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OASIS
DISSERTATION

A Thesis
presented in partial fulfillment of requirements
for the degree of Master of Fine Arts
in the Department of English
The University of Mississippi

by

SARAH HUDDLESTON

May 2019

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ABSTRACT

A novel.

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CHAPTER 1

OASIS

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particular, because she has work to do. She has lessons to plan, and grade sheets to fill. She has a stack of student essays still sitting in the back seat of her car. The wishy-washy, vague, illogical, arguments of her freshmen and sophomore students. She should be grading them, should have graded them two weeks ago. Now, every class period, a different one raises their hand and asks when they'll be getting their essay back. Tomorrow, Tuesday, another one will. Laurel is tall for a woman, but with a round face that betrays an openness and an eagerness to please all.

“Laurel,” they call her. Because she has asked them to. Laurel, because it's a formal name, but not so formal as miss or ma'am. Laurel, but never Lorie, never Elle.

She registers the number on her phone screen with a slow dismay. It creeps through her body, starting first behind her eyes, like the tingle of a migraine, and then falling into her stomach. A heavy rock. Her mother's hospice. There's only one reason they'd call in the middle of the night like this.

At first, she just holds the phone to her ear before remembering to say hello. Even then, her voice comes out in a breathy whisper, as if the knowledge of her mother's death has already extinguished something in her. Though it was expected, coming, had been just around the corner for months even. Still, Laurel is surprised by it.

She does not pack, does not take anything other than her wallet and her cellphone—There is no reason to. A small drive, she tells herself. Time to think and process. Her mother's hospice is on the other side of the city. She can drive, she can grab breakfast, she can reach the facility by sunrise. Then the mortuary. Then the cemetery. It will all be so easy.

Of course, there will be calls to make and answer. Arrangements and plans. Laurel teaches three classes and still doesn't earn any healthcare benefits. But at twenty-five, she was still on her mother's plan. A good plan. Solid. Earned from years of working at Fredrick's

grocery store. Now that is over, too, and tomorrow, there will be so much to do. For now, though, it is dark, and such things can wait until morning.

The night her mother dies, Laurel takes a drive. The phone rings middle of the night—late, but not so late that the night owls and restless people of Oregon aren't awake. Laurel is one such type, and still high from the chocolate bar she ate around nine. The bright blue light of her phone, the coarse hum of plastic on glass, it cuts through the room and causes Laurel to flinch. No one ever calls her, except her mother, and since her mother got sick, since she moved from home to hospital and hospital to hospice, no one calls Laurel at all.

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VITA

Sarah Huddleston is a writer. Her work has appeared in *Bartleby Snopes*, *Cicada*, and *Quarterly West*.