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Abstract

1. I've heard stories that once you get to heaven you sit in front of everyone you know and they replay your life so everyone can see. It's movie hour. I imagine all those folding chairs, the murmurs of anticipation, the projector warming for the arrival.

Keywords

movies, girlfriends, rated r, mother



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Run Time

by Jesse Goolsby

1. I've heard stories that once you get to heaven you sit in front of everyone you know and they replay your life so everyone can see. It's movie hour. I imagine all those folding chairs, the murmurs of anticipation, the projector warming for the arrival.

2. During high school my girlfriend and I would select which movies to watch by their run times: the longer the better. We'd curl up under a blanket—even in the summer—and play with one another's bodies. Once, in late August, we thumbed through titles, checking the backs, when I spotted *The Sound of Music*. I flipped the movie over and like a gift from on high I read 174 minutes. I felt like shouting thanks to the heavens. We turned off the lights, took up our position on the couch, and nestled under the blanket. Before Julie Andrews could finish *the hills are alive with the sound of music* my singing mother walked in and sat a foot away from our heads. She stayed until the end credits.

3. My parents didn't allow rated R movies in our home. But every so often, out of the blue, one would sneak in. I remember *Braveheart* getting a pass. *Schindler's List* got a pass. I was 15 then. I remember the little girl in a red coat running through the Jewish ghetto, the naked, starving people, the

part where Schindler tells the bad concentration camp commander that real power is pardoning, not executing the Jews. My head spun. In the end, my mother was angry about the sex scene in the beginning. *It showed her breasts*, she said. *Completely unnecessary.*

4. One afternoon, a high school friend brought over *Faces of Death*. Some cows had their heads chopped off. There were a couple of executions by electric chair, firing squad scenarios, and a few hangings. In one scene, a tight rope walker:

He stood in beautiful balance between two tall buildings; a crowd gathered below, shouting and pointing. The walker gripped a long balancing pole, but soon it fell away, and for a few seconds the man teetered between safety and horror: he went on his toes, angled his hips; he thrust his arms to one side, then another. I wondered if he'd prepared for the moment. Surely tight rope walkers consider their fall; they imagine where and how, the few seconds of gravity. And suddenly, the man slipped, but snagged the rope under his armpits. He dangled, his legs kicking, but there was nowhere to go but down. His body slid another couple feet and he hung by his hands. The scene took far too long. *Let go*, I said. But he wouldn't. He hung on to the rope, and for awhile, it seemed as though the movie paused: just the still frame of the man, hanging, the V shape of the tight rope, and the crowd, eyes above, silent and waiting.

5. While my mother was dying in the San Francisco hospital, I wasn't thinking of her. Occasionally, I would, but not for the right reasons. When I was seventeen I asked to miss school to go see her. It was mid-week and I told Dad that I couldn't take it anymore—I missed my mom—and had to make the four hour trip south. He said *yes, of course you can go*, looking proud and tired through his red eyes, and I ran back to my room and picked up the phone and called Jill, my on and off again girlfriend who lived on the way to the hospital. We were currently off, but she said I could stop by, so the next morning, a sunny Wednesday, I stopped in Davis.

I know my mother was lonely and scared. I know she was bored. I know the beeps and shining floors drove her mad. But I was in Davis. I went to a movie—*The Horse Whisperer*—hoping the darkness would guide Jill's hand to my thigh, her blonde head to my shoulder. The long movie was overproduced and sappy, and Jill never touched me, not even when I

overtook the armrest between us and bent close, smelling her jasmine perfume. Still, on the ride to her apartment, I hoped for the best. Dusk was fading out, and the sky turned purple.

At her apartment she let me kiss her. I started leaning on her, but she held me up, said, *I want to know you mean it*. Her eyes shook. I told her, *of course I mean it*, but it was a lie. She let me kiss her again. Then, she backed away. *Your mother*, she said.

6. I made a movie once, a documentary. I filmed quite a bit over my four years in university. I interviewed my friends, took the camera on Spring Break, and to other events. When I edited the film one of my friends helped. We wanted to make sure it was authentic, so we left most of the stuff in.

In one scene, my friend moons the camera, says, *full moon out tonight, fuckers*.

In another, a Mexican prostitute bares her chest and sings in Spanish.

In one, I'm naked and drunk. I recite Dylan Thomas's "Do Not Go Gentle into That Good Night" in a downpour in Montana. I get most of the words right, and perform a twirl for the camera.

I showed the film to my family. I don't know what I was thinking. Near the end I realized I'd brought a R-rated film home.

7. The other day *The Horse Whisperer* was on television. It's been 15 years since the night in Davis with Jill. I recall driving the rest of the way to my dying mother later that evening. I drove through Vacaville, Vallejo, and Oakland. I drove the Bay Bridge over the dark water. I passed the tall buildings of downtown San Francisco, so close they seemed to touch. I parked at Kezar Stadium, and walked up the hill to the university hospital. When I walked in my mother had just shit herself, and the staff was changing her diaper. They finished, but the smell lingered. A nurse brought me a cot. There wasn't a whole lot to say. My mother was dying and I was confused and tired. I asked her if she wanted me to read to her, but she said no. We lay there for awhile, not saying anything. They brought her red Jello and she ate it half heartedly. Her face was bloated from the anti-rejection drugs, and she struggled to open her mouth. She

groaned. We walked a lap of the floor. I pushed her IV machine and she stared at the gleaming tiles as her organs toiled. I hated myself, but my mind swung to Jill—how she hadn't moved toward me, her smell, her dry lips.

Later, with the lights out, my mother turned on the television. She asked me what I wanted to watch, but I didn't care. She said we could watch a movie, my choice. I didn't object. We scrolled through the titles on the menu screen a couple times, but there was nothing worth our time.

Jesse Goolsby's work has appeared in numerous literary journals to include Epoch, The Literary Review, Harpur Palate, Our Stories, War, Literature & the Arts, Storyglossia, Vestal Review, Paradigm, and various anthologies. He is the recipient of the 2010 Richard Bausch Fiction Prize and the 2009 John Gardner Memorial Award in Fiction. He was raised in Chester, California, and currently lives and teaches in Colorado Springs.

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