“What?” I looked at my mother’s frail face looking back at me.

“What?” she repeated.

“You called me, just now, said you needed my help.”

She closed her eyes and mumbled something I couldn’t understand and laid her head back against her pillow. Her thin body was covered in layers of blankets.

“Mom!” I said harshly, “you called me in here, what do you need? You said you needed help, what is it?” I shook her shoulder slightly and once again she looked back at me, her brown eyes confused. Finally she nodded...

“Pulsatilla, I can’t find it.” She closed her eyes again.

I moved towards her small wooden bedside table and started searching through the mountains of bottles. The small homeopathic remedies scattered over the table as I looked. I moved to the other side of the bed; sitting down I began looking for the small orange remedy in the piles of bottles thrown randomly on the mattress. Groaning I looked back at my mom.

“I can’t find it.” when she didn’t repond I repeated myself louder, “Mom I can’t find it.”

She looked up started. “What?”

“The pulsatilla, I dunno where it is.”

“Oh okay.” She began to close her eyes again and I stood to leave. Her eyes flashed open, started once again. “Don’t leave me! Mandy, I’m scared.”

I stopped and looked cautiously at her, the bones in her thin body easily could be seen even from a distance. “Mindy” I said.

“Huh?” she frowned.

“My name, it’s Mindy. Mom, you know that, wake up.”

“I’m awake,” she stated. “Can you find me my Pulsatilla?”

“I can’t, I already looked.”

“You did?”

“Yes!”

She started to cry, her dark eyes filling with tears. “Don’t get mad at me, please don’t get mad at me.” She grabbed my arm. Her hands were cold, like ice, and when I looked at her more closely I could now see how pale her normally olive skin was.

“I’m not bad.” I tried to keep my voice gentle but a hint of annoyance still could be heard. “How’s your oxygen?”
She touched the plastic tubing on her face and pulled it away slightly then put it back. “Maybe...” she said, her eyes began to flutter closed again so I tapped her arm. “...turn me up to four,” she finished finally.

I looked at the large white machine against the wall that the oxygen tube connected to. 4.5 the meter read.

“You’re already at four and a half.”

She was asleep again. I shook her. “Mom wake up,” I said, “Mom, please, you never do this. It’s this stupid flu you’ve got, just please wake up and tell me what you want me to do!”

She opened her eyes and stared at me bewildered, then once again fell back asleep. I sat back down on the bed and slipped my still sleeping mother’s bent and crooked witch finger into the small yellow plastic oxygen monitor. I hit the “on” button and looked at the screen. The white digital numbers read 83, then dropped suddenly to 76. A high-pitched siren started to go off.

Beep beep beep!

I ran to the living room and dialed the seven numbers to my neighbor Kim. “I need to borrow your thermomenter. My mom feels so cold and her oxygen is way below normal and I don’t know where ours is.” After hanging up I ran across the street and when I came back I had to wipe the tears from my face before going in to see my mom. I woke her.

“I’m going to take your temperature,” I said.

“Sit up.” She obeyed and I put the thermomenter in her mouth. I waited. After hearing the beep telling me it was done reading her temp I removed it and looked to see what it said.

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“That can’t be right” I tried again...

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“Mom, please wake up.” I carefully handed her a mug with some juice. “Drink this, Kim says your mouth might be low.” She took a sip and a sour expression flashed across her pale face. She took another sip then rested her mug against her knee while holding it. Her eyes started to close.

“Don’t spill it,” I said sternly.

“I won’t.” Her eyes closed again and her mug tipped to the side spilling the sticky juice on the ground next to the bed. I took a deep breath and called my dad. As I explained everything that was happening I felt my eyes start to sting and a sob threatened to escape my throat. He told me to relax and that she would be fine, but if she wasn’t better before to long to call my Aunt Alisa. Hanging up my mom looked at me.

“Please don’t be mad at me Missy.”

I couldn’t hold it in anymore. “Mindy!” I cried. “Why don’t you remember my name?” The hot tears rolled down my cheeks.

“Please don’t be mad at me,” she repeated.

“I’m not mad.” I forced the words out.

“Call 911.”


“Please,” she whispered, eyes closed.

I obeyed and called, then waited for the EMTs to show up. They arrived; two men dressed in dark blue pants and dark blue jackets came in. They hooked my mom up to a monitor and changed her oxygen tube to a mask.

“No,” she said struggling, “I don’t want the mask, I’m allergic to the plastic, no!” She tried to fight. Now there were more people, more than the room wanted to hold. I stood with my back pressed to the wall to try to stay out of the way. He asked me questions, the EMT, so many questions. I tried to answer. There were so many people in the room, and my mom was asleep again. I moved into the hall so I could move. I shifted from foot to foot as I watched my mom sleep with all the people around her. One of the men came into the hall to talk to me.

“We’re gonna bring her to the hospital,” he said. “She’ll be at Ellis, are you going to come?”

“I can’t.” I told him. “I have to be here when my brothers get home from school.”

“Alright”, he said, then went back into the bedroom. They moved her onto the stretcher thing and started to take her out. She was fighting, pushing the people away and crying out. She was panicking, scared.

“I don’t want to go to the hospital!” she screamed, “I just need my pulsatilla, Mandy... get my pulsatilla.”

Instead of telling her again that I didn’t know where it was I made up a bag of several of her herbal remedies and gave them to one of the Emergency Technicians. “She’ll feel better if she knows she has these.”

He nodded and took the bag. He offered me a sad smile, his rugged face and features appearing somehow more gentle than before. They pushed her out of the room and down the bare dark hallway. I followed them out of the house and into the driveway. It
was raining out, the skies were gray and the pavement beneath my bare feet was wet and cold. I watched as they loaded my other, my best friend, into the ambulance. Once in she looked out at me and she smiled. “Thank you for helping me,” she said. “I bet your family really loves you.”

They closed the doors of the vehicle and drove away. I realized I was crying again and very tired so I went into the house and after calling my dad I slept.

The church was dark, dull, and lonely... I stood in the back by the baptismal font and waited. It was noisy in there and I couldn’t concentrate, everyone talking to each other and moving from seat to seat. I felt my Aunt Alisa put her cold hand on my arm. “It’s time,” she said, her voice hushed.

I took a deep breath and nodded. I hadn’t cried since it happened, I had been strong but when the doors opened and my uncles all dressed in black suits carried the long brown polished wooden box into the church, I lost control. The tears started to roll down my face like waterfalls and my sobs were uncontrollable. I had never cried like that before, and haven’t cried like it since, but that day, it couldn’t be helped.

They carried her into the church, down the center isle and I followed. The church was empty, it was only me there, no one else, just me and my mom.

**We’ve Heard it All Before**

*by Nick Mauro*

Despite the way something may seem, you may not actually be experiencing what you perceive. Remember the time you felt like someone was ignoring you? I do. I like to think of it as “perspective distraction”. In order to actually be ignored, you must first be recognized, right? This is not always the case, but if you think back to that time, you would probably realize that you were not actually being ignored, just simply excluded from a series of overt behaviors. Most of my early childhood was perceived in this manner, with the exception of one thing... music.

Way back in the luxurious mind of a seven, or eight-year-old child, sits a very vulnerable emotion. I felt as if the world owed me something. My days weren’t long enough, and no one ever mentioned anything about taxpayers or bill collectors to distract me from my own little reality. When I started to feel like the world owed me something, I started looking for that something. Nothing presented itself to be very inspirational, until I started to listen to what was on the radio.

I found myself being drawn in what seemed to be a million different directions. As I felt the urge to run wild with my new found glory, I kept myself as close to the music as I possibly could. In turn, I gave up most of the social activities that average grade school children normally take for granted. I did play a lot of sports in my younger days, but this gave me time to focus. That’s when I realized that there is always music playing all around us, all the time. While I played football, I heard it ringing inside my helmet. When I was on the ice at Center City playing hockey, the endless symphony of the ice and the orchestration of the chattering crowd, would almost distract me enough to forget what I was doing altogether. There were plenty of nights back then—when I can remember tossing and turning for hours on end with these wild visions of music tumbling through my thoughts. It never ceased, or even slowed, it just got stronger as time went on. A few years had passed, and I found the path I needed to travel in order to complete this cycle of thoughts and visions of music.

As a college student, my father had learned to play the electric guitar, and decided to let me have a crack at it one night. I could barely hold the thing the right way, but I could play a couple notes in order, then remember exactly how to do it again and again. Soon thereafter, my father said that I had taken him by surprise, and that I should keep that guitar as my own. This was the single most influential thing that could have happened at that moment. I never put it down. I would strum that thing every chance I got, and then some.