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Editor's Note	
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SNR's Writers	<p>He thinks to himself, If I were to commit suicide, it wouldn't be by drowning. He finds it difficult to breathe. Salt clings to his forehead, wishing to slide against moisturized skin. The water is green. He continues to imagine spilling algae filled water up his nose, viscous green crawling between eyelids clasped shut. His hair is not wet. He knows that the water can find his heart and squeeze it tightly, a Venus flytrap snapping firmly. He wonders, Would my heart collapse under that pressure? The water is hot. A thick film of steam tints his glasses grey. The poison his woman put in the bath works swiftly; he can no longer see clearly.</p>
Mail	<p>His woman hums softly in the kitchen. It is where she belongs. He calls it her place, her special place. Her belly is round and protruding uncomfortably into the stove. With a scream, she looks down to see a white scar bubbling with puss. She pours a glass filled with iced water over her stomach. Her cries of relief do not lower in pitch or intensity from her whimpers of pain. The condensation around her glass sticks to her muddy fingers.</p> <p>I have been planning to rid my home of these two pestering people since I was six. The fat woman who drove me here had rolls of lard pouring over the seat belt. I imagined them as loaves of bread stuffed beneath her hideous dress splattered with geometric shapes. Blue obtuse triangles collided with orange rhomboids that intersected the edges of green and brown circular spirals. The print was not symmetrical as it draped along her bulbous body, but I doubt it could have ever been symmetrical. She had a face that matched her dress. I believe that her skull must have been disfigured during the long trip through pelvic bones, maternal hips crushing her soft cranial bones. There could be no other explanation for its flawed design, its innate ugliness. I wanted to rip that cloth off her skin and devour every piece of warm, soft bread. I felt the urge to take her head like a piece of dough and mold it properly, beautifully. Instead, I sat beside her, hands on my lap.</p> <p>When we got to the house, the fat lady let me ring the doorbell.</p> <p>He enjoys baths late in the evening, two hours after dinner. He soaks his</p>

emaciated body in salted water. The mineral bath pulls tension out of stiff muscles. This bath, however, is unlike the others. Because he cannot breathe with regularity, he dreams that he is dying. He used to tell me, If things get so bad that even a bath can't make you feel better, you might as well just give up. Just close your eyes and give up. Do ya hear me, boy? You listening to me, boy? I would nod and reply, Yes, sir.

From my room, I can hear him struggling. Two closed doors and a hallway separate us. I know that he isn't dying, but he's making himself give up. Victory is watching someone else wane of his own volition.

Listening to him is like appreciating an opera. I know that the characters will fall, one by one. I try to smile but cry instead.

His woman is pregnant again. She has had five miscarriages. Her body is too fragile to bear the weight of a fetus. By the fourth month, she always manages to flush bloody waste out of her vagina. The first time, he cried in the hospital waiting room. For just one moment, one evanescent second, he looked at me as if he wanted to touch me, to hold me as if I were his son. The second time, he cried even more. He would not even meet my eyes pleading for acceptance. By the third time, she did not even go to the hospital. She sat on the toilet and pushed. Afterwards, he stroked her hair and fondled her naked body. I could hear muffled cries asking him to stop.

Curiosity drew me out of my bedroom. I caught glimpses of her throwing clumps of blood around the bathroom, her palms stopping periodically to smear the waste along her body. He cleaned it off with his tongue. When she stood up, he wrapped his hands around her throat, forcing her to turn around. He fucked her, and she was silent, his hand imprinting anger on her neck. When he finished, his cock was painted a brilliant red. He turned on the bath water and emptied a container of green mineral salts into the tub.

I dreamt variations of that scene for months. Every morning, ashamed, I would change my sheets.

When the woman screams, I can hear his body jolt up from the water submerging him. I move from the bed to the door to eavesdrop with more accuracy.

You all right?

Yes, sir. You stay in the bathtub. I just burned myself a tad. Nothing to worry about.

You sure?

Yes. I'm fine. It hurts, but I'm fine. Just fine.

Did you hurt the baby?

No sir. I think it's fine. I mean, I think she's fine. Not it. I didn't say it.

I said she. I said she.

Did you say it?

When I was six, I packed my backpack with clothes, books, and sixty-eight dollars

and ninety-five cents. I left home to live in the art museum I had visited on a fieldtrip. When I returned to the house from that fieldtrip, I gathered every map in the house and began plotting my escape. Ten days later, when the fat lady took me back, she asked why I had run away. I calmly explained, The museum is filled with beautiful things. My house has nothing beautiful, nothing noteworthy, nothing extraordinary in it. I want all of those things. I want to be able to hold, touch, and manipulate that beauty. She replied, Sweetie, do you know what you're saying or you just repeatin' somethin' you heard in a movie? I could smell chocolate on her tongue.

Looking up at her angrily, I yelled, I want beautiful things! I want to be surrounded by beautiful things! Instead, all I have is two ugly people who look at me like I'm stupid and a fat woman who thinks I'm dumb! I hate you!

She opened a rusty door, it shrieked loudly. I imagined her body as a skeleton, with the fat deteriorated into a pile of lard making a pink aura around the bones. The hardened calcium would sink into the gelatinous material surrounding it. The whiteness would slowly be stained a dirty yellow, the color of semen when it is left exposed to oxygen for a few days. If I were to pick up one of those bones and snap it in half, the fat lady's cries would not have been as loud as her car door opening.

I walk into the kitchen to look on his woman. For the first time, I notice that her body is slight despite the growing size of her stomach. Her hands cradle her belly button, exposed and glowing. I ask, Have you hurt yourself? She responds, Yes. It hurts. I ask, Can I help you? She says, I think I would like to die tonight. Her face shows no sign of sadness or regret. She looks peaceful, almost happy.

I walk over to the cabinet and pull out two packages of chamomile hot tea. We drink tea together in silence. The water burns my throat with every swallow. I imagine it red and swelling, like the scar on her belly, breathing heavily and without structure. Finally, I say, You know that I can't help you. His woman looks up at me and says, I can't have another death flow out of me. I can smell it coming. At night, I dream all the others come back. They crawl into my mouth one by one and slide through my body, playing cheerfully, painfully, and then, each one pops out, and collectively, they try to eat me, but they have no teeth. So I open my dress and let them red globs of almost-baby suckle.

I respond, They are only dreams. You have nothing to fear.

I lie to her. I know that she should fear her dreams. I fear them. Instead of sleeping at night, I close my eyes and concentrate on the sound of their breath as they sleep and dream. I know that most nights, she does not sleep well. Her breath is quick and deliberate. She is frightened. He sleeps soundly until morning. His inhalations are harder than his exhalations, but other than that slight aberration, I could set a metronome to his sleep.

When I rang the doorbell, no one answered. The fat lady, who was obviously annoyed with me, left me in front of the house. Three and half hours later, he and his woman came home. He nodded at me, as to acknowledge that I had been gone. She did not look at me. Her eyes stayed fixed on her stomach, her fingers strumming loose cloth up and down.

As soon as we stepped inside, she sighed deeply. Her fingers left the belly and ruffled my hair. They have never asked me where I went or why I left.

Growing up, I was never allowed to call them mommy and daddy or any variation of those words. If he even heard the word father, his jaw would tighten. I learned that as soon as his lips began to extend, I would need to run, quickly, up to my room in order to avoid punishment. He never hit me. He merely scolded roughly and took away my dinner privileges for the next week. I taught myself to eat large lunches. When he turned his head during breakfast or lunch, I would spit my food into a napkin that I put into my pocket. I learned the value and commodity of food.

In the evening, while he and his woman ate, I would unravel my paper towel, soaked with meat juice, egg crumbs, and wilted vegetables. I closed my eyes and ate every bit of half-chewed food. Then, if I were still hungry, I would eat the napkin.

The only way I could avoid punishment was if I managed to prepare his bath before he did. This took careful planning. If I drew the water too soon, the temperature would not suit his taste. His anger rose to the proper temperature of the water. If I started the water too late, he would be forced to wait for the bath to reach its optimal moment of entry. His baths seemed to follow a formula that I did not quite understand. In my lifetime in this house, I have managed to escape his punishment twice.

Our mugs are empty. I motion to the kettle, which has a film of bright red rust around it. She shakes her head and takes the mugs to the sink. She does not sit back down with me until she has scrubbed the porcelain of the proof that it has been used. Casually, she sits back down, her hands returning to her belly. The scar has risen, an inflamed pocket of secretion under a tender layer of opaque skin.

We simultaneously look at the clock. He has been soaking for forty-five minutes. He will rise from his liquid tomb within the next five minutes. Silently, we agree to part. I return to my room; she remains in her special place.

The air in the bathroom is tangible. His hands grab fists full and shove them into his mouth. He swallows the steam in gulping lumps. He is surprised that his woman's poison did not kill him. Perhaps she did not intend to commit murder after all.

His body has wrinkles that burrow deeply. He inspects each cut into his skin with an overly hydrated finger. He never washes off the bath salt.

With a leg elevated on the sink, he moistens his body even further by applying thick layers of lotion. He imagines some blonde slut caressing him. His woman never comments when he grabs her hair and calls her a random name during sex. She has become accustomed to his way.

In her special place, his woman begins kneading dough. She adds carob chips and walnuts to her concoction. She will surprise him with cookies. She likes to surprise him.

I will not be allowed to consume her dessert until he has eaten his fill.

Neither will she.

When I was fifteen, he preemptively told me, Art has no value. You go round thinking about pretty things all day long, and all you have is what I give you. Maybe you should go work for your own money before you start thinking about

all those pretty things.

At the time, I believed him. He often told me that he was successful. He worked from eight in the morning until seven at night. He came home to a woman who cooked him dinner and a boy who did nothing but dream of beauty. I determined never to think about art again. I brought out all my oils and charcoal. I threw everything into the trash to prove my devotion to him. As I emptied tubes of paint, I felt my own blood flush out of my body.

He became so enraged at my waste of valuable resources that he took away dinner privileges for the next two weeks.

Two weeks later, the fat lady came back. She told my parents that I was a terrible boy because I ran away. She said I was hateful and spiteful, and they should monitor me closely. I could be a grave nuisance and danger to those around me. She said that she could see psychosis fertilizing in me. Of course, they neither listened nor cared about anything she had to say.

She wore a purple suit garnished with eroded gold buttons. The purple was once a royal color, but now it worn down to a browned lilac. Her ankles displayed three layers of wrinkled fat. I could not imagine that they were bread rolls this time.

His woman bakes carob chocolate chip muffins instead of cookies. He emerges from the bath smelling cocoa. His lips turn to his bearded chin while he pants softly from the fresh air mixed with that distinctive aroma attacking his lungs. Without drying off, he drips salty wetness to his woman. Fingers indented like paragraphs reach to her belly. The swelling has subsided and looks like a small blister waiting to burst. He pinches it tightly until she yelps, softly, as to not alarm me.

If I could replay the night's scenario, I would have ground up a portion of glass, ground it so finely that I could not see it. I would have slipped it into her dough while she turned her back. I would have insisted that she let me bake it. She would have been resting in bed when he finishing bathing. I would have offered him carob chocolate chip cookies. I would know that he preferred cookies to muffins. He would have eaten the entire batch, and I would have watched as the glass cut his internal organs and killed him slowly, painfully, giving him time to repent and perhaps even forgive me for killing him. I would leave his body there for my mother to discover. I would spend the entire night admiring his corpse. When she rose in the morning, I would say to her, Mother, come eat cookies with me. Father has had his fill. She would not be surprised by my request. I would pour us two glasses of milk, and together, we would sit and eat the two cookies that I have saved. I would watch her eat hers first, to witness the poison bleed through her body. I would not have eaten mine. Instead, I would sit in the chair, in the kitchen, and bring out my charcoals and paints and translate them onto the page. I would not mock their sadness, their anger, their death. I would know that they never knew beauty, and in their death, I will give them the only art they could ever know.

I walk into the kitchen. He is groping her body; her face is turned away. I cannot see her face contorted into sour reactions. She whispers in his ear, Please don't touch me anymore. The baby can't stand it. He replies, Then it won't live to hate me.

I clear my throat. I ask her, How did I survive him? This? All this? Why did you

do this to me? How could you?

She doesn't respond.

The bottle reads, For external use only. If skin becomes irritated, discontinue use immediately. Keep out of the reach of children. If pains and aches persist, consult a physician.

Lily Hoang is an MFA candidate at the University of Notre Dame. Her work has appeared in *Square One*, *BlazeVOX*, and *Invisible Insurrection*

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