

Crafting on a Sunday

Miranda chewed her cereal slowly and deliberately as the sun crept out early on Sunday morning. Since her leave from work at the local elementary, she had taken the most time she could completing even the most basic tasks. The days did not feel so long and useless if she chewed every bite exactly thirty-two times before swallowing, as her doctor suggested, and if she flossed and brushed after every snack and meal. Her digestion had never been better and her teeth had never been brighter, but her mind felt as if it continually shrunk. It expanded and shifted inside her head, giving her thoughts and mood swings that produced anything from crying spells to utter and absolute emptiness. She scanned the word search on the back of the cereal box in an attempt to gain full alertness when the phone's loud and acute ringing did just that. She contemplated just how much energy it would take to get up and walk the five steps to the wall mount, and whether the call would be worth it, before she remembered her mom saying: "If I need you to pick your brother up from practice, I'll call to let you know." Miranda thought having her license would involve more thrilling endeavors. In her head, she had seen herself offering the most attractive underclassmen rides while they waited at the bus stop. If a male senior could go out with a junior or sophomore, why couldn't she? But instead, she found herself driving to her therapist's office twice a week and her psychiatrist's once a month. At least her pharmacy delivered, because if anyone familiar had seen her pick medication up, they would poke and prod around until they found out just which ailment Gonzalez suffered from and which medication they were taking to aid it, and if that happened, her family would be absolutely mortified, and her brother Diego would probably be chased off the lacrosse field with kids badgering him about his crazy sister having finally



cracked and being locked up at home. She finally rolled her eyes, leisurely stood up, stretched until her back cracked, adjusted her lilac bathrobe, and made her way to the phone.

“Hello?”

“Miranda!”, a nauseatingly cheery voice boomed on the other end.

Miranda grimaced. “Yep, who’s this?”

“It’s Debbie from church. Listen, is your mom home?”

This was no help. Miranda was four the last time she was in a church. “No? Can I give her a message?”

“Well,” the woman hesitated before continuing, “I just wanted to let her know that your dad was in my neighborhood this morning.”

Miranda’s eyes narrowed. She swallowed hard and felt remnants of cereal go down the back of her throat. The line was silent.

“Hon, you still there?”

“You live on Maple?”

“Yeah, I just thought I’d give your mom a call. She’s been through so much this year,” the woman lamented.

Miranda shut her eyes and let out a livid breath. “Sorry, who is this again?”

“It’s Debbie! You all came to my place for New Year’s.”

Silence.

“You took off with my Alex and kept him till two, remember?”

Miranda finally remembered, but wished she had not. “Right.” She tightened her grip on the pearl-colored phone and asked, “Is he still there?”



“I don’t know, doll, maybe. I just saw him go in.” The woman paused, then added, “I’m really sorry.”

“Yeah, well, thanks for letting us know, *Debbie*.”

Miranda hung the phone up with a loud clang, paused with her hand on her hip, then sped to the kitchen drawers. Once there, she leaned over the counter with her head hanging low and breathed in and out. “*One flew east, one flew west,*” she whispered to herself. She stood up straight, staring at one drawer in particular. “*One flew over the cuckoo’s nest,*” she said aloud, and pulled the drawer out. From it, she grabbed a large, slender knife. She held it in a stabbing position and looked at her reflection on the small microwave door, holding her chin up with purpose.

“No, that’s ridiculous,” she murmured, and put it back.

She grabbed a cleaver, and thought it was even more ridiculous, but made a mental note of the fact that she liked the way she looked in a bathrobe holding a cleaver, and that it would make a good concept for her and her friend Emily to write around and shoot later. She placed the cleaver back in the drawer, just about ready to abandon her plans, when she caught sight of her mother’s large orange coupon-cutting scissors. Her eyes lit up as she picked them up, gave them a trial *snip snip*, and slipped them into her robe pocket. She grabbed her keys and headed out the door.

Her dirty bunny slippers’ ears flopped furiously as she treaded through the snow and slipped into her inherited ’84 Jetta. The engine struggled to start and for a second she feared the Colorado temperatures might keep her from exacting revenge. It started, though, so she peeled out and headed toward Maple.

She knew exactly which house to look for. It was bigger, nicer and cleaner than the Gonzalez home, and Miranda remembered lamenting the cleanliness



because she knew it was something her father appreciated and couldn't get at home. Miranda's mother was immensely sweet, but not very tidy, and though Miranda tried her best to keep the house in basic order, her mother's manic tendencies made it difficult for it to remain that way. She considered this a personal failure and for the first time felt partly responsible for her father's affair. The last time she had been to the home it was decorated for Halloween. Her older sister, who no longer lived at home, had torn all the pumpkin garlands from the bushes and mailbox after catching her dad inside filling the poodle's water bowl. He never filled the water bowl at home.

Miranda left her Jetta at an angle in the driveway. She slammed the door shut and treaded even more furiously to the house's front door, which she knew would be unlocked from experience. Her dad had always taught them to be suspicious of the world, but how did he end up in a house with an unlocked front door? She couldn't understand it. She stepped inside and marched directly upstairs, sure of where she was headed. She was just beginning to feel the creeping cold and wetness of her slippers on her feet when she heard her dad and the woman speaking lowly from behind the slightly open master bedroom door. Miranda pushed the door open all the way slowly, and when they saw her, the woman shrieked and pulled the covers up over her chest, leaving only her tacky green nightgown's straps visible. Her dad immediately crawled out of bed, also tugging at the sheets to cover himself, and Miranda whispered, "Perfect."

She went straight to the woman's side of the bed and grabbed her by a chunk of cheaply-dyed burgundy hair. It was brittle in Miranda's hand, but she was grateful, because it only helped tighten her grip around it. The woman shrieked in disbelief.



“Miranda!” her dad yelled. “Leave her, please!” He wasn’t dressed and therefore could not, or rather would not, move to stop her.

“Chivalry really is dead,” Miranda scoffed, looking directly at her father and his inaction, but later, she would have the fleeting thought that maybe his lack of action meant he cared more for her comfort than his mistress’ safety, but Miranda would then rationalize that her dad could never respect her even that much, and that he was just a coward.

Miranda ignored him and tugged on the hair as hard as she could to bring the woman up from her knees to a standing position. Once this was done, she yanked and dragged the woman down the stairs, the woman shrieking and grunting all the way. The burgundy broad tripped halfway down, momentarily halting the ordeal, but Miranda used her free hand to grab the woman by the elbow and get her back up so they could continue. During the pause, Miranda caught a glimpse of a family portrait hanging on the wall. Two daughters and a husband. Where were they? Probably living their lives thinking Mom was in spinning class. A sham. They made it through the front door and onto the front yard, where Miranda promptly threw the woman to the relatively fresh fallen snow and pulled the scissors out her pocket. She grabbed a new chunk of brittle burgundy hair and snipped it as close to the scalp as she possibly could. The woman clawed at Miranda’s hands with rhinestone acrylic nails, but Miranda was unflinching in her execution. She grabbed the chopped chunk, left the woman on the ground, and marched back to her car. By then, her father had appeared half-dressed at the front door and the woman yelled back at him, “She cut my hair! Do something!” Miranda’s dad called after her, but she was already busy making sure no cars were behind her while she backed out the driveway. She turned her head right and whispered, “*One flew east,*” turned her head left and said, “*One flew west,*” and as she heard her dad yell her name



one more time over the lady's obnoxious sobbing, she exhaled, "*One flew over the cuckoo's nest,*" and pulled out. Her instructor had always reprimanded her for forgetting to actually turn and check for cars instead of just relying on her rearview mirror. He would've been proud if he had seen the way she left.

Dinner was silent that night. Miranda's mom made trout, steamed rice and veggies to satisfy her husband's low-calorie diet, so Miranda and her brother shoved the plate's contents around back and forth without actually eating much.

"This shit sucks," Diego whispered to Miranda.

"Shh! It's your dad's favorite. It's good for you too," their mom whispered back, and shot a sheepish smile in her husband's direction. He sat motionless with red-rimmed eyes at the head of the table and paid her no mind. She sighed.

"So," Miranda's mom started, "anyone wanna talk about how their day went?" She looked around the table, but no one so much as made eye contact with her. She patted her greying, messy curls that sat like a bird's nest atop her head self-consciously, but kept trying.

"Miranda? That's an... interesting necklace you have on. Did one of your students make it?"

"What, this?" Miranda pointed at the piece of yarn around her neck. She'd knotted tufts of burgundy hair to it and separated them with colorful beads she'd stolen from her brother's old craft kit. She was still in her lilac robe.

"I was feeling creative today," she answered, and shoveled some rice into her mouth. Her father cleared his throat, sniffled, and brought a small spoonful of rice to his mouth. Miranda watched him intently. He stopped chewing abruptly



and brought a napkin to his lips. From them, he expelled a partially chewed rice wad with one long, burgundy hair attached to it. He pulled the rest of the strand out from his mouth with his thumb and index finger and looked up at his daughter. She smirked. He gagged.

“Santiago, what’s the matter?” Miranda’s mom asked and placed her large, worn hand on her husband’s. Decades of factory work had stolen their youth long before the Gonzalezes could afford to live in the house they had now, and she refused to treat them with manicures and acrylics because she claimed her chores wouldn’t let the effect last, anyway.

Miranda casually gnawed at a sautéed snow pea. “Yeah, Dad, what’s the matter?” she asked, and kept chewing while awaiting a response.

He looked up at his daughter with betrayed, swollen eyes and stood up from the table. Everything was still. “This house is a fucking pigsty,” he finally said after a few seconds, looking directly at Miranda. She met his gaze with equal, if not deeper, disdain and contempt. He marched upstairs, and the remaining family members sat motionless.

“Miranda,” her mom whispered after the footsteps had disappeared into the master bedroom. “What did you do?”

Miranda nearly choked on the half-chewed pea still sitting in her mouth. She cleared her throat and croaked, “What did *I* do?” She felt the heat of rage rise to her ears. “*I* didn’t do anything. Why don’t you ask your husband what *he* did, for a change?”

“Your father’s going through a really tough time at work right now, and he doesn’t need you kids making it harder for him.”

“‘Kids?’ What did I do?” Miranda’s brother asked defensively. “Miranda’s the one



who bums around the house all day.”

“Hey, your sister does plenty, and you could have picked your shoes and backpack off the living room floor today, mister,” their mother responded.

“I was going to do it after dinner!” Diego rebuffed while Miranda shut her eyes and tried her best to breathe steadily.

“Your dad just wants to come home to a clean house, Diego,” his mom explained.

Miranda’s eyes suddenly shot open, sick of the words that had turned to white noise. She felt her mind teeter.

“Enough!” exclaimed Miranda. “*You* didn’t do anything. Diego and *I* didn’t do anything either. We’re not taking the blame for dad’s bullshit and your marital problems anymore.”

Miranda’s mom’s eyes widened in astonishment.

“Oh, *excuse me*,” Miranda corrected herself with eyes rolled so far up they looked as if they might go all the way back. “I meant *cleaning* problems. If you two are having *cleaning problems*, work it out amongst yourselves or get a *fucking* cleaning lady. But then dad already might have, so check in on that.” She was agitated. “How am I the only sane and sensible person in this family? It can’t be possible,” she said, and stood up from the table leaving strands of dyed hair by her plate and on the floor.

Her mom and brother sat stunned.

“It can’t be possible!” she yelled again while stomping up the stairs.

Everything was silent.

“Well,” Diego said after a moment. “It really was an interesting necklace.”



“Yes,” his mom responded after a beat, her eyes far away. “Your sister’s very talented,” she said, and she began to sob over her trout.

