

A Brief Paralysis

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Author's Note: The Honors Journal suggested that I write an author's note because my essay contains sensitive materials. If I am honest, (which you'll discover, if you choose to read my work, I have trouble not being) it took me a minute to realize what they could have classified as sensitive. Due to the people I surround myself with, the media I consume, and my own desensitized brain, sex and violence are mundane objects, comforting consistencies in a chaotic world. I apologize, but I am not able to explain why I wrote what I did—if I knew why I was writing what I wrote when I wrote it, I would never have needed to put the words down. So, instead of some unsure explanation that unnecessarily (further) exposes the dark corners of my psyche, I present this as a warning: what you are about to read is a pseudo-fiction story, a mélange of personal experience and subconscious wandering, which contains outright mentions of cannibalism, sex, and suicide. Proceed with caution.

She could hear her neighbors having sex through her wall and her roommate dancing to Frank Sinatra in the kitchen and she was scared to move. It seemed that a great peace had been established in the world, or maybe it had always been there, and if she moved even an inch, she would destroy it completely. She shivered and her eyes watered. She was acutely aware that something or someone was watching her, or she was watching herself and projecting that phenomenon onto someone else to cope with being strange. From this odd position where she could feel everything and nothing, she watched the entire world pass by to the very end. It was beautiful entirely without her influence. She considered suicide, then medication, then dinner, then suicide. She didn't want to die yet, but she would have to move eventually, and when everything fell down around her because of that, the guilt would certainly rip her apart, so it was only logical to plan her death now so as not to mess it up later. She imagined handing everyone she had ever loved a piece of herself. A hair, a finger, a lung. She hoped they would appreciate their gift.

When she was young, things were harder because she was smaller. People kept things from her, stepped on her, poked her—anything to make sure she knew she was lesser, and they were greater. As she aged, most of her problems came from not being small enough. She could feel herself filling up every room she walked in, fluidly expanding until she was suffocating everyone near her and she, herself, was drowning in the sea of her own creation. A whisper was a scream. People often told her to speak up, a perverse request designed to make her seem louder, bigger, worse. The world was full of bastards; she was the worst of them.

She screamed, stunning the world into stillness. But then, she didn't really scream, and the world was never still.

At age sixteen, she decided she was going to eat a man. She planned out how she would do it quite precisely. She knew that she could get away with it, because, well, who would miss a man? At age eighteen, she gave a blowjob for the first time and decided that she no longer wanted to eat a man.

Gentle hands were too gentle and rough hands were too rough and she was eternally unhappy with her eternal happiness and “Have you seen the sky lately, dear, and did you know that all the stars are dying?”

She took a deep breath and heard her lungs rattle. She never smoked. There was no reason for her

lungs to rattle. Unless she had cancer, because cancer ran in her family and through her blood and there was a chance she could die at this very second if she wasn't careful. She took a shallow breath to not disturb the cancer growing in her body, hoping her minimal oxygen intake would act as a bribe towards coexistence, and that the cancer would recognize it and appreciate it and they could be happy with each other. Then, one day, she could tell a crowd of strangers at a slam poetry event that the only long-term relationship she has ever had was with the amiable tumor growing in her chest, and they would snap and snap and snap. She suddenly prayed for cancer, sending little pleas up to a God she didn't totally believe in as if He would hear her or care or be so benevolent as to gift her a death sentence so she could have praise.

When she drank tea, she stirred it with a silver spoon and pretended it was soup so her tongue could caress the spoon fifty times over until the cup was empty, and she would pretend to be the disappointing daughter of Midas who had an interesting story and an interesting name. Afterwards, she felt too full.

Her mother used to tuck her into bed every night, and she never forgave her for stopping. "Snug as a bug in a rug." Her mother was tall in her high heels, her mother liked laughing, and one time her mother walked out of the house and didn't come back for hours. They didn't talk about that. She was sure she'd search her whole life to find the snug safety she lost when her mother stopped tucking her in.

She stared at the floor. The floor was dirty and she should vacuum but she couldn't move but the floor had paper on it and hair and crumbs from snacks she had eaten at her desk and she felt disgusting but she couldn't move. She told herself she would vacuum her floor before she killed herself so no one would discover her imperfections.

She was raised on little white lies. She drank them like milk. They tasted like heaven, and she wanted more, more, more. She built herself a pedestal of pick-up sticks, atop which she saw the truth. The pedestal crumbled, but she didn't cry yet. She said, "Isn't brokenness beautiful?"

She told herself she wouldn't vacuum her floor because that would be a lie and the world deserved to know that she was irreparably flawed.

Isn't she most beautiful all taped together, with her face painted so thickly her tears are glaciers when they fall?

If she covered the carpet in blood, no one would notice the dust.

There were butterflies on her left arm that she drew on in Sharpie at 9:30 pm on every Wednesday, unless she forgot, which happened often. To her unblinking eyes, the faded figures looked real. Their wings fluttered and they flew off into the world, leaving her abandoned and naked. She would curse them, but she understood. She wouldn't want to be stuck to a tomb of a person. She would fly if she had wings.

She decided to move. She wasn't sure where her feet would take her or if the sun would blow up and consume the Earth before she found out, but she would move, nonetheless. She stood quickly and felt dizzy. The ground collapsed beneath her feet and she fell into a pit past a thousand fossils and two circles of Hell and landed somewhere between belonging and self-detestation. But nothing had happened. She had no proof that she had actually destroyed any peace and even wondered, for a moment, if peace was not so delicate as she'd thought. The world was finally, inexplicably silent. She laughed loudly, carefully careless, as if she wasn't still terrified, as if she wasn't certain that every step she took was a disastrous ending, as if everything was and would always be perfectly fine.

Her only recurring dream as a child took place in a fairy world where everyone had wings, and

everyone except her could fly. Sure, she had wings, but she couldn't make them work the way her fairy friends could. They would encourage her and cheer and hover around, and she would strain and strain, but her feet stayed firmly planted in the grass. Eventually, her friends flew higher and higher, and she stayed stuck below becoming smaller and more irrelevant to the only people in the world she knew, quietly reprimanding herself, demanding "Fly, fly, fly!"