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About

Well, it was about time for me to release another short story, considering it's been about two months since "Seventh Circle" was released to the world. Not everyone decided to outright hate me after release, so following up with something only seemed appropriate as I got into my writing groove. You'll find that "The Egg" is a much more nuanced and layered story than "Seventh Circle," and as such, they are written in different genres and styles. Notably, "Seventh Circle" is a pretty generic, heteronormative romance from the get go, while "The Egg" is more of a tragic love story that turns into weird horror. I would define "The Egg" as a mixture of the very human and real problems of "Seventh Circle" and the surreal horror of "New York Onions" and "Grey Skies."

I notice that my short story ideas seem to come from a disparate vein of concepts than my novels. Usually, my novels come from a very personal and introspective place. No one sat me down and told me to write "Grey Skies" or "Weeping of the Caverns." Both came from a manifestation of inspiration, pain, spite, and discontent with what was going on around me. One of the main reasons "Grey Skies" came into existence was because as a boy, I had some fairly intense anger issues and as I grew older, I became terrified that I would wind up becoming abusive. This pain and fear became intensified when one of the first people I was ever romantically involved with threatened to kill herself when I broke up with her. In the span of a few days, she went from adoration of my every quality, to claiming I was the cause of her eating disorder and I was abusing her. She wound up having sex in one of the bathrooms at my high school and was caught for it, so considering I never have abused anyone I've dated, I think I came in the lead between the two of us. Regardless, her words and actions stuck with me for a very long time.

My short stories have always come from a little bit of a different and more varied place. "The Black Box" (which was attached to Grey Skies during its initial publication) was more or less a love letter to one of my idols, David Lynch, and more specifically, his film "Blue Velvet." It is also one of the very few stories I have written

where Mark Hammelton does not speak to the protagonist. That being said, he does appear in the story.

“The White Shade” (which was packaged alongside “The Black Box” and “Grey Skies”) came from a conversation with my cousin, Steven, who is something of a writer as well, although he is kind of shit. He told me it would be an interesting experiment for two different authors to produce two short stories that directly mirror one another, in a fashion that isn’t too dissimilar from “The Regulators” and “Desperation,” one of which was written by Stephen King, the other by Stephen King under his pseudonym, Richard Bachman. “The White Shade” by me would mirror “The Black Window” by Steven. His life never really worked out, so I ended up being the only one with a short story. Maybe one day, I’ll fulfill that promise and write something called “The Black Window” that’ll echo “The White Shade.”

“Seventh Circle” was written as a response to some horrible things that I’ve encountered in my life. While it is in some ways a reaction to the #MeToo movement (I will say I do support the movement and even attended a speech from Tarana Burke, who I found wonderfully inspiring,) it also is a direct response to my experiences with romance. Often, as I’ve found myself opening up to people and exposing the fact that I am not a sadistic, depressed weirdo, I have found myself often hurt and exposed for my vulnerability. If you’ve read “Seventh Circle,” you probably know exactly what I’m talking about. As a side note, while I do love that story, I find it extremely frustrating how I can’t talk about the true meaning without spoiling absolutely everything.

“The Egg” is no different. This one came as a joke when a group of college friends and I found ourselves in Michael’s. In my typical, absurd sense of humor, I found a MASSIVE plastic egg and said to someone, “what if you gave birth to this?” It was painfully unfunny and juvenile, even for me, but not more than ten seconds later, I began pondering what if someone gave birth to a strange alien egg. This prompted some serious debate that eventually led to another one of my roommates, William Wasp, to look like he wanted to hit me in the face. Sorry that this materialized, William, I know I’m annoying, haha.

Even as I recognized that the idea was just a tiny bit ridiculous, I realized that it had lots of potential to talk about abandonment, maternal instinct, homosexuality, abortion, intimacy, instability, and above all things, alienation. As I write this, it’s

mid-August, COVID-19 is still in full swing, I'm trapped in an apartment in Wilmington, I miss my boyfriend (they came out to my parents about being non-binary right before I started writing this, so the inspiration is pretty evident,) but above all things, I'm very excited for everyone to read. This is technically the second part of my 2020 trilogy of short stories, all of which are most unrelated to each other. "Seventh Circle" was the first part, this is the second, and the final part, which I plan on releasing before the end of the year, is going to be a tragic tale about suicide and cheating. That story will be called "For We Are Many" and I'm sure it'll surprise everyone.

As always, I thank you for reading. I'm not sure how most of you stumbled upon me, but I am endlessly grateful that some people out there have welcomed themselves into my world of weirdness.

However, as an indie writer who mostly promotes himself, I have to ask a favor to anyone who is reading this. If you open this book and decide you enjoy what you're seeing, please leave me a rating on Goodreads at this [link](#). Not only does it put a smile on my face, but it lets the world know about my writing and helps me to become more reputable as an artist. I don't earn much money by giving away my short stories for free, so all I ask of my fans and readers is that they leave me reviews at that link.

Thank you,

William

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The Seed

The crimson lights in my room make her hair seem red without any intruding natural light. My head is in her lap, her skinny jeans comfortable against my shoulder-length hair. My eyes are closed, almost as if not seeing the moment will make it slow down or last eternally. I wish I could hold onto the moment forever or hold it in a photograph, dipping my impressionable heart in whenever I need to feel real. She's playing with my hair and in the background is the sound of "Plan 9 From Outer Space" playing at an overwhelming volume, practically screaming out from the television. It's just noise to me, filling the air with a distraction that only serves to deviate from our impassioned silence.

Everything is okay. Her short nails grazing along each strand of my hair is enough to make me want to fall asleep. Everything about her feels right. Her perfume has mostly faded after a long day with me, but the scent is more comforting than anything else in the entire world. My mind flashes back to prom, when we told my parents that we were going "as friends." That's where the smell takes me. Other times, the smell takes me back to my first kiss with her, when time seemed to shatter and my stomach felt like a glove for a little frantic demon inside of me. It's nostalgic and makes me miss her, even though she's right next to me.

I'm drifting between being awake and being asleep. When I open my eyes, she's looking down at me, only she doesn't seem as unstrained as me. She's turned the TV volume down. The sun has gone down, making the room completely red with my LED lights that have been tacked up along the ceiling.

"May," she whispers flatly, the words cutting through the silence like a gunshot. Her voice is cracked and dry. The words seem like they are struggling to escape her throat. Something immediately seems to shatter the serenity.

"Yeah?" I say back, barely having the strength to open my eyes.

"Can we talk?" She asks without any hint of emotion. Something inside of me drops. In situations like this, it's usually nothing important, but her saying stuff like that always makes me anxious. It's usually related to an insecurity or something stupidly minor that I end

up laughing about, questioning why I was even worried to begin with. This time, something actually feels horribly wrong. Suddenly, I'm thrown out of my comfort zone.

"Of course, love, what's up?" I reply. I force my eyes open. She's not looking at me anymore. Her hazel eyes are trained on the wall. She's biting her lip. She's hesitating. Something is so very amiss.

"Aubrey?" I ask her.

"I can't do this anymore," she says plainly. My words get caught in my chest. My face is turning red and burning. Until this point, everything has seemed fine. This feels like it's out of nowhere. I haven't had time to prepare myself. I'm thrown off of the ship of serenity into the icy depths below. The pain is so much worse when I can't brace for it. I pray to whatever God there is that she isn't talking about our relationship.

"What do you mean?" I ask. I'm already in denial, but I'm certain that I know exactly what she means.

"This, us, you. I just can't." I close my eyes again, practically slamming them and scrunching my eyelids together. My face hurts; from my eyes to my jaws. I know it won't take me long to start crying.

"Why?" I ask. In just moments, my entire world has been flipped upside down.

"I just can't hide anymore. I can't pretend to be your friend forever. I feel suffocated, I—"

"You know I can't do anything about that, my parents would—"

"It's exhausting, May. I want to feel like it's okay to love whoever I want. I'm not a teenager anymore. We're adults," Aubrey says. There are so many thoughts already rushing through my brain, yet none of them feel sufficient enough to reply to her. I am overwhelmed and empty all at once.

"But I thought you wanted to stay with me, forever," I whimper back. She's still playing with my hair, but at this point, it's irritating instead of comforting. I can't help but feel like she's not saying something that's on her mind.

"No, not like this," she replies. I scrunch my eyes even harder. She's just a voice in my head at this point. I am in the void, the oblivion of feeling or lack thereof. I have been tossed from the cliff and into the abyss below. The tears are already streaming out from my eyelids. I don't want to open them again, to see her. I don't want to

plunge in the depths; I want to wake up and find her holding me up, bringing me over the ledge and onto solid ground.

"Babe, please," I croak back. I feel her put a hand under my head to lift it up, then gently set me down against the pillow. I wish I could savor her last touch for longer. The blankets shift as she climbs from out of my bed and steps onto the rug. It feels like she is fading away, like a ghost in the night.

"I'm sorry," she sighs out. Any indication that she's going to fight another day for me is gone. It feels so unexplained and effortless that her lack of speaking screams how long she's been thinking of doing this. As usual, I am at a loss as to what to say.

"Please, we can try something else," I sniffle. The tears are streaming down my face, but she doesn't seem to care

"I'm sorry," she says again, only her voice is further away from me. I pant breathlessly as I cry. My eyes shoot open and I roll over my knitted blankets. She's by the door, her jacket already on. The TV is on a different movie now that is showing a pack of school children cornered by a mutant, man-sized ant.

"Baby, please, just stay," I sob, pulling myself over the bed and towards the door. The room's small enough to allow me to reach my hand out to her, but she dodges my touch.

"I'm sorry. You've been wonderful to me, but it's run its course. I can't," she says back, twisting herself around.

"I love you, please," I beg as she adjusts herself in the doorway. She's clearly uncomfortable.

"No, you don't. It's only been a month. You don't know me enough to love me. It just isn't working like this, I'm sorry."

"Please, just give me some time. I can work things out. Please, Aubrey, please," I beg her.

"I'm going home," she says flatly. I have an unmeasurable urge to get out of bed and grab her around the waist. I need to feel her touch me again. I can't lose her. I need her to stay so badly that every fibre of my being is demanding I do more, but nothing feels like it has a point anymore. She's made up her mind. I'm not sure why, but she doesn't care about me. I am a helpless child, the bastard, the runt of the litter who no longer deserves to nurse.

She looks at me in my place on the bed, uncomfortably shifts, then turns to the hall. She must feel my pained eyes on her because the door to my room shuts behind her. I lazily roll myself over to gaze out

the window beside my bed. My room is placed over the garage in our Middle-American home, allowing me to look out the window and see the driveway. In the past, I've used it to watch her as she leaves after spending the night at my house, often finding myself wishing she would stay forever. A childish part of me would always hope she'd decide to stay just a little bit longer and let me try to convince her. There's no better feeling than her soft legs against mine as we huddle under my blankets. I always found myself longing for it again as soon as she left, but I still had the knowledge that she'd be back again. This time, I feel a sense of finality in her leaving that hurts my heart. I know deep down that I have to let go, but I can't just make myself.

I can just barely see her leave in the darkness. Her figure comes into focus as she opens her car door, the interior lights shining upon her. She doesn't look back up through my window like she usually does, nor does she blow a little kiss that she knows will melt my heart. Instead, she gets into her pickup truck, pulls her phone out, then starts typing. I can only tell because her brightness is so high that it highlights her facial features. Her face is dark and covered in shadows. Unlike me, she seems emotionally unaffected. A tear trickles down my face as she brings the phone up to her ear, turns the ignition of the car, swings the car into reverse, and then the air is filled with a gentle hum of the engine as she hurries out of my driveway. I wonder if she's telling her friends that she finally mustered the courage to leave me.

I can't tell if her leaving took hours or seconds; all I know is that the dense aching in my heart is overpowering all else. I stare out the window and into the night sky, the tears freely flowing down my face. I occasionally lick my lips and taste the salt of them.

I catch myself drifting into thought about our first kiss. A dare when we were both drunk, long before we ever dated or knew we were interested in people who weren't boys. The sensation swept me off my feet back then, but now, it ties me to the ground with a three hundred pound weight. I am stuck to my bed, unable to turn away from the window and focus on the TV. I want to silence the noise and drift into my endless canyon of sadness.

I drift into thought about texts from her ex: a male. They were just friends, but of course, there was always an underlying sense of jealousy from me as he texted her regularly. I find myself wondering if

he had anything to do with her leaving. I hate myself for not asking more questions. Why was I so scared of being controlling?

At a handful of points throughout the night, I find myself pulling my phone out to text her. "Wifey" is her name on my phone. I never gather the guts to send her anything, but damn, do I want to. I briefly consider the razor hidden inside of my phone case that I never told her about, and the scars on my thighs that Aubrey was more than just a little concerned about. She never heard the truth about just how recent they were. The noise of the TV and lights of my room eventually are replaced by nothingness, but I'm too apathetic to lurch over and see who turned it off. In my terrible, frequently disrupted slumber, all I can do is stare out the window. Thoughts and dreams of her touching and cuddling me muffle all else. I don't want to move. I feel like I can't.

Several hours after the TV is turned off, I begin to distantly feel an aching sensation in my lower stomach. The aching grows and fluctuates until it feels like my insides are trying to twist their way out from my skeleton. I feel like my organs are being pinched and played with by that same demonic hand that once made me feel butterflies. I start wondering if I started my period early, but I find myself unsure, as it's been only two weeks since my last. The pain occasionally disappears entirely and I allow myself to sleep in these moments. I'm too tired and sad to move, much less take care of myself.

The Happiest Day of My Life

The first sensation that I'm aware of in the morning is that the bed is moist. The moistness is oddly warm and sticky. I'm nestled beneath the covers now, lying on my back and still positioned to face the window. The sky is grey and the sun hasn't appeared yet, leaving a gentle morning glow that feels melancholic after the events of last night, which I'm still unable to determine if they actually happened or not.

At first, I'm worried that I pissed the bed as my legs brush over the sheets, but a quick whiff of the air reveals that whatever is in the bed with me lacks a distinct smell, so it's probably not urine. My mind flashes back to the random pains I felt in the night and then I become nervous that I bled over the bed.

"Damn it," I mutter. Can things get any worse? I haven't even had time to wake up and today already is shit. What mirror did I shatter? I pull the covers up to glance down, expecting to discover blood staining my white sheets, and I'm surprised to find nothing, even as the morning light shines on me. The only difference is that the bed sheets around my thighs have taken on a darker appearance with the fluid. It doesn't have any smell whatsoever, which makes it all the more strange. I slide up and down, shifting myself and feeling something gently graze my skin underneath my boxers.

It's soft and warm, almost as soft and warm as Aubrey's legs against mine, only it's close to my private parts and as moist as the bed. I reach into my pants absentmindedly, the same way one would scratch a razor bump or foreign itch. My hand makes contact with a small round thing that feels exactly the same as my skin. It's separate from my body, as I get no sensation or feeling when I touch it. I get a cold chill. Without thinking, I softly tug on the warm thing. Almost instantly, my body screams out at me to stop. There's a tingling sensation from my vagina that is vastly outweighed by an overpowering pain coming from deep inside of me; a sharp pain that's more intense than any period cramp I've experienced in my entire life. The twisting of my organs has been replaced by me feeling as though pulling on whatever is in my pants is yanking on my insides.

I have to bite my lip so as to not scream out in pure, unfiltered agony. My uterus burns. I close my eyes and slam my head back into the

pillow, letting the pain ring out like a bell that is far too high pitched. The pain is nauseating and throbbing, to the point where I can feel the beginnings of a headache. I'm trembling in excruciation. It takes everything in my power not to scream out for help. Do I have some kind of parasite hanging out from me?

After a minute or so, the pain is gone and I open my eyes again. Ever so gently, I grab the sides of my boxers and tug them down, extremely careful as to not hurt myself any further.

The mass of skin that becomes visible when my pants have been removed is no bigger than a golf ball. It's a perfect ovular shape, unwrinkled, flesh-colored, and after studying it for a moment, I discover that it is gently pulsating. The most horrifying part of the ball isn't its mere existence, but instead, the presence of a blue and white, vein-like cord exiting from the top side of the ball that links it into my vagina. It becomes immediately obvious why tugging on it hurts me so much. *What the fuck?*

The cord is about as wide as my middle finger and seems to function as a cable that links the ball to me. A quick touch reveals to me that the cord is scaly, slimy, yet oddly familiar. It takes me far longer than it should to make the connection that an umbilical cord is linking to me to this ball- No, human egg.

"DAD!" I shriek instinctively, but wish I hadn't by the time it escapes my lips. On one hand, I want the egg gone and I'm terrified of it. Did some freaky alien thing break into my room in the middle of the night and lay its seed in me? What if it was some kind of parasite? None of that makes any sense to me, but then again, neither does giving birth to an egg.

On the other hand, I am just as scared of telling my father; after all, the egg came from my body and he would certainly be convinced I had been having some kind of sex. He's a dedicated Christian who had once told me that if I got any tattoos, he would scrape them off with sandpaper. I'm still not sure if he was kidding or not.

And if he did end up believing me about the origins of the egg, he would certainly call the hospital and demand they remove it. What would happen then? I had some part in making it, as I am literally connected to it. I don't feel like I can abandon it. It's a feeling of attachment that I can't quite comprehend. Just tossing it out into the wind like I don't care about it feels like the wrong thing to do. But

then at the same time, I feel as though I won't be able to take care of it without any kind of help.

Yet, it doesn't make sense to me. I haven't had sex with a man... well, ever. I'm constantly the ridicule of the family at Thanksgiving.

"May, do you have a boyfriend yet? We need some grandkids," my mom would "joke." It's a wonder how they've managed to discover so little about their own daughter. Even if I did have sex with men, my period was only two weeks ago, but I suppose the most important fact is that typically, humans don't give birth to a *fucking* egg. I chuckle at the thought of telling her, "well, lookie here, bitch. There's an egg hanging out of my vagina. Say hi to your grandbaby!" Perhaps laughter is my only way to cope with whatever the hell is happening. What am I supposed to do? Call 9-1-1? Tell my parents? What are they going to even say or do? Then again, just pretending an egg isn't hanging out of my vagina doesn't seem like much of an option.

The door to my room swings open. I yank the covers back over me in a split second, and then my dad is in the doorway; all two hundred and fifty pounds of his five-foot six-inch frame. His beard is scraggly and already beginning to grey. In his hand is a needle; he's been knitting downstairs. It feels far too humiliating to look him in the eyes with my boxers around my ankles.

"What's wrong?" he asks. I stare at him with a lump in my throat. Unlike me, he makes no attempt to hide the southern twang in his voice. I don't think he's as embarrassed as me by it.

"Can you make me some food?" I ask. He grins.

"Sweetie, do I look like a maid to you?" I can't help but force a laugh back. My heart is thundering in my chest. Can he tell I'm faking it?

"I'm feeling a little sick," I reply, hoping he'll just go away.

"You are looking a bit pale. May Elizabeth Dawes! I swear to Mary and Joseph that if you brought the China-Virus in this house! Are you experiencing fever-like symptoms?"

"Uh, there are so many things with what you just said, Dad," I mumble, "can you tell mom to make me some ramen?"

"Why, certainly, Your Highness," he sneers, sarcastically bowing and turning to leave, but it sounds more like "high ass." Before he leaves, he whips his head around and speaks again.

"I thought Aubrey was staying the night. Where'd she end up going?" Is it possible he knows about us dating?

I've almost forgotten about her by that point.

"We got in a fight," I say, trying my best to hide any emotion whatsoever.

"Wanna talk about it? You know, your papa is great at girl problems. How do you think I deal with your mom?" he asks with another smile. As amusing as it is, this conversation is the least of my worries at the moment. I don't really care about the food, much less Aubrey. I have enough emotional stress as it is. I'm far too scared to say anything about the thing hiding under the covers. I just need him to leave me alone so I can think about what to do, but I somehow doubt a solution will come any time soon.

"No, I'm okay," I mutter absent-mindedly.

"Cranky, cranky," he jokes, then hurries down the hallway. I softly cough as the tears start to pour out again.

How Did We Grow So Far Apart?

In the moments I have alone, I'm thinking quickly and rashly. Beads of sweat are rushing down my forehead. I haven't even gotten out of bed. My pits are beginning to stink, my teeth feel grainy, and the moistness surrounding my thighs hasn't grown any more comfortable. I feel like I need a shower. How long till I start chafing?

I pull my phone from the nightstand next to my bed, careful not to tug anymore on the cord coming from my insides. I can't even stand to look at it. A tap of the home button shows a random smattering of notifications. Two missed calls and five texts from my best friend, Connor, various missed Snapchats from about a dozen different people I knew in high school, but of course, nothing from Aubrey, the only person I feel like hearing from. It's already one in the afternoon. *Man, I slept like a rock last night.* I only have time to glance for a second at Connor's text messages, only glimpsing at the most recent text, which reads, "did you see what she posted? CALL ME!"

"Fuck," I growl to myself and in seconds, I've dialed his number. My mind can't seem to choose if it wants to focus on the fucking egg hanging out from my vagina or whatever happened with Aubrey. It's hard to give much emotional attention to the latter.

"Hey, you okay?" Connor asks right as he answers. His voice is calm, yet a sense of urgency lurks beneath his words.

"Yeah?" I reply, unsure of what to make of the situation.

"Did you guys break up or something?"

"It's a long story," I say. It's not worth talking about right now.

"I dunno, man. I don't want to get in the middle of it or anything," Connor pussyfoots.

"What are you talking about?" I ask. Connor has a beautiful way of not getting to the point. My father once said he hadn't seen so many words that say so little since he was in the military after a conversation with Connor.

"So, you haven't seen it?"

"No, I just woke up. What are you talking about?" I grumble. I vaguely want to hit him in the face.

"She posted on her story, 'single, hmu fam!'" he says. It's reassuring to know I'm basically dating a fifteen year old- okay, WAS

dating a fifteen year old. Even still, it stings to know how urgent she is to move on from me. Words escape me. Any thought of asking Connor for help with my egg has slipped away.

“Ouch,” is all I can choke out at him. I’m holding back tears already.

“Are you okay? Like– what happened?” he asks.

“Yeah,” I vomit back out. More than a syllable is going to make it obvious I’m on the verge of crying. I don’t quite have the emotional capacity to talk about her or listen to someone’s kind but misguided attempts in comforting me. I can’t feel any sense of comfort right now. I need to escape, to breathe, to run away.

“Do you want to talk about it?” he asks, clearly concerned for me. *God, he’s a good friend but he has no idea what he’s doing.*

“No,” I say, swallowing and letting a glob of mucus slide down my throat. The tears ease up. I want to tell him that I do want to talk about it, but not right now. I want to say that I love him and he’s an amazing friend but I just can’t stomach it.

“Would your parents be okay if I came over?” he asks. I’m not even sure if I want to be around another person. The situation with Aubrey is debilitating enough, but I have no idea how he’ll handle the ominous egg. My stomach grumbles ever–so–distantly. Dad needs to hurry up with the food.

“Not today,” I snap back, “I gotta go.” I know I’ll talk to him soon, now just isn’t the time.

“Okay, uh, well, let me know if you need anything, man,” he says.

“Thanks, bye,” I answer, not even giving him time for a response before I press the “end” button.

I flop my arm down clumsily and lazily, not having much energy for anything more delicate, then take a deep breath in. I bite down on my lip, as if that’ll magically stop me from feeling anything at all. I don’t feel like I can focus on Aubrey right now.

When I’m able to regain my composure, I lift the blanket back up to look at the strange thing hanging out of me, and when I see it again, it’s hard to believe that it’s real. Perhaps it’s my imagination, but this time, it looks just a slight bit bigger. I reach down and touch its smooth skin with my hands to find that it is as soft as a baby’s bottom. It’s as big as a tennis ball and about as heavy as one, too. As I ever so gently move it and feel it against my palm, extremely careful as to not move the cord any further out from inside

of me, I can feel it softly pulsating. It's a gentle, smooth beat coming from within the skin-covered egg that always stays in rhythm, to the point where its very existence is soothing. Gazing upon it, I feel myself becoming less scared of it. It's clear to me that the egg is growing and that I have no clue what made it, but beyond its strange presence, there's nothing that indicates it's anything but docile. It hasn't hurt me from what I can tell.

All that I'm even slightly sure of beyond that is that it is growing. Somehow, I am nursing an egg through an umbilical cord, and despite the fact that it is outside of my body, it's alive and being nurtured by me. I have no clue how. Does this make me a mother? If so, who- OR WHAT is the father? Does this egg need to be kept warm like a duck egg? When/if it hatches, is it going to be a human baby? If I snip the cord, will whatever is inside the egg die? If there's a human inside, would that make me a murderer?

I don't have long to have a moral debate, as my mom knocks on the door to interrupt my train of thought. She at least is polite enough to knock before barging in.

"Honey?" her voice calls through the closed door, "I brought you some ramen." *God, she's an angel.* I can't help but feel like she's nicer than I deserve.

"Come in," I say, almost slapping myself when I finish. I'm supposed to be "sick." When I answered her, I sounded perfectly normal. I need to make some kind of attempt to sound exhausted or nasally.

My mom is petite and frail, especially compared to my father. When she gently opens the door, she's holding a wooden lap-tray in her hands. A steaming hot bowl of soup in a white dish is sitting on top of the tray, next to which is a glass of sweet tea and a perfectly browned grilled cheese. She bought the serving tray a few years back to make us feel like we were a higher class than we really were. I suppose that might sound pretentious, but it's the same concept of drinking everything out of wine or champagne glasses.

"How are you feeling?" she asks, pacing into my room. I cringe as she leans across the bed and sets the tray over my lap, directly over the egg that is still hidden under the covers. I'm sure it can't tell and doesn't mind, but I worry that it's going to get crushed or too hot underneath the tray. Does it like the heat? Does it need to be kept warm?

"I've got a headache and my stomach isn't feeling too good."

“Like you’re hungry or you need to throw up?” she asks.

“Both,” I reply.

“Aw, hon,” she pouts, “do you want me to get you a trash can?”

“No, I’m fine, mom. I think I just need to rest.”

Without any warning whatsoever, she moves alongside the bed and softly places her palm against my forehead. I don’t complain. For a moment, I feel like a child again. I feel the urge to let her just cradle me and tell me everything’s okay. I want her to keep her hand on my forehead longer. I want her to climb into bed with me and hold me. I don’t really have the energy to recognize that my train of thought is a little off-kilter. I can feel myself gradually becoming more and more exhausted.

“You don’t feel that warm,” she says softly.

“I don’t think it’s a fever. I think I just need some food and some rest,” I mumble sadly and with a hint of exhaustion. It’s becoming harder and harder to focus on her.

“Okay, sweetie,” my mom says, “I love you.” I follow her with my eyes as she whips her blonde hair around and moves to the door. I softly blink, then lose focus on her. She’s a blur of motion that leaves my room behind. The soup on the tray in front of me disappears soon after. I am gradually fading into a black abyss. Consciousness becomes a fleeting thing, yet I’m strangely aware of my slip into dreamland, like sinking into a pool of black, warm peanut butter.

Cries Without Words

In the darkness, I'm faintly aware of a baby crying. I'm sure that I'm in my room, only all the lights are turned off, the air is black outside of the window, and my door is shut. There's a greyish haze to everything in the room, from the dresser, to the space to walk towards the TV, to the wooden floor, and even the closet, almost as though I'm watching my life through an old grainy TV. The tray that was on top of me is gone.

The baby crying gets a little louder as my eyes flutter open. I pull the covers of my bed up, very consciously aware of the fact that the egg is no longer attached to me and that my sheets are no longer wet. Maybe it was all just a really bad dream; maybe it's still the night after Aubrey left and I never woke up with the egg at all. I sigh a breath of relief. I can't wait until I tell her about how crazy all of this was.

The baby cries again, but this time, it sounds closer, as if it's just outside of my room. I know I don't have any siblings, most of my cousins are from out of state, and my parents don't particularly love babies, so why am I hearing one?

I step out from the bed, letting my left bare foot hit the floor, but right as it does, I instantly recoil when a warm fluid cushions the sole of my foot. It's lukewarm and stinky, as though someone has spilled soda or melted ice cream.

I curse to myself, thinking someone let the dog in my room, but as I raise my foot up to examine it, I find that the fluid has stuck to my foot and is darker than my skin. The baby's cries turn into shrieks; they're breathy, loud, and agonizing. It wails and wails with enough might that I swear it is going to tear its own vocal cords from its throat. It sounds both terrified and in intense pain, as though someone snapped its tiny legs and threw it underneath the house. My heart drops in my chest.

The hollering never seems to subside, instead becoming more pained and intensified. My ears start to ache from the high-pitched shrieking, but my racing heart and urge to save the child outweighs this. I want to shout out for my mom, but my instinct to start following the voice of the child takes primary importance.

The sound is ear-shattering by this point. I'm curious how the hell my parents can just ignore the sound. It's certainly not coming

from downstairs, for it's far too loud to be from anywhere but right outside of my room. My small, square room has only a few feet between the bed and the closet, and there's just a short little hallway leading from my room to the stairs. There aren't that many different places the baby could be.

"Don't worry, I'm coming, honey!" I exclaim, sounding too much like my own mother for comfort. The direction of the sound isn't coming from the doorway across from my bed, but instead, from the left side of my room; the closet.

I gulp, marching through the puddle on the ground to find the lightswitch near the door to my room. Whatever is on the floor is being tracked across the room by my sluggish footsteps, as when I take a step, my sticky feet smack against the wooden floor. I flick the lightswitch, letting the room be cast in a yellow glow from the dim light hanging from my ceiling.

The baby shrieks even louder as the light comes on, but before I can even look towards the closet, I look at the ground to see that the fluid I was stepping in is a cherry, red color. A small puddle has congregated right next to my bed, and two sets of prints are leading across the room. The first set are obviously footprints that I made when I got out of bed, while the other set are a mix of handprints and footprints that are abnormally small, perhaps even infantile. When the baby cries again from my closet, I make the connection that the fluid is blood.

I feel a chill run up my spine; my bones are tingling in my skin. The baby is still crying. I no longer feel desperate to find it, but something forces me across the room to the folding doors of the closet, which are just slightly peeled open. I put my hands in between them, then shove them apart.

The glimmers of light shine into my closet. The hardwood floor has turned a greyish-green color that looks as if it's been submerged under the sea and rotted for years. All of my clothes are gone and in the center of the space is a slowly moving mass of bloody flesh.

I stare at the flesh in horror, barely able to comprehend the thing that has decided to kill itself in my closet. It's no longer than a single human foot and painfully skinny. I can make out a tiny human head, pained, blinking eyes, and a set of limbs that look unnaturally twisted. It's curled up on the floor in a fetal position, the screaming sounds of the baby making much more sense now. Its shiny skin looks

almost alien, like a creature that shouldn't exist at all. It's hard for me to acknowledge that I'm staring at a human fetus. It's much too small to have been born yet, looking as though it was ripped straight out of the womb. Its eyes won't open all the way, but I can't help but feel like it's staring at me, practically begging for me to save it. I don't know what I'm supposed to do. The cries have stopped, instead replaced by a silence that feels all the more painful.

There's a lump in my throat. My eyes are watering. I let out a gasp because it's all I can do. Suddenly, my hands are rubbing my eyes and I'm sobbing. As usual, I am powerless. When I move my hands and open my eyes, there's more of the babies, only now they're piled on top of each other, all curled up and softly breathing in a giant mass of flesh. There's so many that they're piled on top of one another and reaching the back wall of the closet like a mound of dirty clothes.

There's so many to focus on, each with a different, pained facial expression. All of them are covered in blood and look like they need to be helped or put out of their misery. I keep debating between calling 9-1-1 and just stomping on their heads to get them to finally be at peace. I'm sick and I can't stop crying. I can barely breathe.

When I awaken from my nightmare, the first thing I do is reach between my legs and feel for the umbilical cord. I feel an odd sense of comfort. It's still there and everything is okay. I can still take care of the egg. I don't have to worry about saving the child inside, at least not yet.

The setting sun outside of my window lets me know I've only been asleep for a few hours. In front of me, the tray is still there, but the soup and grilled cheese are gone. I don't remember eating either. Strange.

Implantation

I drift back into total consciousness, but I find my journey back into the world of being awake rather difficult. My eyes are heavy, as are my limbs. Exhaustion has more than taken me over. It feels hard for me to recall where I am, who I am, or what's been happening to me. When my eyes open, all of my surroundings are blurry. The sun is casting dim rays of light in through my window, this much is clear, but everything feels blurry and unfocused. What's happening to me? Am I still dreaming?

I move my leg and feel my thigh graze the umbilical cord, which has become slightly more rigid, like a flexing muscle. It's still slimy, yet not enough to leave any kind of fluid or moisture on my skin. This egg is draining the life out of me. It's a leech feasting upon my life force. I can't help but wonder if it's trying to take me over. I have an urge to cut it out of me, but what if I die? What if the two of us are so intertwined that I get pulled down with it?

I pull my blanket up and glance down to see the egg. It's grown again, even if the change is extremely slight. At a time, it was the size of a golf ball, but now, it's almost twice the size of a baseball. The pulsating beat that comes from inside the egg has grown in intensity, throbbing like a beating heart. The beating is occasionally interrupted by a gentle tremor, as if the thing is experiencing cold chills. It's slowly coming alive. I'm not sure if I should be excited by what's going to come or terrified. If the egg hatches without killing me, will it sprout a human child? What if the child is some weird alien? Will it be my sole duty to nurture it even after its birth?

I'm not sure how long I can lie in my bed. It's been over thirty hours since I've showered, put on deodorant, or even brushed my teeth. I lean to sniff my armpits, which are now rancid, greasy, and sweaty. My teeth are covered in grittiness and every breath I take feels putrid and filthy. I can't keep living like this. I need to get help or at least try to figure something out.

My phone is the first thing I reach for. There's not many people I can call. Aubrey is obviously long gone. I wonder if she would even pick up in my time of need. Does she hate me? Did she like a single

moment she spent with me? My heart hurts and only briefly distracts me from the egg. I don't have enough friends anymore to reach out to, so the obvious person to call is Connor. A glance at my clock reveals that it's eight in the morning. I don't even remember sleeping through the night. Something terrible is happening to me. I pray to God that Connor still leaves his ringer on. Hopefully he's worried about me enough to do so. I know he sometimes likes to sleep in, especially when he's been drinking or out partying. My mind drifts once more to the razor hiding in my phone case. I know why it's there, but it feels much too early to even consider using it.

I go to his contact and quickly call him. The phone begins to softly buzz as it rings. It buzzes once, then twice, and finally a handful of times, before I finally prepare myself to hear his voicemail. I'm not so sure how long I can wait for him. Suddenly, the phone clicks, then I hear his voice.

"Hello?" he mumbles groggily.

"Hi, I need your help," I say anxiously.

"What's up?"

"Did you just wake up?"

"Yeah, it's really—"

"Not important. You need to come over. How soon can you get here?"

"It's so early May. What do you need?"

"I can't tell you a ton on the phone but I shit you not when I say it's the most important thing you could do for me."

"Okay? Spill the beans," he says.

"Just come over. Get showered, hurry!" I exclaim.

"Alright, damn, I gotta ask if I even can. Give me like ten minutes, okay?" He's barely awake enough to even respond to me. I tell him to hurry and mumble a goodbye, then he hangs up the phone. I silently pray that Connor won't fall back asleep, but hopefully I sounded anxious enough that he is rushing to come help his best friend. A paranoid part of my brain tells me that Aubrey might be talking to him, trying to convince him that I'm luring him over to have sex. Does she think I'm that much of a slut? I'm not even attracted to men, and even if I was, I'm in no place to have sex; I am filthy. Maybe if I invited the right person over, they'd avoid it and just take advantage of my condition.

“What the fuck?” I blurt out to myself. My train of thought feels so erratic and forced. What am I thinking? Nothing really adds up like it’s supposed to. I think back to the few things I know about being pregnant, which, admittedly, is a tiny amount. Aren’t people who are pregnant supposed to be hormonal? Do they get paranoid about random shit? Do they get horny randomly? I’m tempted to google it, until I realize that I can’t exactly be considered pregnant.

Regardless of what I can understand about my condition, Google seems like a good idea. Health class certainly never said much of anything about laying eggs, but maybe there’s been some kind of phenomenon or medical condition with some women where they lay eggs. From my experience watching porn and movies, I’m pretty sure birth isn’t supposed to go anything like this. I can’t help but wonder if my mom went through the same thing when she was pregnant with me. Is that something people in this family really go through? My razor hiding within my phone case screams out to me at this moment. I need to bury these thoughts.

I type “why am I laying eggs?” into google, but the only things that come up are results about chickens. I sigh, then type “woman laying eggs.” The first result is about a Norwegian woman named Omundsdatter who gave birth to a normal sized egg. When the egg was cracked open by a friend, someone told her that it had a yolk and a white. The next day, she went into labor again, giving birth to another egg, which was preserved and sent to a man named Olaus Wormius, who concluded that the devil stole the fetus and replaced it with an egg. A Dutch physician later accused her of having sex with a rooster. Nothing there was helpful to me. I certainly hadn’t been having sex with a rooster and I wasn’t having any deals with the devil. I type in “I gave birth to an egg” next, but nothing relevant turns up. I groan when I recognize that I can’t deal with it by myself, but what am I supposed to do? Cutting the egg out is going to kill whatever is growing inside of it and possibly even me. I don’t know shit about birth. Does cutting into an umbilical cord cause pain? Isn’t there a way to cut it that prevents infections?

I know I need to tell my family eventually, but as I contemplate telling my parents, the thought of them taking me to a doctor and the doctor simply removing it makes me uncomfortable. I can’t exactly explain why, but the very thought provokes chills up and down my spine and makes me feel oddly disgusting. If the egg turns out to actually be

a growing baby, can I stomach having its blood on my hands? I know my parents will want me to keep it, assuming it's real; they're overly Christian as it is. I pull the covers up over my head and look at the egg, which is still softly humming and pulsating. It's barely audible, but it almost resembles purring. From what I can see, the first white layer of its skin is somewhat translucent. The white is foggy, making it seem almost like a celestial object or planet whose surface is filled with clouds. Like a beautiful pearl on the shore of a lake or resting on the inside of a clam, it's beautiful and mysterious. I catch myself mesmerized by its gentle movement.

Like the tides in the ocean, moving in, out, in, out. The movements are gentle and entrancing. I find my own breathing matching the movements.

In, out.

In, out.

In, out.

In, out.

In, out.

In, out.

In, out.

In, out.

In, out.

In, out.

In, out.

In, out.

In, out.

In, out.

In, out.

In, out.

In, out.

I'm knocked out from the serenity of my breathing. A finger starts poking me through the blanket.

In, out.

The finger pokes me more aggressively.

"Dude," a familiar voice whines, "wake up. I drove all the way here. If I can't sleep in, neither can you." The warmth I feel under the cover with the egg beside me is like heaven. I feel so warm.

In, out.

"Give me a minute," I groan back, hoping that he will just go away. I don't know why I invited him over. I'm so exhausted.

In, out.

"Dude, fucking wake up. You're pissing me off!" he growls. I feel him grab the top of the blanket, then rip it off the top of my head. The cold air hits me like a train, a bucket of water through a spiderweb.

My eyes shoot open. Connor is standing next to my bed with a combination of extreme frustration and extreme concern. I suddenly realize that to even a mildly rational person, I seem completely batshit.

"I'm sorry, Connor. I don't know what's happening to me," I stammer as I start to tear up. The anger slips off of his face. It's

hard for him to stay angry; he's too empathetic. I sniffle a bit, trying to hide a tear as it escapes from my eye.

"Jesus, man, what's going on?" he says, sitting alongside my legs on the bed. The egg is still in between my legs and I'm a little worried at first he's going to sit on it. I need to keep it safe from everyone, even him. I sniffle again and cough. It feels a little hard to emulate being emotionally stable.

"Hey, hey, it's okay," he says, putting his hand on my forehead, before gently squeezing my sides and wrapping me in a hug. Before I can handle it appropriately, I'm sobbing relentlessly into his shoulder. Everything is hitting me. Aubrey, the weird egg hanging out of me, my parents; it all hurts so fucking bad.

I shake my head at him, tears and snot streaming down my face. I can't hold them down, no matter how hard I try. I'm drowning inside of myself.

"Of course it's okay. I promise, May. Everything is fine. You deserve better," he replies. I shake my head again, letting more snot pour out of my nose. I'd normally be embarrassed about the mucus, but there's a dull ache in my heart that makes the onslaught of crying even more intense. I'm too overwhelmed to wipe my face off, so Connor grabs the blanket and wipes it under my nose.

"Here," he says as he does.

"You're my best friend, buddy. I'd be lost without you," he says, trying his best to comfort me. I sniffle again in reply, burying my face into his shoulder. I close my eyes and put my hands around his back and hold on as tightly as I can. I really hope he can't smell me. I kick myself for never letting Aubrey buy me a teddy bear. Why'd I have to try so hard to be manly? It would feel so good to have someone squishy to hold onto whenever I need it.

"If it makes you feel any better, I've always thought Aubrey was kind of a bitch," he says. I chuckle a little bit, sniffing again. The tears are slowing down. I can breathe again.

"Really? Why?" I pathetically whimper out. My voice is filled with cracks.

"She's just... kind of a bitch. I don't know, man. What kind of person breaks up with someone and posts that they're single on social media the same damn night? It's shallow as fuck. Even people that post about being single when they haven't been dating someone are trashy."

“We were only together for a month,” I whimper back, echoing her words. I don’t want to invalidate my own feelings the way that she did, but her logic feels more powerful and stable than mine; I feel worthless.

“Doesn’t matter,” he snaps, “no one deserves to be thrown out like that, man. It’s shitty. You were really good to her. She also said I have ugly teeth one time before you guys were dating,” he says. His teeth are a little crooked when he smiles. His parents never got the money together for braces from what I had heard around school. He’s usually embarrassed to smile in pictures, so when he lets out an actual smile, it feels very real and endearing, perhaps even cute or attractive.

“When?” I ask, pulling away from him. The tears have subsided, instead replaced with a deep, intense anger. I’m angry with Aubrey, of course, but I’m also mad at Connor. If he had said something, maybe I could have dodged the bullet and not had to deal with her. Maybe I would’ve realized she was a horrible person.

“Like a few days before you asked her out,” he says.

“Why didn’t you tell me?” I snap.

“We weren’t hanging out that much. You were going out with her like every night and you seemed so happy. I didn’t want to ruin that for you.”

The tears start slipping out again, but they feel more angry and intentful than before. I hate crying, I really do.

“I’m sorry,” he says, trying his best to comfort me.

“I fucking hate that you never told me. I would be so happy if you had just told me,” I snarl.

“Listen, I just wanted you to be happy with your girlfriend. I know I should have said something but there was never a right way to do it. I don’t know man, I just... didn’t. I’m sorry,” he says. Connor doesn’t seem far from crying. We both are messes; horrible, twisted messes.

“You should have.”

“You don’t have to be mean. I’m only human. I mess up sometimes,” he whines.

“I just don’t know why,” I grumble. I can’t control myself. I just feel angry. There is no remedy to soothe me. Nothing he can possibly say will calm me. It feels wrong to be mean to Connor. As simple-brained as he can be, he’s far too nice and calm to say anything

rude to him. I recognize that I need to breathe. My emotions are taking control.

"I'm trying. Cut me some slack. I know you're upset but I'm just your friend. I only do my best, May. Did you call me here and tell me it was so important to just yell at me?"

I'm silent for a moment. The tears are still escaping but I know I need to breathe. Connor is my only way out of this and pushing him away won't help me at all.

"Well?" He asks impatiently. I'm not completely sure how to respond so I look at him powerlessly.

"I'm sorry," I whimper out. It doesn't feel like enough to offer him but it's a start. I wonder if the egg is making me more emotional. Connor is clearly already shut off, shuffling on his feet and leaning against the door frame. My apology isn't going to shift him, the same way his apology didn't help me. His discomfort seems to echo the discomfort I saw in Aubrey.

"What did you actually want?" he angrily grumbles.

My mouth struggles to say the words. There's sand in my throat and I'm suffocating on an entire desert. I can't breathe, much less find the words. So like an idiot, I stare at him, searching so hard for the right thing to say. What if he doesn't help me? What if he thinks I'm crazy or I did something wrong?

"I'm worried about you, man. You're not yourself," he says.

"I'm sorry," I mumble, "but I really need you."

"What's going on?"

I pause for a moment, truly taking in what I'm about to show him. I have this odd mental image of pulling the blanket up, Connor looking at me like I'm crazy, and the egg not being there at all. The thought of this scares the hell out of me, almost prompting me to make something up to prove that I'm not absolutely bonkers. I silently swear to myself. I feel like my thoughts are becoming more and more erratic. Something deep inside of me wants to not tell him, but I know I need to. Every instinct and fibre of my being is trying to convince me not to show him the egg. I'm not exactly sure what's possessing me, but my body seems in conflict with my mind. Could the egg be putting thoughts into my head? Whatever is happening is strange. I'm not sure if the egg is trying to protect itself or if it's trying to protect me. Is the egg sinister, or merely trying to survive for its own benefit?

It takes an immense amount of will to find any kind of word to explain what's happening to me, so instead, I grab the covers as tightly as I can. My arm doesn't seem willing to move, as though it has been replaced with an invincible iron bar. I grit my teeth and scrunch my face up, trying to force myself to push the covers up. Connor seems to notice and looks at me with concern.

"Are you alright?" he asks. With every bit of strength I have left, I throw the covers up. It's nearly impossible, but the covers land at the end of the bed, revealing my vagina, the cord, and finally, the egg. He stares wide-eyed at me. For a moment, I wonder if I should be embarrassed that he's seeing my lady parts, but I'm too exhausted to think too much of anything.

The Consumer

Connor is instantly horrified about my condition.

“What the fuck, May? What the fuck is that thing?” he gasps out, “do your parents know? Have you told anyone?”

“No,” I reply. It’s hard to keep myself awake. I barely have the energy to answer him. A glance down reveals to me that the egg has grown even larger, now the size of a football.

“What do you mean, ‘no?’ Why the fuck not?” he gasps, pacing around my room. Everytime he takes a glance at the egg, he instantly averts his eyes and focuses his gaze on something else. Maybe his eyes are creeping up to glance at my vagina and that’s increasing his discomfort, because there’s nothing that repulsive about the egg itself.

“I don’t know what it is. I wasn’t even sure if it was real until I showed you.”

“How the fuck are you so calm? We need to get you some help right now. Jesus Christ, May. How did this happen?”

“I really wish I knew. I don’t think telling my parents is a good idea.”

“Why?”

“What if they think I’m having sex? What if they try to take it or make me get it cut out?”

“Why the fuck would you not want it taken out? It’s like a... tumor.”

“You don’t know that!” I snap back at him, “It’s alive. I can hear it breathing.”

Connor looks at me like I’m absolutely insane. I’m not sure if he’s right or not.

“Maybe we should take you to the hospital,” he says.

“I want to keep it safe,” I reply calmly. I barely have control over my words anymore. They seem to slip out without any effort. My mouth feels like a tiny hole that’s been poked in my boat made of skin, bones, and feeling.

“Jesus, May. What the actual fuck?”

“Please calm down.”

“How can I be calm? There’s a growth hanging out of your… your… pussy and you want to defend it. Who is doing the talking here? You or the fucking tumor?”

“It’s not a tumor. It has a cord. I’m its life source.”

“I have no clue what the fuck that thing is but when people get tapeworms, they don’t hang around and make sure the damn worms are healthy! They get them yanked out!”

I know that he has a point, but the thought of a doctor snipping the umbilical cord makes my stomach churn. I can’t let it die; after all, the egg has just started to grow. I don’t even know what I want Connor to do. I can’t help but feel a little worried he’s going to force me into seeing a doctor.

“Shit, May. You really need to get some help, like, right now.”

“I got some. It’s you.”

“Can I drive you to the hospital? Or at least urgent care?”

“I can’t let my parents know. They don’t even know about Aubrey.” Connor shoots me another look. He can’t seem to gather why I don’t want them to know.

“I thought you were going to tell them about her,” he snaps back.

“Well, she kind of left me before I could,” I spit out. My mind is far too filled with confusion to think of a way out. I want to sleep so badly. I want Connor to go away and just let me fall asleep with the egg in between my legs.

“Shit, man, we gotta do something. I don’t even know how to help you. What if I snuck you out and took you to a doctor?”

“No, I’m scared of moving. What if the cord snaps or I hurt it?” I ask frantically. I’m practically scrambling to find a way out of this. I can’t keep it a secret forever; it’s growing at an impressive rate. How many days has it been since it appeared? It’s already more than doubled in size. How long until it’s so big that I can’t keep it hidden under the sheets? What will I do when it finally hatches? I have no idea what the hell is inside of it, much less what I will do if something living actually climbs out from inside. How will I explain it to my parents? I know the child, supposing there is one, won’t exactly be loved or appreciated by my family, considering its odd origins, never mind that the child sprouting from the egg will more than likely be deformed or extremely alien, leading to a lifetime of pain, hardship, and isolation. All at once, I find myself wanting to be merciful towards the life of the thing growing inside of the egg by

destroying it, I also consider a deep fear of whatever might be growing, and finally, I feel a massively overwhelming urge to protect the baby. The razor hiding in my phone case no longer feels tempting to use on myself, but Connor, who is pushing me to do things I do not want to do. It's an intrusive but powerful urge.

"Can we compromise?" he asks finally, after a moment of deep contemplation. I'm too exhausted to do anything but agree with a nod. I have covered up the egg with the blanket at this point.

"Can I give you a day to think about it? I don't think it'll get much worse between now and then. I have an uncle who my family is pretty close with. I'm sure he can at least examine you, maybe recommend you what to do. He won't hurt it or do anything more than that. He'll just help you get taken care of. You won't have anything to worry about, I promise."

I stare at him blankly. I just want him to go away, to stop pressuring me and my child.

"What if my parents see us leaving?"

"I can sneak you out early in the morning or late at night. They'll never know. I'll help you carry it and make sure it doesn't get hurt, I promise," he begs. It's hard for me to feel much trust at all, but I feel a little bit for him. Instead of wanting to hurt the child or me, he seems like he actually wants to help the two of us. I smile at him lovingly. I've never been attracted to men, but I feel a sense of safety with him suddenly, as though he is a caretaker for the two of us. If he needed me, I would let him have me. I know he wants the best for us, even if I'm not ready to tell him.

"Thank you," I murmur.

"Can I get you anything? Have you been eating? Drinking?"

I nod. It's hard for me to feel anything but safe. I want to rest now. I feel much less worried. Everything will be okay. After he says goodbye and tells me he will text me, I'm fast asleep.

The Demon Will Dash Me Upon The Stones

I wake up and I'm in a hospital bed, only this hospital bed has replaced the bed in my own home. I'm not sure what's going on or what happened. I'm groggy and hazy, as though I have drifted into something beyond comprehension. The egg is taking things from me, this much is clear. Right as I think about that, my heart drops. There's no way they got me in this bed without hurting him.

I tear the covers off of me, finding instantly that the egg is gone. It's hard to stop tears from trickling down my face in response. Did Connor tell my parents? Had they killed my baby? It's tougher than it should be to breathe. The pressure of protecting him is gone, but instead, it's been replaced by an emptiness. I can't help but feel like trusting someone led to me being hurt once again. I had trusted Connor not to take my child and like with what had happened to Aubrey, my heart had been broken and my trust was shattered.

My train of thought is interrupted by the bedroom door opening. I try to see what is beyond the door and can only make out a wall of blackness, as though the very laws of the universe are preventing me from seeing what lies beyond. A tennis shoe penetrates the dark wall, followed by a leg that is covered in medical scrubs. Another tennis shoe follows, until I am greeted by the frowning face of an elderly doctor. His silver hair reflects what little light is penetrating my tiny room. Wrapped around his wrist is a leather band that connects to a link of chain, which I presume is connected to another link. His footsteps seem to thunder, drowning out all other noise in the building.

"Hello, May," he says politely. His voice is one of the most relaxing sounds I have ever heard, as though pure honey had been converted into an auditory format. His eyes are soft and as weathered as his face, as though he had traveled through a million years across a million civilizations. In some ways, his calm demeanor and soft-spoken voice feel omni-potent, as though he possesses no flaws and was aware of all of mine. Where the fuck were my parents?

I can't stomach out a response, so I just stare at him.

"I'm Doctor Hammelton, call me Mark," he explains, flashing a smile that is too perfectly white and untainted for someone of his age. I feel paralyzed by this man. He is the most relaxing person I have ever met, but also the most terrifying. Something about him is too perfect, to the point where his very existence feels like a corruption of nature.

"I have some wonderful news," he says, letting out another smile. It feels forced, like someone who is trying to imitate a human.

"Your delivery was a success. Would you like to meet your child?" he asks. I wasn't even so sure I knew the answer.

He takes a step forward, not even waiting for me to reply. His footstep is giant and overwhelming, sending a cacophony of creaks and booms throughout the house. It is so loud that it almost dwarfs all other sounds. The chain smacks against the doorframe, as though whatever he is leading is fighting him. The chains jangle sporadically, until what he is leading comes into focus.

I can't even find the words; the horror is too great. A girl who is most certainly not a baby is kneeling in the doorway. Her face is battered and bruised, leaving her nose crooked and bleeding, as though the doctor spent an hour beating her before leading her to the room. She's older, as shown by her lip-piercing, her bowl cut, and her painted nails. Did I give birth to this person?

At first, she looks familiar and I can't put my finger on why, but as I contemplate her appearance, I realize that I'm looking at a younger version of myself. I can barely understand it.

"May?" I call out. Hammelton smiles again. I examine his hands and notice that in the hand that isn't holding onto the chain, he's firmly grasping a power drill. His fingers are twitching, as if he is overwhelmed by pleasure.

The girl that is supposed to be me lets out a cry, but this cry isn't the cry of an adult, it's the cry of a baby in the wrong body. From her mouth escapes a cry that can't be older than an infant.

The girl who looks like me crawls across the floor to kneel next to him. The power drill hums as he slams his index finger on the trigger, then turns it to face her. I make eye contact with her. Her eyes are just as calm and serene as Mark's, as though she is completely okay with what is happening. Mark raises the drill but doesn't release his fingers. He thrusts it forward, then smiles as he touches the skin

with the drill bit. It easily punctures, sending little splatters of blood onto my floor. He thrusts his arm forward, pushing the drill deep into her skull. As I scream, her eyes roll back and she collapses onto the ground.

In, out.

I'm in my own bed again, but there's a weight on me. I feel the familiar pillows and smell the scents of my house. Everything should be okay, yet nothing feels right. The weight isn't the normal weight of existence; it's warm, but warm to the point where I feel violated and uncomfortable. I'm naked, yet I don't remember taking my clothes off. I push my hands down beneath the covers and feel my hands meet the umbilical cord. I sigh with relief. I open my eyes and see nothing. I am vaguely aware of my location and some moonlight cutting through the window.

"Hello, May," I hear Hammelton say from nowhere. I frantically look around, expecting to find him hiding in a corner. I try to lift my head up to search for him, but it's pinned down by this invisible weight.

"What the fuck?" I shout out. I blink for a second and shake my head, hoping that I'll soon be snatched out of this horrible dream. My racing heart and goosebumps make me feel as though it's all too real.

"Hello, May," he repeats, but his voice is a whisper that is right next to my ear. His breath feels hot and smells of garlic and wine. I open my eyes quickly and can't breathe when I do; I am greeted by his face just inches away from mine. It's covered in shadows and wrinkles, but it's unmistakably him. I'm terrified. He opens his mouth again, letting slobber drip down to touch the areas around my eyes and mouth. He is the weight on top of me. I gag.

"Your delivery was a success. Would you like to meet your child?" he asks, letting his face get filled by that stupid fucking grin. I want to punch him. I try to force my arm up to do so, but his weight is too great.

In, out.

The blanket is suddenly gone. His skin against mine feels rubbery and inhuman, as though I'm touching a tire without any treads. I can't see his hands; it's too dark, but it doesn't feel like he's even holding me down. I feel as though my body is simply too heavy to move.

I feel something alien graze my thigh, as though a finger covered in slime and rubber is trying to caress me.

“GET THE FUCK OFF OF ME!” I try to roar, but my throat is caked in mud. I can’t breathe or speak. I pray to whatever God is out there that he won’t hurt my baby. Mark’s wet appendages massage the lips of my vagina, tickling every nerve. They’re bigger than fingers, but it feels like there’s more than one. I hold back tears, hoping that if I just let it happen, he’ll leave my baby alone. I don’t know where the fuck he came from or who the fuck he is. Where are my parents? I want to scream out for them, but I’m reminded that he can kill the both of us if he wants to. It’s clear he’s in control. I think he knows that.

“Someone’s already wet for me,” he grumbles excitedly. I want to scream and tell him abso-fucking-lutely not. I want to tell him he’s a disgusting, perverted sack of shit that’ll rot in hell while I piss on his grave, but I am reminded once again of the suffocating weight that seems to become even more overpowering as my thoughts grow more and more violent.

I can do nothing but hold back vomit and tears as he enters me and talks down to me, helplessly allowing his appendages to explore my insides. Every movement hurts. I’m gagging and coughing but it doesn’t stop. Mark doesn’t care.

“A little whore like you should be used to this by now,” he says, sending more spit trickling down on my face. It hurts like hell every time he pushes in, to the point where I have to whimper, then I sigh with relief as he removes himself. It feels like my walls are being grabbed with a barbecue fork that’s there to remove all the flesh from inside of me.

In, out.

Pain, relief.

In, out.

Pain, relief.

In, out.

Pain, relief.

In, out.

Pain, relief.

I shake my head violently, hoping that the dream will end, but nothing takes me out. I can’t escape until he’s done using me for... whatever the fuck he wants me for. I’m sticky and disgusting but that

seems to excite him even more. Finally, he gets bored of me, spits a mucus-filled wad onto my forehead, then I feel the weight release me. Suddenly, he's gone. Everything becomes black before I can vomit.

I Will Dash You Upon The Stones.

When I awake from the nightmare, I'm covered in sweat, snot, and drool. My bed feels like it's coated in a variety of fluids. I'm sure my parents will come in at any moment and find me. How will I explain my horrifying condition? I haven't looked at myself in a while, but running a hand across my forehead reveals to me that I'm covered in acne. I smell disgusting and musky; the lack of showering or leaving my bed has taken its toll on me.

I still feel that weight on me, his slimy appendages exploring my body. I can't help but wonder if it's a vision from the past; was that how the egg was created? Is that how I was impregnated? No, it can't be, it doesn't make sense, but then again, what about my current situation makes sense?

I don't even need to look under the covers to see the egg at this point, because it's already begun to make a little dome in between my legs. I have absolutely no clue how I'll hide it if my parents decide to come in any time soon. It's tempting to call Connor right then and there to ask him to pick me up. The distant sunlight reveals to me that it's not far from being night. How long has it been since he left?

Even still, my questions from before remain; had my mother experienced anything like this? Did my dream have any real meaning whatsoever? I don't know how much longer I can just lie in this bed doing nothing. Something has to happen. I can feel my energy going into the toilet, my dreams becoming weirder, and my thoughts more erratic. How long until someone gets hurt? I don't know how much I can take care of my child on my own.

I pull my phone from my pocket, then go to my mom's name. She's not checked up on me in a while. How many days have I been lying here?

"Can you come here? I wanted to talk to you about something," I type. I wipe my face off, shift my legs to hide the tent, and then pull my upper body to cover the wet spot on the bed. I'm extremely nervous, but it's too late to back down. My heart thunders in my chest. In between my legs, I can feel the egg softly vibrate. I can't figure out if I'm excited or terrified to see how big it has gotten. How long until it hatches?

Seconds later, I hear someone quietly walking down the hall. There's a gentle knock on my door.

I tremor in response to the noise, then say softly, "Come in."

"Are you okay, hon?" my mother asks, letting her petite frame come into focus. I'm brought back to my nightmare from last night, the way that Mark came in through the door. I shiver.

"You don't look so good," she replies, coming closer to the bed. I really want to tell her to not get so close, but my energy is already at its maximum expenditure just from speaking to her. I have no idea just how awful I look. She stares at me with concern. I can tell she's contemplating taking me to the hospital. I haven't left my bed in days.

"I have a really random question," I say, "what was it like giving birth?"

My mom looks at me with an expression that seems to fall from concern to hurt. She bites her lip. I'm not sure if I'm supposed to feel relieved that something about the question bothers her.

"Why?" she asks plainly. She's clearly faking a sense of calmness.

"I've just had weird dreams lately and wanted to know. Nothing important," I reply. She sighs a little. I can tell the questions hurt her. I feel a burst of energy that comes with the excitement.

"Honey, I wanted to wait until you were older to tell you. It was very traumatic for me," she says, pausing for a moment. I feel like I'm about to figure everything out. Is it possible that she could have been through the same thing?

"You know that to me and your father, you being born was the biggest blessing we could have asked for. Neither of us had much money and we were both young, but no matter what, we knew we wanted to have you. When I found out I was pregnant, I was the happiest woman in the whole world," she says, letting her smile shine through her mouth. At a time, I found her smile beautiful and contagious, but after my hideous nightmares last night, I only feel reminded of Doctor Mark Hammelton.

Her face falls suddenly.

"It wasn't too long after that that I went to the doctor's and they told me that I would be having twins," she explains. My heart drops in my chest. Over the course of my entire life, I've never imagined having a sibling. Being an only child has just been a fact of my life and I never was able to picture anything else. My entire world

feels even more flipped upside down than it already has been. But on the other hand, I still feel confused. This answers absolutely nothing about my condition, or does it?

“Your brother was... well, he disappeared. They think he didn’t develop fully and he was absorbed,” my mother explains. I can tell she’s on the verge of tears. If I wasn’t so gross and scared of being found out, I’d give her a hug. I’m speechless.

“What do you mean absorbed?”

“He was a vanishing twin. He disappeared. They could only assume he was absorbed by you and me.”

“Did we kill him?” I ask. Does this make me a murderer?

“No, no, sweetie, of course not,” she says, taking my hand in hers.

“There’s nothing anyone could have done. They aren’t even sure why it happened. I went in at 6 weeks, there were two heartbeats, and then the next time I went in, there was only one. I ended up with you and I’m more than happy. It hurt me so bad when it happened, but in a sense, it was a good thing. Your father and I were so broke and neither of us could spend so much time looking after two kids. Your brother wouldn’t have been able to live a happy life like you’ve been able to. It let us give you all the nourishment and attention we could. I would love it if your brother could be here, but it wasn’t meant to be.” I can tell that the answer doesn’t satisfy her, much less me. I wonder if this has anything at all to do with the egg. My head keeps automatically referring to the child as “he.” Perhaps my baby brother is still holding onto me somehow.

“I’m sorry,” is all I can manage to get out.

“It’s okay,” she replies, letting out a deep sigh before continuing, “do you need anything else?”

“No,” I answer. She smiles, leans down, then gives me a kiss on the forehead. I can tell she’s hurting when she talks about it, but there’s little I can do to console her.

“When do you think you’ll be getting up? I’m worried.”

“I’ll be moving tomorrow, I think. I’m just so exhausted,” I reply.

“Do you think we should take you to the doctor?”

“No,” I say plainly.

“Okay, honey. Just text me if you need anything,” she says, standing up and moving to the door.

“Mom,” I mumble out.

“Yes, sweetie?”

“What was his name?”

“Alex.”

After my mom has left the room, my consciousness feels fleeting and uncontrollable. While I never drift completely asleep, I find my head filled with images of Mark.

In, out.

A gentle sweep of the blanket reveals that the egg has turned a reddish-black color, not too different from a swelling boil or pimple. He doesn't have too long until birth, I can tell. I can't maintain this for long. When did Connor say he was going to take me? Tonight? Tomorrow? I pick my phone up absent-mindedly, more conscious than ever of the razor blade hidden in my phone case. My vision is blurred and unfocused. It's hard to concentrate on the screen.

I text Connor, “hey, come tonight. 11. Parents leave the basement door unlocked.” I hear a ding just a second later.

“Kk,” he replies, but I don't have the energy to say anything in response. Everything feels artificial. My stomach has begun to cramp, feeling as though tiny worms are running circles in my ovaries and gnawing on the fleshy bits.

In, out.

Mark's voice drifts in my head. I blink and the world turns black. In the distance, a baby cries, but I'm not sure if it's real or not. I seem to cycle through emotions, going from terrified of my parents barging in my room and ripping the cord from my vagina, to relaxed and calm about the birth of my child, and finally, excited to be in Connor's arms once more. In one of my more panicked spells, I take off my phone case and set it on the floor, grabbing the razor and feeling it in my hands. I clutch the sharp object in my palm, letting it sink into my skin and draw just a little bit of blood.

I feel myself breathe in and breathe out. I suddenly feel relaxed, perhaps even happy. Almost as absent-mindedly as I text Connor, I take my phone again and go to “WIFEY.” It feels only fair for Aubrey to know. I press a button, then the phone starts ringing. I'm not completely sure why I'm trying to call her. Maybe it's pure spite,

maybe I want her to know my child, or maybe I'm just trying to find a way to say goodbye.

A few rings later, the phone vibrates, indicating that she's answered.

"Hello?" I hear Aubrey ask. She's groggy and her voice sounds exhausted. Did she just wake up?

"I'm having a baby!" I practically scream in excitement.

"Uh...," she says with hesitation, "who is this?" I'm bewildered. Does she not have my number saved?

"It's May. I just wanted you to know that--"

"Look, just stop," Aubrey interrupts.

"Why? Don't you want to know more?"

"I don't want to be mean, May, but you're not having a baby. I know you're not."

"I'm pregnant and I just--"

"Stop!" she bellows into the phone, forcing me to move my ear away. Why is she so angry? I feel the tears coming. My heart drops in my chest and begins to ache. I need her to be the mother. I need her to help us both.

"Listen, I had a great time dating you, but this isn't a funny game to play. You need to let go of me. It was a month-long relationship and all that taught me is that you're not stable enough for something serious."

"Aubrey, please. I'm telling the truth, we're having a baby!"

"No, we aren't. You need some serious fucking help," she snaps angrily.

"Please, just listen to me!"

"Goodbye, May. Stop calling me," Aubrey calmly replies, then hangs up the phone. I tremble and my lip chatters. Did our relationship mean nothing to her?

Who is going to help me? I feel like I need her. Connor can't be a father! Sure, he just wants to help me, but he's not cut out to handle me and my child like Aubrey is. Aubrey might as well be the mother! For fuck's sake, she was dating me! I'm sure that if Connor got his way, he'd destroy the egg. It was willed into existence for a reason! A swell of exhaustion hits me, and suddenly, I find myself in the arms of sleep.

I awaken to the feeling of my foot lightly being shaken underneath the covers.

"May," a familiar voice whispers. I can still feel the razor digging into my palm, which has become wet with blood. Before I even open my eyes, I know that Connor is in my room. How long did I sleep for? Why is he here? I think for a moment, then my heart drops when I realize his purpose; to take us to a doctor who will undoubtedly make me give my baby up. I pretend to be asleep, letting him shake my foot. Maybe he'll leave the room and I'll have time to... I don't even know anymore. My brain is scrambled and nothing makes sense. I feel him touch my knees, running his hands over the covers and grazing the egg. I tense up. He better not hurt my baby.

"May!" he whispers, more sharply this time. I can feel his breath on my face; it reeks of Doritos. I clench down harder on the razor, drawing more blood. I bite my lip.

"I know you're awake. We gotta get going. It's late," he says. His face is right next to mine. I don't even know why I texted him. My feelings are so turbulent and free-flowing. I feel pressured, like he wants to make me see a doctor who will hurt either me or the egg. We can't be separated. The razor calls to me. I keep my eyes closed as he pinches my cheeks, shaking them back and forth.

I want him to go away, I need him to go away. I can't stand him being this close to me. He's supposed to care for me, not make me feel like I need to do anything at all. He's forcing me. He's forcing me because he is scared of the egg. He is scared of my baby, my life, my love, and people hurt what they are afraid of. He needs to leave but I can't figure out how to tell him.

"If you don't get up, I'm just going to call 9-1-1. I can tell you're awake," he pouts. *Fuck*. He can't call 9-1-1. Taking me to a family doctor or something like that is bad enough, but 9-1-1? I can't let him. What's stopping his doctor friend from doing the same thing? Pretending I'm asleep isn't going to work, obviously, but I now know I can't go with him. I grip the razor as tightly as I can.

"May, don't make me take it there myself!" He jokes, "wake the fuck up!"

I'm anxious, almost terrified of him. My own instincts don't feel like they're under my control. I feel him press his face against mine and then it becomes too much.

In a swift motion, I unleash my grip on the razor, feeling the blood drip over my fingertips and stain the bed sheets under the covers. I put it in between my thumb and index finger. I open my eyes and stare at Connor. He's leaning over me, his face just inches from mine.

"Thank fuck, I thought you were having a stroke!" He exclaims, and then without any control of myself, I throw the hand that's holding the razor over the covers, and before he can react, I use all of my might to jam the razor into the side of his neck. I dig it into his skin as hard as I can, watching mindlessly as the flesh on the left side of his neck makes way for the razor. There's little resistance in the way of his flesh, and it happens so fast and mindlessly that he doesn't have time to react. I barely have a moment to comprehend what I'm doing. The skin separates cleanly, leaving a trail of blood across his flesh that quickly grows red icicles. It seems to open rapidly and separate after the razor has cut through, sending what feels like a torrent of blood gushing onto the white sheets. It splatters my bed with red.

I drop the razor as quickly as I had brought it up to his throat. He blinks slowly and raises his hand to the tear in his neck, as if he's in disbelief he's just been mutilated. I hear him gag; it's hard for me to believe I cut him that deeply. He lets out a little cough, splattering more blood over his lips and down his chin. He lets out a wordless groan as he presses his hand against the wound. My hands are shaking. I can barely believe it.

"May!" he gasps out in between choked breaths, falling to his knees and putting his hands on the side of my bed. I wonder if he can still smell my disgusting armpits. The blood seems to pour freely from the gaping hole in his neck.

"Mugh, Murgh, plurgh," he chokes out. The blood is everywhere now, pouring down his esophagus and onto the floor beside my bed. Less than ten seconds later, he collapses onto the floor with a massive thud, shutting his eyes one final time.

My hands and sheets are covered in his blood. There's no way I can hide this from my parents. There's a dead body on my floor; I'm a murderer. I killed my best friend and I'm not even sure why. My parents will find him and call the police, then my baby will most certainly be stolen from me.

I pull the covers back up and look at the egg. It's still pulsating, only it's now tripled in size, practically forcing my legs apart. The outer layer is still mostly translucent, but the inside has turned red with little specks of black veins. How long does it have until it hatches? I can't carry this thing if I end up in prison. The baby will undoubtedly be taken from me and experimented on. If it's a human, I need to give it mercy. The egg can clearly control my instincts and hear my thoughts.

I gaze at Connor's body, which has crumpled up on the floor near the razor. I pull myself over and lean down, grabbing the razor again in my uninjured hand. I take a deep breath, my every individual cell screaming at me to stop but I'm too far gone. My life has taken a turn and it's all because of the damn egg. I can't protect it forever.

The razor seems to move on its own, only with a delicacy that I hadn't felt with Connor. I push it across the surface of the egg. Like my own flesh or Connor's neck, it cuts with ease. I make an incision that runs over the top of the sphere, one that oozes out even more blood than Connor's neck. It's too late to go back by the time I'm done.

I don't feel any pain from cutting into it, only a weird sense of emptiness. It's time, perhaps even merciful, for me to give up. The squishy outer layer seems to flip open and release, sending a lake of blood onto my bed and the floor and creating a huge puddle across my room. The slit opens wider, allowing me a look at whatever lies inside.

When I peer into the newly opened slit, I distantly hear the cry of a baby, just like in my dreams. At first, I'm horrified by what's inside, but then, my horror turns into laughter, which then turns into tears of happiness. Soaked in a puddle of a mixture of blood, I stare into the egg, crying and laughing like a maniac. The egg is the ugliest thing I've ever seen, but the most beautiful at the same time. The cries continue in the night, mixing with my own and drowning out all other sounds. The razor meets the skin on my wrists, and then I begin to make new eyeholes for the demon inside of me. The red LED lights are off now, but the red tint to the room feels permanent now.

The End

A Call To Arms.

As I mentioned at the beginning of this, I would greatly appreciate anyone who enjoyed leaving me a [review on Goodreads](#). Even if you think you don't have much to say, anything at all helps. Making an account is simple, easy, and lets me know if I'm doing things right.

Thank you for reading,

William