

The Hunt

He decided that he was too old to sulk, so Paul leaned on the sofa arm and jiggled his loafer to the music. The beat was a strolling sort of snobby jazz that hummed, “You wouldn’t understand.” And, well, it was right.

But Janice was one of his oldest friends, from back when they were college kids renting one house and splitting it among an illegal amount of humans and canines. So when she had invited him to her housewarming party, he had to say, “Hell, ya.” And as a real friend, he had not toted in a bottle of wine, but gifted her a retro shirt that said, “Hazy Shade of Winter.”

He was then suddenly stabbed in the leg and decided it was time to leave.

“Oh no! I am so so sorry!” gushed over him in an airy swell of tequila and stupidity. The girl who had just kicked him, hard, with her high heel was shaking her hands at the wrists and saying anxiously, “Ooo, ooo, ooo.” She was staring at his thigh which was the scene of the crime. She had been trying to Superman-horizontal-leap onto her two girlfriends sitting on the sofa. She actually did quite well except for Paul being in the way.

“No, it’s fine. I think you need this more than I do,” he said, gesturing to his seat as he stood. Where was Janice so he could say goodbye and leave?

He twisted his head into the next room and saw a bunch of backs and butts around the kitchen table. The gathering was dense and they were all leaning in. The one man sitting up was Harris, from Janice’s office, and he was wearing a cowboy hat. Paul could only hear the tone, not words, but it was obvious that Harris was a storyteller. His hands swirled to the plot. His voice morphed from narrator to caricature dialogues and back again. And when he gave his final pause, everyone seemed to lean in more, as if the world had tilted. In that choreographed silent breath, his wife gave the supporting line, leaving him to close with the punch. Like a snapped rubber band, the cluster flew backwards, laughing and rolling their heads.

His wife put her hands out towards the audience as if they were a camp fire. She tossed her dark hair backwards and laughed, later than the others. The warmth was fading quickly as conversations of ones and twos began to splinter off. She coughed. She drank from her martini glass. But through her thick lashes, he could see that her dusk-green gaze was skipping across the faces.

Paul did not want to save her.

He wanted to devour her.

She was malleable in her thirst. He could see it all now. He would begin slowly, with a friendship of niceties. She would rush to trust him, and he would let her. Then one day, she would shakingly show him her photography. Black and white

photos of flowers, words written in the surf, children on swings. All terrible and stale. Even her husband had the balls to tell her that.

Not Paul. Calling in a favor at the town newspaper, he would get one of her silly shots published. When she saw it, she would cry openly, numb spilling out as hope. At this moment, he would look at her, in a way that she had longed to see herself. And the hunt would be over. Now his prey would walk into his own mouth, leaving one last act. Consume.

How she would tighten her thighs around him and scream out his name. Claw his back. Kneel before him. Through the weeks, she would please him, needing more of him to stay warm. And when he had his fill, he would leave. For a carnivore takes the flesh and cares nothing for the bones.

Paul licked his lips and walked into the kitchen.