

ONE



NOW

I absentmindedly stab the absolute shit out of my egg yolk, rupturing the membrane. I watch as the golden nectar spills out all over my plate of toast and sausage. I wish so badly that I could somehow wind up in that innocent eggs position. My blood, my anger, released upon the touch of a loving hand.

One like my husband's. I'm sure he'd like that as well.

"I hate that sound," I hiss at Michael, my husband, from across the kitchen table. With each scoop of his scrambled eggs, he scrapes his fork against our delicate porcelain plates. The sound is an embodiment of the callings from Hell, a place Michael will be more than welcome in.

"Worry about your own plate. You got egg spilling on the table!" Michael retorts in his hideous southern drawl that has only worsened since our move to Illinois. I glance down inconspicuously at my plate, and, sure enough, yolk has begun dripping off and right onto my placemat.

Perhaps it sensed the tension in this room and took its chance to escape. Unfortunately for the yolk, within the next few moments, I will scrub clean the evidence of a breakfast ever taking place. Its desperate escape will have been for nothing.

"Your work pants are in the dryer," I break the silence between me and Michael for the final time.

"I figured. Get this cleaned up." Michael stands from his chair and stomps away toward the laundry room. Luckily for me, this is an indicator that he won't try to kiss me goodbye before work. I have pissed him off just enough to prevent a disgusting peck on the lips, but not quite enough for him to justify hurting me. I would like to live right here, in this in-between.

The door slams with an exciting echoing rattle, and Michael's truck starts up in a roar. I take a small peek out the blinds to ensure he is fully gone before I make my next move. When the smoke from his exhaust dissipates at the end of the road, I head back into the kitchen and grab a wad of paper towels, covering them in Palmolive dish soap; lemon-lime scented, Michael's favorite. I take the towels between my jittery fingers and lay them flat against the table. With every stroke against the smooth finished wood, my stress wanes. *Back and forth, back and forth, back and forth.*

As I finish up, I hear the phone ring from my office. Or as Michael calls it, the craft room. I wipe my hands against my jeans, back and forth until no remnants of soap remains. I glide across the kitchen floor and down the dimly lit hallway, hesitating only slightly before crossing the threshold between the hardwood floor and the avocado green carpet in my office. I

hate the color. Our home hasn't been renovated since it was put up in the late 60s, and unfortunately for me, it has remained in perfect condition for the past twenty-seven years. Michael says we have no reason to renovate and we aren't spending our hard earned money on a new carpet we don't need. I disagree entirely. I mean, we have green carpet, for christ's sakes!

I grab the phone and put it to my ear, wedging it swiftly with my elbow. I intentionally free my hands to begin preparing my work for the day.

"Heather! How are you?" The cheery and slightly obnoxious voice on the other end belongs to my sister, Amy. It is not often that she calls, but when she does, it literally does not end.

"I'm doing well. How is your life?" I ask in response, although I don't necessarily care. As she responds, I reach into the cupboard above my desk and pull out a pile of soft black faux fur as well as a pattern I haven't yet used; a crow.

My sister tells me about her crazy day at work yesterday while I stitch and stuff my crow, who I have named Charlie. The house we grew up in was right in the heart of Kentucky, and crows were frequent visitors at my mother's bird feeder. I once captured one when I was around seven or eight years old, and I named it Charlie after my childhood hero Charlie Chaplin, in remembrance of him following his passing. I was a strange child.

I glue small black beads to Charlie's face, allocating him the privilege of vision. I place him on the top shelf of my cabinet labeled *Birds*. As I sweep the leftover thread from my desk, my sister goes silent.

"Amy? Are you still there?" I prompt her to continue her blabbering, which is admittedly some of my favorite background noise.

"Yeah, yeah. Sorry. I have to go, though, I think my boyfriend just pulled in," Amy responds, which was more than expected. She invites her new boyfriend, Rob, over every day of the week. I don't know why he doesn't just move in already.

Rob is sweet. He makes Michael seem like the devil reincarnate. He treats Amy well, taking her out every weekend and spending all of his Wal-mart money on her. Amy still lives with my parents in Kentucky, which I suppose is reasonable for her age. At twenty-two, I never dreamed of being married and living six hours away from my entire family. But here we are only three short years later. Lucky me.

"Call me back when he leaves," I tell Amy.

"You know I will. Love you," Amy says faster than an auctioneer.

"Love you too, Ames." I place the phone back on the switchhook and finish tidying my office.

I began working from home just before Michael and I moved up north. I was never very interested in art when I was younger. It was the summer before our move that I had sat down with Michael's mother, Carol, and learned about at-home toymaking.

"These are patterns," Carol said to me, "you use them to cut your fabric right. Size and shape, that stuff."

"What patterns do you have?" I inquired.

“Different animals. Hundreds. I get them for Christmas every year because it’s the only thing my girlfriends know about me, how about that?” Carol said, followed by a laugh that can only be described as sweet and rich.

I made a craft room out of an extra bedroom in the new house, and in the first few months of making and selling off the animals, I brought in a decent amount of money. More than Michael, but he doesn’t need to know that.

He doesn’t need to know I have my own bank account at all. I won’t need it for long.

I gather all the trash bags in the house and tie them off, leaving them by the back door. Trash day is tomorrow. I usually try to get all of it out the evening before just in case I fall asleep early, which only seems to happen when Michael comes home drunk.

Before I set the bags outside, I grab an extra and shove all the trash from Charlie’s creation inside. I take a small walk around the house grabbing anything that looks out of place. I have never been a sentimental person. If I don’t use something, don’t like something, the like, it finds itself directly in the trash.

I throw in an almost empty tissue box from the bathroom, and then stop in the master bedroom for whatever garbage is in Michael’s nightstand. I grab the cold metal handle of the drawer and pull it open, and the smell of sugar fills the room. *Oh, Michael. Butterfingers in bed?*

I toss his candy in the bag. I scan the room for anything else that needs to go, when I notice the closet door is ajar. Before I can stop myself, I walk towards it and open it the rest of the way. The light is off, so I pull the chain letting light engulf the small space. It smells like old person in here.

Curiously, I flick through the clothes hanging on Michael’s side. He has a pretty standard wardrobe. He has his work T shirts, which are dark green with the *Samson’s Body Shop* logo on the front pocket, a bigger graphic on the back. He has four in total, some more stained by oil and brake dust than others. He also has a collection of nicer clothes. A few polos for when he goes out with his friends, a couple sweaters for the winter. At the end of the rack hangs his favorite sweater; maroon and striped. He bought it before our first date after I told him maroon was my favorite color. He has worn it for every single date since, so about five times. I can’t stand the sight of it.

I turn the light back off and walk out to the bedroom, and tie off the bag left by the bed. I walk it out to the backdoor and slide on my slippers. I unlock and shove open the door that sticks more than any other door I’ve ever seen. I gather the garbage and walk it out to the curb. I take one last glance at it over my shoulder, and notice something I hadn’t before.

A small red sliver of color peeking out the top of one of the bags.

I walk over and hastily shove the fabric deep into the bag, ensuring it won’t be seen by anyone but me.

Especially Michael. I don’t know what he would do if he knew I tossed his favorite sweater.