

Our Mother (4-7)

There was a low hum in the house as our mother descended the stairs. The hum harmonized with our favorite lullaby, drowning out any noise. She knew these lullabies, as any mother would, but our mother's love was suffocating, so she memorized the ones we treasured. We watched as she stooped to turn on the radio, turning it to a staticky children's station. It was just us and our mother, making what we listened to easy. There were three of us, all boys, and after we came into this bright, loud world her favorite color was blue in an effort to showcase her love. Our house was quiet because we were kept quiet. The only noise in our house was the radio, the constant low hum, and our mothers high-pitched singing. Our days were like any other child's, filled with playing outside, playing inside, being read bedtime stories, and being choked by our mother's love. The only difference was we were hushed compared to the other children. Our attention turned back to our mother who had put on a baby blue apron. She was making our favorite meal, chicken pot pie. We watched as water was poured into the soupy contents. She looked so pleased with herself while she cooked. She would cook for us until she perished. We hoped she would perish.

She approached me with a glistening smile, baring her teeth. She took me in her scratchy arms and ascended the stairs. I was first since I was the oldest. She undressed me from my 5-year-old overalls, which hadn't been washed in many lifetimes. They were starting to fray and become very itchy, but it wasn't like I could complain even though I wanted to rip them to shreds. She laid me ever so gently in the bath and began pouring the water over my head. It ran in my eyes, in my mouth, and into my ears, but I couldn't scream at her to stop. Next was the soap. She hummed to herself as she massaged it into my thinning, colorless hair. Soon I was dry, sitting in the corner of the bathroom like a rag doll watching mother wash the twins in the same exact steps like a well-oiled machine. When she had finally finished, she cradled my frail body against her chest and carried me to our shared room. I watched as she picked out our forever pajamas, mine a muted orange, and the twins a subtle green.

She left us to talk, which we never did, as she went and finished up dinner. We soon found ourselves sitting at the table, staring helplessly into each other's empty

eyes. She placed the smaller pot pies in front of us. A new sound joined the chorus, a singular clink of her fork hitting the plate on the bottom. This was the part of the day we despised because bedtime was next, and like most children, we hated bedtime. Our mother purred yet another lullaby as she pulled her hair back and began washing the dishes. We sat there silently screaming, waiting for her to finish. She discarded her apron and flashed us a loving smile. As much as we loved that smile, we dreaded what was next. We knew we brought her joy, but it was getting harder with each passing day. She brought us back into our room whispering phrases of love in our ears. Once we were all sitting in a circle facing our mother, she began reciting a bedtime story. We didn't squirm, ask questions, or whine for a different book even as we wished for it to catch on fire only to end this pain. She read as if we could understand her, full of enthusiasm. Our souls dreaded what was coming next. She carefully tiptoed down the stairs that led to the basement. Down here the low hum was a deafening roar. We would have covered our ears if we could. She opened the door of our nightmares, and a rush of freezing cold air assaulted our frail and decaying bodies. She lined us up in order of youngest to oldest. We pleaded her from high above to let us go and move on to end our pain, but our bodies stayed because she willed us so. "Sleep well my loves." Our mother said this as the freezer door slowly closed. That was our mother, our mother who loved us too fiercely to let us go. The three of us stayed in that freezer, dead, waiting for the same routine to start again.