



*From the Desk of*

MISS GEORGIA LEE HUSSEY

## “Eviction”

As I pour my coffee, I catch a whiff of being very young. It's a dewy, sun-dappled scent. Wholly familiar. I lean out the window, sniffing in each direction. Below, a neighbor lifts a giant bag. Dark soil runs along the ground as she swings it, burying her garden plot and her red sandals. Sparkling water streams from a snaking-green hose.

The scent condenses. It is bright green leaves heavy with morning summer rain. I remember sliding down steep red soil wet with drizzle. I smile suddenly knowing the scent as summer camp. I hum a few bars of a camp song then wave to the gardening neighbor when she sees me leaning from my window, smiling dumbly. When I was ten I wore white t-shirts and shorts on Sundays. I ran down muddy trails cut into the mountain's low-hanging trees to the chapel beside the lake. The lake came alive when the rain came on.

My neighbor hikes up her shorts and I look away to the bright blue surprise of this morning sky. My only One Night Stand materializes on the windowsill, a dust mote whirling listlessly round a lidless mason jar. I backhand the jar out the window. It shatters against the fire escape. But the dust mote floats up on a sudden breeze, skimming in the window above my head. I try to track it but lose it in the dust along the ceiling. Who knows what else is hiding up there, best not to disturb it today.

Are those two sparrows flying together along my neighbor's roof? They're headed right for me. No. They aren't birds. I know those sad brown eyes, those sparse eyebrows. My father's eyes narrowly dodge a telephone wire. I slam the window before he can get in. His eyes skim along the branch of a cherry tree. I yank the curtain closed on their imploring sadness.

I blink blankly at the curtain then realize it's going to be a rich day for ghosts. There's no avoiding them after a night of quick drinks, sudden sleep, then even more sudden waking. I wanted to pamper myself today, now I'm trapped in my apartment dodging another haunting.

No. It's Sunday morning; I want eggs and coffee, the paper and MyRadio. I lock every door and window and pull all the curtains. No. They'll just have to come back another day. I will sit down to my coffee and read the paper. Both feet on the floor, fingers gripping the edge of the paper, I bend my head with great intention towards my allotted newsprint. I'm half-drawn into another politician's missteps when I sense her profile in my periphery. I refuse to look at her so I implore the newsprint in front of me. Please go away. I'd rather have the others. Not you. Please send the others back.

Her disembodied head lingers above the stove. I don't want to see her slow smile, the one that precedes any declaration that I'm bright or pretty or that she's missed me, every time like she's just realized it. I ignore her but by the bottom of the international news her face has drifted into my lap. She cuddles into my curving arm, her mouth too close to my nipple. She laughs at one of my old sarcasms. I smile too.

When the tears start she floats out of the kitchen. Elbows on the kitchen table, head in my hands, I cuss, wiping my tears. I haven't leaned back in her arms, laughing, for years. Still, every time we meet for a drink I lean in to catch her cologne of sweat, shampoo, and cigarettes. I want to keep her smell with me, so I siphon it into bottles I hide under the bar. Today her bottles are uncorked.

My fist slams into the table. This is ridiculous! She's possessed me too long! If I can't get rid of the others, she at least has to go. It's time for an eviction. My chair rumbles against the yellowing linoleum when I sprint from the kitchen to my bedroom; she's there already, cuddling against my English/Italian Dictionary.

Threads of her scent sneak towards me. I follow the densest to my bureau.





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My underwear drawer clatters to the floor; stockings scatter, garters fly. A bundle of her curling black hair, tied with a pale blue ribbon, lands beneath the window. I grab, stroke, then inhale; it tickles my nose. I pull open my window despite today's hauntings, untie the ribbon and toss. Her hair scatters and tangles on the streetlight and the garbage can and the weeds in the yard next to mine. She doesn't react, just sighs and snuggles into a stack of Spanish novels.

From my jewelry box, beside my grandmother's engagement ring, I snatch her most precious features. Her chocolate eyes bounce along the sidewalk. Her nipples sail out then roll into the gutter.

MyRadio's glowing face suddenly broadcasts this country song's sad warble *Together again/My tears have stopped falling/The long lonely nights/Are now at an end.* I glare; MyRadio has a strong sense of self-preservation; the music stops.

Her head appears on my bed, leaning into an open book left there. Like the magician's trick, I pull off my silk comforter. Her head levitates then disappears. I throw each pillow over my shoulder. There, cast in gold are each of our conversations, studded with her glittering verbal ticks. I've cuddled them under my pillow for too long. They are out of date anyway, corroded and dusty. I know she speaks differently now and to another. I reach back like a discus thrower to skim her words through the window. I aim for the roof opposite, two fly over and are lost to the hot tar, the rest explode in a shimmer against the old red brick. Her words can still make me laugh.

I breathe deep, sniffing her out. My bookshelves are redolent with her aroma. Tucked into the spines of century old Russian authors I find every image of her standing in a crowded room, drink in hand, tough as a 1940s boxer but with a ballerina's grace. I have to bend first with my knees to pick them up.

When I open the refrigerator Granddaddy's voice sings *I'll Be Home for Christmas* the one holiday I wasn't. His voice can stay but from the vegetable crisper I hoist her smile first thing in the morning. Underneath some rotten carrots I find the half-frozen weight of her falling asleep on my shoulder when I read aloud to her each night.

I'm sweating now, but they all go in the thick bags meant for fallen leaves. I can't lift their combined weight, so I open my front door, run down the stairs, and open the building door. Up the stairs again and I roll the awkward bags onto the landing. Grunting, I push then kick them down. They thud out the door onto the street. I hear a car skid then a child yell.

I don't think I can drag her lock-kneed walk to the door so I just crouch beneath it and heave it out the window. It shatters on the steps below.

Now for her three words I've kept tucked behind my left molar, same place Granddaddy keeps his gold tooth. I don't want them loose on the street so I'll just spit them in the toilet. They clink against the porcelain; the loud swirling water satisfies.

Her scent is clearing. A quick sweep and I'll lock her out for good. Catching my breath, the smell in my apartment changes suddenly to the dusty cab of his pickup truck. From under the bed comes a sound like a kitten skittering with some small object. I haven't a cat. I've seen the horror movies; I know that vicious fears loom under beds. With one hand I squeeze my other hand's two fingers pretending I have a hand to hold. As I crouch his thick fingers slide along the floor. His sausagelike index finger taps then motions to me. I leap away to grab the broom from the kitchen, slamming the wooden handle against the floor as I run. His finger dares to beckon even as I beat at his hand with my broom. His hand evades the broom by disappearing.





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New rustlings begin.

My stepfather's muffled footsteps shuffle in the bathtub.

In the utensil drawer Nana hums while she makes lunch.

On the mantel, my mother's half-paralyzed hand (a stunning sculptural feat) stretches its shortened tendons.

I'm a mess of twitching nerves. I yell at them to please leave me alone.

From the hall I feel a sudden heat, the closet door glows red like a wild fire's behind it. I hesitate with my hand on the knob, studying the flaking paint along the wood grain. Her cologne is strong again; the closet door is suffused with it. When I pull the door open, I am stunned by the same sunlight across a field of high grass the morning after I gave my virginity to an entirely different woman. I kneel and then sit, resigned to bask in its glow.

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