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Category: Short Story

Excerpt of Let Them See What They've Done

My life of secrecy began with a pie.

It lay toppled over on my kitchen floor, canals of raspberry jelly smeared in between the filthy grout lines which crisscrossed under my feet like tiny highways. I lowered myself to the ground and pushed the stray curls out of my face. With shaking hands, I collected the crumbles of dough and watched them shift under the diamonds of tears that gathered in the balcony of my eyelids. *Stupid stupid stupid.*

The clumps of red and pink against the stark white reminded me of a lesson I heard at school once. 100 years ago, a President drove through the streets of America in a green convertible.

"The cars didn't drive themselves?" someone murmured from behind a fluttering screen at his desk. Next to him, a student flicked two fingers at the side of his head to scroll through the article projecting from the corner of his glasses.

"Why is she dressed like that?" was my interjection. I squinted at the photo of Jackie Kennedy waving next to her husband, both of them glistening under the Texas sunshine. The First Lady's tilted felt hat, delicate gloves, and fabric buttons intrigued me the most. Immersed in a sea of gray linen uniforms, I longed for a world where clothing abounded in different colors and patterns and fabrics, where girls could choose their outfits for themselves, style their own hair, and paint their faces however they wanted. *How pretty I would be if I could dress myself...*

"Mrs. Kennedy loved fashion," the teacher spoke into the microphone. From the shoulders up, her image filled the board at the head of the room, and we faced her in neatly arranged rows. "In fact," the teacher continued, "She kept her suit on even after the incident. Does anyone know why? To do *what*?" A long silence permeated the room.

"*Let them see what they've done*," I quoted.

Now I flicked the globs of pie into my palms and pretended they were pieces of my assassinated husband's head. I imagined my clothes were blood-stained pink Chanel instead of jelly-stained gray linen. This made me feel better about crying on the kitchen floor by myself.

I washed my hands at the sink and observed the ribbons of red swirl around the drain, *down...down... down... gone*. I wanted to shrink down to one inch tall and sail on a crumb of pie crust down the sink. The thought of embarking on an adventure invisible to everyone else enticed me.

I rummaged through the silverware drawer, removed a fork, and slid back down to the ground. I prodded and poked at the pie before raising a forkful to my chapped lips. A faint tingling sensation spread across the rolling valley of my tongue and traveled to my stomach like a tiny match tumbling down the chasm of a canyon.

I was too hungry and desperate to question the source of the pie. All I knew was that it sat at my doorstep when I returned home from work with the words "*Real gold is not afraid of the melting pot*" scribbled on the box. Then it was on my kitchen table, then on my hip bone as I bumped into it, then down my shirt as I tried to save it, then all over the tile floor, dead.

I tried to convince myself that no one in this whole city was creative enough anymore to poison me with a pie. Then I tried not to think about the fact that I was 21-years old, and my first kiss would be with Death.

My fork *clinked* against a clear cylinder in the mash of pie. I balanced the fork in between my teeth and dug out the tube like a doctor removing a bullet from soft flesh. Someone rolled up a tiny piece of paper inside the glass. With sticky fingertips, I popped off the cork top and removed the message:

Judy,

I am not far away, my angel. Please know how much I love you. Remember that crying does not make you weak. It clears your eyes so you can see better.

Yours,

Mom

The fork slid between the grip of my teeth and clattered to the pie mush. I read the message five times, questioning

my eyesight more and more each time. *This is not reality, Judy. You are dreaming. She is gone. You are hallucinating. This is a joke. Someone at work did this. A cruel joke.*

I folded the paper into four squares, shuffled over to the window, and sat down on my armchair. Glitching over my window, a sign reading “*Akio’s Luxury Eatery*” spilled its neon light onto my wood floors and warmed my cheekbone. A league of flies darted into the sign like firecrackers hitting the bottom of a cement stairwell. Then they turned their beady faces and zipped away, ducking under the telephone wires suspended between buildings. A woman leaned out of her balcony, pried a clinging infant off her hip, and hung pieces of laundry over the lines. The clothing fluttered against the northwest winds and added a faint percussion to the ballad of city sounds.

A hum traveled from the streets below, and with it, the soft *pfitt... pfitt... pfitt...* of someone sweeping a sidewalk, the distant *purr* of a motorcycle weaving through the towering buildings, the whine of a door heaving shut in a dim alleyway, the thump of a garbage bag breaking its ribs atop a dumpster filled with its peers, a woman’s voice fizzing in the still darkness like the abrupt opening of a soda can in a movie theater: “*Anata no sei desho!*” *This is all your fault.*

I wondered if somewhere, out in that sad, glowing expanse of electricity, my mother was waiting for me, alive. I wondered if she was dancing in a kitchen with her head on someone’s chest, or if she was all alone like me. I wondered if there existed someone other than my armchair who wanted to hold me close.

My neck suddenly ached under the weight of all these curiosities frothing in my mind, and I nodded, nodded, nodded, before slumping further into the inanimate arms of my lover under the obscure haze of city moonlight...

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“Judy?” Raymond spoke, his voice like marbles dropping onto hardwood floors. “Did you hear me? I said we’re going through with the memorial service.”

Through puffy iguana eyelids, I watched myself get dressed in the mirror and recalled the conversation with Raymond from two weeks ago. Behind me, fat raindrops pelted my windows and slanted against the skyline.

“She’s not dead, Raymond,” I whispered. I remembered cupping the phone close to my mouth in the kitchen, even though no one was there to hear me. “I don’t know where she is, but I know she’s alive—.”

“Judy,” he interrupted. “I need you to listen to me, okay? Just listen to me,” he inhaled slowly. “You need to be prepared for the possibility that she’s not here anymore.”

I remembered leaning my forehead against the pole in the kitchen, letting boiling tears spill down my face. “And it’s a strong possibility, Judy. A very strong possibility.”

“You’re wrong,” I formed with my lips, but no sound came out.

“I just want you to know,” he continued, “many people who will be at this memorial service have already accepted that as truth. Many people.” My whole face contorted and ached.

“When a person goes missing for months, Judy...” his voice seemed to shrug and trail off, returning softer. “We just want to honor her. We’ve never had a chemist like her at the lab. *Truly.*”

I let Raymond’s voice be a soundtrack to my eyes as they wandered over the photos affixed to my fridge. One of mom and me smiling in front of a large foam volcano wearing safety goggles. One of me collecting water in test tubes under a bridge. Another of mom receiving a medal from the President of Japan. One with curled and yellowed edges depicting us building a snowman under the West Virginian skies, back when the home was a farmhouse... when I only spoke English... when I wasn’t the only redhead in my school... when I could wear long dresses and sit at the tops of green hills and count the cows. Four months later, mom would get a job 6,694 miles away and I would pack my entire life in a suitcase and unravel it in the bustling kaleidoscope of Tokyo.

“Judy?”

I cleared my throat to make my response audible. “*Yes?*”

“Make an appearance for us. Can you promise me that?”

“All right.”

“Good,” Raymond sighed. “Hang in there, kid. Who knows. Maybe she discovered a new element and made herself invisible or something. The woman was a genius.”

I ended the memory of that conversation as mom’s note floated to the surface of my mind. Her letter only complicated everything because it created another possibility. For months, I wrestled with the fact that she was dead and gone. But now I considered that she might be alive and gone. I couldn’t decide which prospect was worse.

I halted in my tracks on the way out of the apartment, realizing:

Mom’s life of secrecy began with a lab coat.

It still hung in the entranceway like a retired ghost, clocking out for lunch. I shrugged into it and closed the apartment door, investigating the pockets’ contents. I grinned down at an unopened packet of ammonia-smelling salts. After mom fainted three times in the lab and insisted that she was never assigned to animal dissections again, Raymond gifted her with ammonia pills during our New Year’s Eve dinner party; “*You have the stomach of an infant, Marilyn.*”

Little bulbs of memories illuminated in my mind like the holiday lights that dangled over our dining room table that night. Green: the wool sweater mom wore every New Year's Eve. Blue: the box Raymond handed to her when he walked through the front door. Orange: the late Mochi, the tabby cat, leaping onto my lap. Brown: the chopsticks we pinched rolls of sushi with. Red: mom's homemade cherry pie oozing on our plates; *your favorite, Judy*. Red: the phone in the kitchen that mom whispered into. Red: the lump of pie I fed Mochi under the table. Red: Mochi's tongue hanging out of his mouth. Gold: the shiny liquid discharging from his eyes. Blue: the blanket we swaddled his motionless body in. Purple: the dripping fireworks that declared his death across the skyline.

The memories in the parallel circuit flickered to the day after. White: the lab coat mom inexplicably left behind. Green: the grass I upturned to bury Mochi. Red: the recording light blinking from my friend's phone during my tribute; *In case you want to remember this day, Judy*. Purple: my friend's heart beating through her hug *Don't cry, Judy*. Gold: the tears that dripped from my eyes and illuminated my shirt. Brown: my friend's furrowed eyebrows: *What's happening to your eyes, Judy?* White: the tissue she wiped my face with. Brown: the coat pocket she placed the tissue in. Yellow: the fingernails of the pawn dealer: *Yes, ladies. This is real gold.*

The weeks after blinked in only blue light bulbs. Blue: my friend's video projected onto billboards and skyscrapers. Blue: notices piled at my front door from news stations wanting to interview me. Blue: binoculars peeping into my window. Blue: telephone eyes following me onto the subway. Blue: notes from my coworkers taped to my cubicle; *is it true, Judy?* Blue: children on bicycles waiting outside my apartment with test tubes in their hands *that's the girl from the news.*

Now I unplugged these memories and all the lights flickered off as I left the apartment. I clicked the front door shut and sighed. For the past three months, an "Out of Order" sign hung limply over the elevator doors. Remembering this, I traveled to the end of the hall, where someone built a decoy washing machine under a tiny window. I squatted down, opened the circular door, and buried my knees to my chest once inside, shutting the door behind me. Then I scooted through the tunnel until the breeze tossed a curl across my eyelashes and I inhaled the gust of city air: cigarette butts, urine, gasoline, vomit, rain. My eyes burned against the elements, and I attributed their sensitivity to last night's meltdown. The influence of the pie never crossed my mind.

I scooted out of the opening and hopped onto the grated platform attached to the side of the building. As I descended the fire escapes, I ducked under pieces of laundry overhead and avoided eye contact with people looking out through their windows. *Why is everyone in the entire world always looking at me?*

The subway silently whirred through the city and drunks, lovers, and businessmen piled inside. Standing in the middle of them all, I saw mom's face everywhere. She was the model brandishing lipgloss on the skyscrapers. She was the actress whose movie trailer ceaselessly flickered on the transparent sidewalks underneath the footsteps of indifferent civilians. She was the lawyer raising an eyebrow from the hovering blimps, promising to get you thousands in Cryptocurrency; *"Drone accident?"* She was the one red umbrella that bobbed in a sea of gray crammed onto an inclined moving walkway. She was the homeless figure swaddled in long garbs with a white snake draped across his shoulders.

As we moved North, she became the waterfall spilling over the tunnel's entrance. Her arms—the tree branches neatly canopied over the gravel parks. Her hair—the swarm of birds floating off the ground and ascending into the smog. Her eyes—the—

"What's happening to her eyes?" a distant voice mumbled.

"Is she breathing?" another ebbed.

"I think so. Her face is *glowing*, Raymond."

"Get the kid some water."

I opened my eyes to a circle of faces looking down at me. I caught glimpses of black shoes, black purses, black sleeves, black hats. In a blur to my left, a long table expanded under a string of ornate garlands with a framed photograph of someone placed on top. Hundreds of roses and candles seemed to suspend the table off the ground in sparkling flares.

I propped myself on my elbows just as someone raised a glass of water to my lips. The whole world spun as if I were riding a tilted carousel.

My shirt clung to my armpits. The *Women In Stem!* pin on my collar reflected the candlelight and made me look down at my chest. Sparkling drops glittered down mom's lab coat.

My eyes stung as I wiped away the cords of tears from my face. When I looked down, my fingers gleamed with a sparkling gold residue.

"You've got your mother's genes, Judy," Raymond whispered. "Fainting all over the place." Behind Raymond, a cluster of people covered their mouths and peeked wide-eyed behind handkerchiefs. Some pointed to my clothes. Others raised their phones and recorded me lying on the ground. A camera crew emerged from the back doors of the room, a woman ushering them inside. I caught streams of conversation: *Is it gold?... I don't know... Maybe a reaction to something?... Zoom in a little... Are we LIVE?... Just started pouring out of her eyes... Never seen*

anything like that before... Out cold in three seconds... Maybe adjust the lighting?

“Who are all these people, Raymond?” I mumbled. “What’s going on?”

“Don’t worry about it, Judy. Just people wanting to pay respects,” he assured. His eyes flicked from my face to my shirt to my face again. “Did you want to continue,” he encouraged, “with your eulogy?” He picked up the microphone near my foot and outstretched it towards me. I couldn’t escape this nagging feeling that Raymond was ignoring me on purpose.

“No,” I whispered, rising to my feet, “I want to *leave*.” Faint jigsaw pieces of recollection snapped together in my memory: leaving the train, walking through the doors, shaking hands with strangers, ascending the steps, mouthing a few words, and then a burning, tingling *pang* igniting behind my eyelids and detonating in my temples.

“I’ll walk you out,” Raymond affirmed. He wrapped his arm around my shoulders, shielding me from the crowd slowly piling into the service venue. We ducked under two bright flashes exploding from a Drone camera. The murmuring of news anchors buzzed in my eardrums: “...*here at the memorial of renowned Chemist Marilyn Wine...daughter fainted a few moments ago...concerning a mysterious gold substance...*”

Once we made it outside and plopped down on a secluded bus bench, I recounted the story of the pie to Raymond. He immediately stood up and interlocked his hands behind his head.

“What the hell, Judy! Why didn’t you tell me this sooner?”

“It just happened last night, Raymond,” I shrugged. I removed the folded note from my sock and handed it to him. His eyes zigzag-ed across the paper and floated back to meet mine. He remained silent for a few seconds before adding,

“Anyone could’ve written this, kid. You know that, don’t you?” I nodded and closed my eyes.

“I just can’t believe you actually *ate* it,” Raymond scoffed.

“I didn’t think anything of it,” I responded.

“Well it was spiked or something,” he continued. He gestured to my face and lab coat, where gold residue still glinted. “You’re clearly having some kind of reaction here, Judy—”

“I *know* that now,” I snapped. I turned my face away so that he wouldn’t see my bottom lip quiver. I sniffled and blinked hard to swallow every emotion that burned up my throat, but my chin trembled like a tectonic plate and everything spilled from my eyes all at once. These days, being a silent crier didn’t seem to make up for the fact that I was a ceaseless one.