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Wedding Night

North Carolina wooden shack — weathered and unpainted, hidden off the side of a newly paved country road. North Carolina wooden shack, her family's traditional honeymoon shack, nestled within trees, street light gaping full pale light on our wedding bed.

Hot summer North Carolina night, nearing the full moon. Window wide open, blinds folded, broken, and bent at the top of the pane. Sounds of crickets and creatures of the night buzz, chirp, croak, fall into my ears, into my head. A large silent grey moth sits still, wings folded by the open window.

She sleeps. She is exhausted by the trip here. I hover over her and the drops of perspiration falling off my neck drip onto her nose. With a strand of her long raven black hair I wipe my sweat off her face. Just outside, I can hear a pack of three or four runaway dogs tramping down the road, barking and howling. I cannot sleep.

I did not marry her because of the overflow of hair that cascades in midnight ripples down to the small of her back. Only rarely have I seen it in its fullness, not tucked back or braided or put up in some decorative configuration. It was her crystal mountain snow blue eyes that first drew me to her, physically. But the intangible charms, her virtues, values, and ideas have been the fuel that kept me by her side, until now. I find myself watching her hair. Its tendrils are a forest that frame her face. I stare, and the blackness of the room, cut into broken shadow-fragments by the street lamp is summer-time daylight compared to the way her hair swallows even the moonlight.

She stirs. I lean to press my lips to her cheek. Her lashes flutter, open. She smiles faintly.

“Why aren't you asleep?” she asks.

“It's hard,” I croak a whisper.

“You'll be tired tomorrow.”

“Yes,” I say. “Still, I...” My words fade off. She rolls away from me so that all I am faced with is her hair. Before long I am watching the swell and fall of her breathing and I know she has fallen back to sleep. I am silent and still. I am hungry.

The darkness spins shadows out of the pale lamplight. The thin sheet slightly draped over her nude form is a minimalist's canvas, a painting, the bare forms of the trees that are the shadows of the trees framed by the window, trees sitting still in the absence of wind. Her weight has shifted slightly and the painting warps. I hear her deep breathing and I am sick with heat, the temperature and the longing for us to touch. I won't dare disturb her sleep. Yet, if she were not asleep — passion, its strong spirit within me forms Edenic images of paradise, the heavenly bliss we would be sharing right now. Yet the flesh is weak...

Moments pass. I am in the strange twilight between full-awareness and

sleep. My images in my head have become frightening now, thoughts of carnal desire — random, wild, uncontrollable thoughts run from my brain to my groin. Only a moment. If she would stay awake only for a moment, we could...but still, there will be time tomorrow. I can wait. I have waited this long. I have been so good to wait this long. But shouldn't the waiting be over? This is our wedding night. Shouldn't we be relishing each other with wild abandon? Shouldn't we be, but — did I see here move again? Is she awake? No. She snores.

The hunger in my stomach draws me to the glow from the light of the ancient refrigerator I have just now plugged in. Inside, it is empty. Its motor emits an ugly mechanical growl as it begins to cool. I am in the kitchen, which is an extension of the living room in this three-room shack. I realize that in our haste to beat the storm promised by the weatherman we forgot to buy food. I had meant to, but — damn that we have to go out in the morning to find food. And I am hungry now. My stomach aches for substance. My head feels light for lack of energy. I should sleep. I scratch my mosquito marks. Each one I'm sure is a pin-point of blood by now. They run all up and down my legs. My fingers press against them — hard little bumps and there are a few bites on my arms. I wonder that she has not been bitten. Or has she? But she is so tired she must not care if she has. I open up a cupboard. Empty. I open another. Bare. There is another. In it there is a small, flat can of something. It might be tuna. I pull open a drawer by the sink. Barely visible from the light of the 'fridge is an old carving knife, blade stained with rust. The wooden handle is loose. Farther into the drawer I reach in and feel a thick piece of rope maybe a yard long. No can opener. There is nothing in any of the other drawers.

I am hovering over her, standing, naked beside the bed. Perhaps she will wake. I hear one of the stray dogs outside the window, digging and sniffing, rooting around for something — a bone perhaps? I watch her hair. Her face is covered by it. I pull it back gently, hoping that the movement will make her open her eyes and see me standing before her and not resist me. Her eyes are closed. My fingers make small contact with her cheek and I follow its curve down her neck then up again to her forehead. I am kneeling by the bed, staring into her closed eyes.

"Darling," the words are choked out. "Darling," I say again, almost a whisper. I don't really want to wake her, disturb her. I want to leave her lying there, calm, asleep. Yes, I resign. I will let her sleep. I stand and climb into bed, checking my weight to keep the mattress from sagging. Her weight shifts only slightly. I lay down. I close my eyes, pulling the sheet that only half covers her over my own body. My mind is on the can of tuna, or something — anything, but nothing is open this far out and I'm beginning to think that her grandparents' shack was not a good idea for our honeymoon and I watch her spine. I reach my hand out to touch her spine and my fingers gently trickle down her vertebrae.

I am watching her hair. Long black and tangled, thick, a blackened forest. I allow myself to bring my hand up and touch it. I caress its thick softness between my fingers as I run my hand through it, moving down from her scalp to the ends. I move slowly as I run into tangles and then....

Something happens. My eyes, the shadows, the heat, plays tricks. I feel as though it is the hair itself moving through my fingers and not me making motion at all. The feeling is so real that I am startled and jerk my hand out of her hair and then feel it with my palm to tell if it is moving. I felt it literally, I mean, it seemed to have...flowed over my hands. So strange. I run my fingers down from her scalp again, slowly to the ends. The strange sensation returns. It feels as if her hair is moving on its own. I remove my hand.

In the pale street lamp I stare at this gorgeous void that is her hair. Ridiculous. Yet what was it that I felt? I watch and for some time I am sure my mind gets lost in the darkness and the shadows of the trees on the sheets become skeletons and her hair begins to move imperceptibly and my eyes are closing...

Suddenly, her body shifts. She lies flat on her back. Yet her hair flows down her chest and I watch, hardly knowing if what I see is real, yet...the hair, it's creeping, slowly across her chest. I imagine that it is caressing her breasts, winding up towards her smooth white neck. I can see it spread over her. How can she feel nothing? She is dreaming, murmuring in her sleep, her head motioning slightly back and forth to the left and right. If she would just wake up! Can't she tell what's happening? The tendrils of her hair move like iron fingers. I am shocked as I feel them now tightening around her windpipe, squeezing tentatively and then — violently constricting. I feel helpless. I try to move but can't as it pulls tighter and tighter around her neck in large bands of black. She still does not open her eyes!

She is now struggling for breath, gasping. Suddenly, I panic and run for the kitchen, open the cabinet drawer and fumble for the knife. I run back into the bedroom, to our bed, to her body, her beautiful naked form and begin chopping at the hair, cutting, chopping at the hair, practically pulling it from her scalp, furiously slicing it as best I can with the blunt kitchen knife. Trying, I'm trying to save her, save her from her own hair, but I find that I cannot, cannot stop, I can't stop cutting. The blade is like a magnet to her flesh and as I feel my hands cutting her and watch myself do this, her blood oozes and the hair is cut in ribbons and her flesh is pierced and I cannot stop.

Sometime while this is happening she wakes, feeling her flesh being ripped apart. My ears ring as she screams and screams and screams. I cannot move to stop myself.

It is morning. The trees filter the sunlight that floods our wedding bed. I gaze on her body, still and silent. I feel nothing. She is not moving. I find the knife clutched by my hand and her hair hacked and slashed in ribbons and the

stray strands and shards of it cover the bed, her body, her once lovely face. I remove the bloody sheets. I spread it on the floor, along with its contents.

The rays of golden sunlight spilling onto the floor, the first well of tears filling my eyes. The hair I sweep with my hands, wrap all of it — the bloody sheet, along with the rusty knife, along with her dead body.

I manage to bury it, bury it in the woods behind the shack. I dress quickly, open the shack's creaking front door, lock it, get in the car and drive away.

The headlights of the early morning cars stare at me as they pass. I watch the gaping road signs as they swiftly pass by. There is a tightness in my throat. My windshield wipers swap furiously back and forth. My radio is broken. My tires are whining. My hands are shaking and I am blind with tears as my car begins to slide off into the lane on oncoming traffic.

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