

Eggs for dinner

“Will you shut up?” he grunted into her ear. She stopped her stream of repetitive moaning at once. She knew she wasn’t good at faking it, but he was the first to ever point it out. It occurred to her that if she had any professional pride, she would be offended but there was no pride left in her now. He seemed happier now that she was quiet and carried on thrusting into her. She shut her eyes and began to mentally compile her shopping list. Nappies. One pack was two dollars, fifty. Carrots, good for teething, those were seventy cents. One bag of pasta. No, two bags. One dollar each so was that five dollars? He grabbed her bare thigh and squeezed painfully to hold her still. He needed to cut his finger nails. Five dollars, twenty. What else did she need? Sauce for the pasta? Ketchup was cheaper and Freddie wouldn’t know the difference, so six dollars, twenty. He released her thigh and used his free hand to slap her across the face. It wasn’t the first time this had happened, but it still shocked her. Why did guys do that? Wasn’t he already getting enough of what he wanted without marking her face? The impact forced her head to turn into the pillow. She caught sight of the room service menu on the bedside table. Eggs, she could afford eggs this week, maybe not a dozen but a half box would be nice. So that made seven dollars... seven dollars something. How much were eggs these days? He was near the end now, thank goodness. This could be the last one this week. He was speeding up and she was very aware of every thrust barging into her soft tissues. Without the distraction of her verbal performance she felt the pain more. He moved his position and used both hands to squeeze her throat a little, supporting himself on her neck. This was new and not in a good way. She opened her mouth to protest but he squeezed harder in warning. She shut her mouth again. In for a penny, in for a pound then. With each stab he pushed her head further into the pillow. It would be over soon and then she could go home. Home to Freddie and her own bed and no one would hurt her there, except the landlord if she fell behind with her rent again. She distracted herself with more maths. Seventy-five dollars was the first number but thirty of that would pay for the room. Twenty-five more to the sitter and the rest was hers. Well, Freddie’s anyway. There wasn’t enough air anymore and she could only feel the rhythmic assault behind her navel and the pinching of his fingers in the skin of her neck. His hands were so strong, and he *really* needed to cut his nails. It would be over soon. She just needed to hang on. Her vision began to blur. She just needed to wait a little longer and then she and Freddie could both have eggs for dinner. She had bread at home, and they could have a slice with each egg. The room was getting dark, and she couldn’t remember the first item on her shopping list anymore. She felt a nail break as she clawed at his strong arms. She could hear a rushing like wind in her ears. Eggs, she thought. Eggs for dinner.

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She awoke with a start and sat up suddenly. The springs of the bed groaned. She reached for her neck, which hurt the most, and felt for the bruises she knew must be there. She flinched when she rubbed at one in particular. Must have been a thumb. The hotel room looked just the same with its yellowing wallpaper and the tacky seventies bedspread which was twisted up with her legs. Her eyes touched on the purple bruises on her thigh. They were dark, almost like black at the edges and then lightened gradually to a stagnant yellow. It was still dark outside and the red numbers on the bedside clock said it was just past two in the morning. Damn, she hadn’t meant to stay this late. What was she going to tell the sitter? She freed herself from the red and green zig zags on the bed cover and climbed off the bed. She stepped on something wet. She inspected the bottom of her right foot and discovered a used condom, attached with natural adhesive to her foot. She hastily wiped the bottom of her foot on the carpet but thought again. She wouldn’t be able to bring clients back here if she left a congealing mess like that on the floor. She turned back towards it and daintily pinched it between her thumb and finger. She bent to drop it into the waste paper basket in the corner of the room. As she straightened up, she caught sight of herself in the full-length mirror attached to the wardrobe door. There had been nights worse than this one, she told herself. Deeper, darker finger marks on her wrists and redder cheeks. There were no bloodstains this time, no black eyes tonight except where her make-up had melted. She forced herself to smile at her reflection, but

the reflection didn't want to smile back. She rubbed at the black mess under her eyes and arranged her dark hair around her shoulders to cover up the marks on her neck, combing through the strands with her fingers. She gave up. What about the money? The unwelcome thought developed in her head and for a moment she felt panicked. She checked the bedside table but there was nothing. She laid on her belly on the bed and felt under both pillows. Shit. What was she going to do now? That meant no money for the room, no money for the sitter who should have been home by now and no money for groceries. No fucking eggs. No nothing. She would have to sneak out of the room, that much was clear. She never carried cash when on the job in case the men tried their luck at stealing from her. It had happened once when she'd reached for a condom and found the man with one hand in her bag beside the bed, but this was the first time anyone had not actually paid her at the end. The bastard. Didn't he realise she had a kid to feed and bills to pay? Of course, he didn't. Why would she have told him that? Why would he have asked? She wouldn't and he didn't. He hadn't even asked her name and she hadn't asked his. He would be remembered as that guy with a choking fetish, who needed nail clippers and didn't even pay!

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Despite her anger she became overwhelmed by the need to get dressed, to cover up her dappled skin and hide inside clothes. The tears in her eyes made it hard to look for her things, but she wiped at her eyes impatiently. She found her underwear easily enough on the worn carpet by the bedside table. Being careful to avoid the darkening patch on the floor, she tugged and fastened them into place. Her dress had made it further away and was hanging by one strap from the curtain rail near the foot of the bed. She had to jump to unhook it, but she managed it on the third jump. She held it up in front of her. Damn. The son of a bitch had somehow managed to rip one of the straps last night. This was why she carried pins in her handbag. Where was her bag, anyway? She hadn't seen it since she woke up. She edged around the bed to the far side of the room to look. Her black bag was on the floor and next to it was the man she'd had sex with a few hours ago: face down on the green carpet. The leather strap of her shoulder bag was wrapped twice around his neck. Shit.

Her instinct was to be still. So, she was. She stood still. She didn't scream or jump up and down. She just waited. Waited for something in the equation to change so the answer could make sense. Her feet stayed precisely where she had put them before she saw him lying there and her breathing stopped for a moment. It couldn't be happening. She waited for someone or something to change the scene. Something had to change, either her being there or him. Maybe he would burst out laughing and get up, pleased with himself for having fooled and scared her. She tried to control her lip quivering but failed. She tried to control where her eyes led her to but failed in that too. The skin around his neck was purple and she could see one eye where his head was slightly turned. She hadn't truly looked at him until that moment. She hadn't seen his greying hair cut short in a sensible style. There was no reason to notice that he had a greyish tattoo under his left shoulder blade or that his black socks were still on. But she saw it all now as she waited for the situation to alter. The tattoo was strange. It looked like the start of a colourless Olympic ring sequence or maybe handcuffs. Well he was kinky, so she supposed that it made sense. As she leaned forward to see it better her cell phone rang from inside the bag. In the silence of the room it sounded supernaturally loud and shrill. In her alarm she backed away from the sound and into the wall, hard. She slid down all the way to the floor. There was nothing for it. Overcome with panic and fear she crossed her arms over her face and cried into the crease in her elbows.

He was dead. She was sure even though she hadn't checked. It hadn't occurred to her when she awoke that she wasn't alone. Had it been her? She couldn't remember anything after he grabbed her throat but there was no one else. No one knew where she was, and it was her bag strap around his brutal looking neck. It must have been her. She bit her fist to stem a loud sob from surfacing. He was dead because of her and she was going to prison. What if he had a family? What about her son? She might never see him again. He would be put into care and passed between

families for the rest of his childhood. "Care" was a ridiculous name for it. She knew full well how little of that a child got in the system and he would have to endure it because of this. She wiped her nose with her forearm. She had to run, had to get out, but how? Scrubbing at her eyes, she noticed something about his position. One arm was lying by his side but the left extended underneath the bed as if he was reaching for something. Putting her hands flat on the carpet she lowered onto her knees to look under the bed. She saw a dark lump just out of his reach. She reached for it, felt denim and pulled his jeans into the light. He had been reaching for his jeans while he was dying? It made no sense. She tried one of his pockets and pulled out almost a hundred dollars of folded notes between her fingers. Unsure whether to feel relieved or not she shook his pants by the feet to see if anything else fell out. A heavy thud caught her attention. A black hand gun lay innocently on the floor next to an open leather wallet. The badge inside shone dully in the glare of the hotel light. If he was a police officer, then someone could come looking for him. If he was on duty, then they might even know where he was now. Was this supposed to be a bust? It couldn't be. *He* had committed a crime as well as her. Either way, she had to leave.

She struggled into her dress and tucked the broken strap into her bra. She located her shoes underneath the bed on the door side of the room and wrestled them onto the wrong feet. She took a step towards the door and stumbled. She quickly corrected her shoes, stood up and reached for the door handle. What about evidence? She couldn't leave her bag. It could lead them back to her or Freddie. And what about the money? She'd touched the banknotes not to mention...him. She'd touched *him*. She had to try to clean up. First, her bag. She made herself walk back around the bed towards him. She looked at his body for a moment, prostrate on the floor. Anxiety bubbled anew in her chest and left a taste in her mouth. Shae had been wrong earlier. There had not been worse nights than this one. She didn't want to touch him or even look at him but needs must. She flattened her back to the wall and side stepped towards his head, careful not to nudge him with her feet. She crouched slowly over the shoulder with the little handcuff tattoo and delicately peeled her bag from around his neck. She tried not to move him, but his head shifted a little to accommodate the untwisting of the strap. She didn't look in his eyes, but she felt as if they were staring at her. Judging her.

"I didn't mean to kill you," she whispered to no specific part of him. She stood where she was and used the bottom of her dress to wipe the strap of her bag, trying to rid it of DNA or whatever could be on it. She slung the bag over her shoulder, took a deep breath and tip toed around the body to scoop up the bank notes. She was re-counting the money when there was a knock at the door.