

Dinner Time

A Short Story by Idil Agcagul

Emma started on the salad after she closed the oven door. She took the ingredients out of the fridge, gripping them tightly despite the cold of their touch. The colors of the vegetables looked harsh against the pristine white kitchen. She took the knife and the cutting board out of their respective places and started chopping. Every day, Emma began on the salad after she put the main meal in the oven. She would make sure to get the timing right on the meat. Joe liked his meat well cooked and dry. Before their marriage, she would shudder at the thought of eating something so close to a lump of coal. Yet, Emma chose to go with Joe's preferences for today's meat. It will fit just right, she thought, while continuing to cut the tomatoes.

Often her acquired rhythm would falter with a small drop of juice dripping onto the counter. She would worry her brow, pick up a lively tune from the radio to distract herself. Her sweet hums filled the room, accompanying the warm air of the sunset. When finished with the salad, Emma took the cloth and the sanitizer. With moves bordering frantic, she cleaned the counter, going over each drop individually. Moments like these, the harsh cries of the small child from the other side of the house were more audible. With shaky hands, Emma opened the baby-proofed cupboard and popped some of the prescribed anxiety meds she got several years ago. It was the night she learned that she was pregnant when Emma had decided to quit them. The blue pills had become a habit again lately.

Shaking her head, Emma exited the kitchen. Skipping over the mass on the floor, she entered the living room. She brought candles to the table laid out with empty dishes. Joe hated candlelit dinners. His poor eyesight did not allow any sappy romance, he would reason to Emma. Emma would reply by how she hated his glasses because they withheld his baby blue eyes from

her. He would let out a small huff of amusement and continue to talk. In her mind, Emma would lose the conversation at the mention of the glasses. Her cheeky response would hide her mind already dissociating to the past. Those glasses were an enigma to Emma. She never managed to understand why Joe would wear them while they were having sex and discard them while he was fucking some woman in his nights of overtime.

She had followed and watched him numerous times in his quests to trap some woman in his claws. No matter where he was, Joe would instantly rid himself of the spectacles soon as the groping started. Emma, hidden away in the shadows, would always watch the way cheap material hit the pavement, the hotel lobby, the dark alley. Its wings discarded in an odd way, the glasses would wait for Joe to pick it up. Eventually, when Joe and his poor eyesight was satisfied with the flimsy encounter, Emma would be far gone. When Joe would come home to his wife and son, he would be ready for another round, a more clear-sighted one for sure.

The ring of the oven woke Emma from her daze. She quickly went into the kitchen and took the heavy tray away from the heat. Turning off the oven, she observed what's on the counter. She had forgotten to take off the glasses. The plastic handles had melted against the temple of the head. The thick glass was still intact, magnifying the burnt eyes that lacked their usual blueness. The jaw was still stuck open. Despite Emma's tries, it had affixed itself in an open position, where the muscles had contracted from all the screaming. Such a shame, Emma thought. Now, it would be harder to digest.

Faint sounds of sirens came from the start of the street. Not losing any more time observing the butter-smearred bald scalp, Emma carried the tray to the dim-lit dinner table. She placed the head on the center of the table. The sirens outside the house continued to blare, drowning the cries from the nursery. Emma took her first bite as the front door broke open.