

7095
Piper Rowley



I shower somewhere else now.
I won't step into the bathroom with the urine caked between the
sticky tiles,
feel the film of the porcelain tub beneath my vulnerable toes,
exposed.
Small, white, soaked.
My breath rattles unhinged between my clenched teeth.
The steam smells of semen,
a younger brother discovering himself,
fills the drain,
the scalding water rises above my red ankles.
Trash litters the floor,
towels heavy with mildew soak undisturbed from where they were
dropped.
Behind the beveled glass door swinging from one hinge on a rusty
track,
I feel nothing.
The walls close around my naked body like an angry fist.
I won't shower there.

Where his indifference is a pillow over my face.
The cabinets are empty,
and bare soles stick to the scarred wooden floors.
Where a lifetime of guilt-ridden phrases raised me.
Nothing Good Happens After Midnight,
You Can't Be Framed If You Are Not In The Picture.
And when my sister cried because she could still feel the phantom
fingers on her from that boy she's never bothered to meet,
he sat angry with empty, defenseless hands that pointed at me.
Had he taught us to love ourselves,
instead of our worth being only as whole as our hymen,
we would not have cried.

If he had taught us to demand nothing less than respect,
rather than a loving marriage can only be exchanged for a few drops
of our blood on a pure white sheet on our wedding night,
we would not have sat in the dark on the porch two nights before
while she typed on her phone the words she could not say,
the shame he put inside of her.

Alone.

Had he shut his archaic mouth and opened his unwilling eyes he
would have seen,
our spines bent and curled from the weight of his fractured and
flawed faith.

The faith that failed him,
and the faith that failed us.

My days are long,
is what I say when our worlds collide clumsily in the kitchen on the
rare mornings we are both running late.

He asks me where I have been.

The kitchen
where he told me
I am the evidence
of him being a failure as a father.

And he said,
why are you crying,
when hot tears spilled from my ashamed eyes.

I swallowed the words and they have sat in my stomach since.
Each affectionate sweetheart sours on my dull ears when I remember
his tone,
you just aren't the same.

When I can still feel the knotted stone of his words still stained with
stomach acid.

I return late, if I return at all.

Sliding in through the broken back door smeared with fingerprints
and wet noses,

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a curt whisper to the whining dogs, who he favors over me.
The lights are off and he is in bed,
but I didn't need to be here to know he spent his night in front of the
television,
two dogs circling he speaks to with more excitement than he has felt
for any of us in a long time.
Indifferent to the son sprouting upstairs, and the one with a
dishonest glint in his cold eyes, always absent.
I creep up the stairs with my shoes on,
slip in the room that shares a wall with his.
It is late and sleep is meaningless to me,
if I dream the images are full of visions of violence,
men's unforgiving hands and women's exposed purpled bodies.
The faces of the women in my family, and all of their histories of hurt
sprawling in rawness.
I lay my head down and think of
how she spreads her legs for a married man,
the sixteen year old with a Mustang and the child he keeps for a
girlfriend in the passenger seat,
I cannot stop the echoing images of
her silhouette in the darkness as her silence shook and cracked the
unknowing neighborhood,
and him.
How even still, he says
Are you going out like that.
My hair is greasy and my skin prickly,
but I won't shower here anymore.