

## Wilderness House Literary Review 19/4

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**Cavity in the Mind**

*trigger warnings: sexual language, manipulation, abuse, & blood*

My nose clogs with dust and my mouth tastes of red wine. This shed smells rank and weighs me down. I've never been allowed in here. All that remains of him is the tan-line of a wedding ring on my left hand. I glance from window to dresser as if he could reach from the grave and grab me by the neck. His old papers and photos sit untouched in open dresser drawers. The sky tumbles with black clouds lined with the red predictions of an oncoming storm. Steam from the concrete outside floats in through the open windows. I almost mistake it for rain on the breeze, but the storm isn't here yet.



An overhead lamp flickers, shadeless. Its thin chain swings in front of my face like a mocking finger. The blood in my face seeps to my toes. I could run. I could take flight. Cut-out images of naked women float beneath staples on every wall. Their eyes marked or their heads torn clean off. Only bodies greet me. My fingers tingle. Who was he? I tear a photo from the wall and crumple it. Unfinished drawings and writings lay thrown on the desk, drawings of bondage and torture. Skewed letterings scrawl across the pages in excitement. I can't be here. I can't stay here. My soles move beneath me. They take me to the door. I reach out, turn the brass knob, and swing it open. Heat travels up my throat when I'm greeted by a body risen from the grave. His hair the same close buzz and his boots still steel-toed. He isn't real. He can't be real. I walk forward, mouth a tight-lipped line. Closing the door behind me, my back turns. When I feel his breath of mixed death and whiskey, I freeze. Who was he? A grazing finger brushes over my shoulder and down my bare arm. I feel him. I sense the anger.

*I remember the bruises.  
I remember the bleeding.  
Who was he?  
I remember.*

The tips of his fingers penetrate my balled fist. They squeeze through my confusion and doubt. He pulls the crumpled photo from between my fingers and splays it out on the shed door.

Rolling out the creases he whispers with the voice of bitter candy, "Nail it to the door for me, babygirl."

I look up into his black eyes, the whites graying with decay. I try to force a calm and content smile.

"I don't have a hammer or even any nails, honey, I can't. Let me just head inside and grab them."

I step down onto concrete. He pulls me back with an ever-tightening grip and a sharp reproach in my ear. A hand reaches into my jean shorts - a front pocket that feels bottomless. He grabs something from the edge

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of the world and pulls out a handful of teeth. Canines and molars, black blood and red blood, both crusty and sticky. My vision turns blurry, hazy with dingy whites, deep reds, and a tan palm. I shake my head as my face shrivels.

He snaps at my ear, nipping at the lobe. "Do it or you leave with me."

My hand trembles as I grab a tooth, a molar that sticks to his skin. I brace myself against the door. He holds up the photo once more, lined with crinkled ink. A naked, pale body stares back at me. Chained to a black bed frame, her spine is arched and in convulsion - scribbled over in his splotchy ink. I hold the tooth to the corner of the page.

"How? What do I do?"

Still behind me, he rests his chin on my scalp.

"Pound it in, baby. Hit it."

I bring my fist back. I stall. Then I slam my fist down onto the photo. The tooth cracks and crumbles leaving a small red stain in the corner. I can feel his cells vibrating in anger. I can hear his rage well up in his chest right before it releases in an ear-piercing yell.

"You're going too slow!"

I pull another from his palm and tack it against her body. Pulling back, my fist slams back down only for the tooth to not move. It sits above the painted layer of the door, only a small indentation in the paper.

"You didn't give me any nails," I whimper. "I can't do this."

"I gave you all that I had and it's not good enough? And you think you'd do better? You're good enough? Do it right and then we'll see if you're good enough!" he screams.

Shaking, I try again and again and I fail with each attempt.

Spit lands on my cheek as he sputters, "Harder! Harder!"

Snot blankets my lips. Tears tickle and scrape at the corners of my nose as he spits, "Faster! Faster! Harder!"

My ears ring, a shrill tone. Saliva flings from my chin as I desperately squeak, "You're not real. You're not real!"

I'm hitting. I'm beating. I'm pounding. His voice swirls into my ears and bleeds out rot.



"I'm not real? Look at you. You love me so much that here I am. You'll never leave me! I do everything for you! You're pathetic and small but you think that you can live without me? Show the world who you love, show the world who you dream about and yearn for when falling asleep! Show them who it is that you say you hate but miss in every moment of the day!"

His booming voice quiets. He catches my arm mid-hit and trails down to my hand. He slowly reaches around me. I cower. He opens my palm and drops the bloodied teeth onto my skin. It's the same amount as when I

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started. The pile, it's bottomless. Infinite.

I feel his sharp tongue flick at my ear lobe when he whispers low and sweet,

“Show them, babygirl, show them.”