

Bearable

by Adam Sifre

"Don't be dense." Michael worked another forkfull of linguini into his mouth.

Julie pretended to study her food.

'If I look at him now, I'll break. I'll break and I'll scream and keep screaming until there's nothing left.'

"Jones is supposed to play each kid at least 15 minutes. Did David play 15 minutes today?" He knocked back the rest of his diet coke and belched. His breathing was shallow and labored at the same time.

'He sounds like he just hiked up a small mountain.' She bit her lip, afraid she'd laugh and then have to explain herself. These days eating and talking at the same time were like running a triathlon for Michael."

'I can't laugh and I can't scream. What kind of life is this?'

"David got to play and he seems fine with it," Julie said quietly. There was a time when she'd agree with Michael just to keep the peace. But Julie had learned a long time ago that agreeing or arguing with Michael led down the same road.

"David's a friggin' doormat. Youi know that. He'd let that dumb fuck coach keep him on the bench all season and say he didn't mind." Another mound of pasta disappeared into her husband's mouth and he continued his rant. Julie wasn't listening.

'He's not my husband. He's a black hole. He's a black hole that sucks in everything good. Nothing escapes.' She sat there not listening, not making a sound; her hands squeezing the edge of the table until her knuckles turned white.

Michael went through the nightly litany -- coaches, teachers, her new haircut ("how much did you waste on that, for Christsake?"), bosses and co-workers.

Julie did her best to tune him out with limited success.

'He get's uglier everyday,' she thought. 'Inside and out. But what about me? I was beautiful. I know that. But he's taking that too.'

Right now. Every second I have to sit here I'm losing myself.' Julie closed her eyes but he was still there, clear as day.

"Any more pasta?"

'He's a monster. He doesn't know it, but he's an ogre, straight out of a horror story. And he's going to consume me, bones and all. Maybe he'll leave my skin and I'll be a husk. Sitting here forever and ever, while he eats and rants and belittles. And he'll go on and on, never knowing I've disappeared.

"I fucked another man." She said it quietly but loud enough. It didn't matter. Michael wasn't listening.

"I don't even know why they bother putting this shit in the classifieds. It's not like they are interested in hiring. Fucking waste of time. Hey, is there more pasta or not?"

"I fucked him in our bed."

"What?" Now she had his attention. None of it was true and Julie had no idea why she was saying it, but it felt good. It felt right.

"I said, I fucked him in our bed. He was so good. He was..." Julie paused, not knowing what to say next. She felt so good though. Lighter.

"He was young and so hard, Michael. His... his cock was hard but it, it felt like hot velvet in my mouth."

"What the fuck!" He stood up from the table and Julie could see spots of marinara sauce just above his belly.

"I sucked his cock." It felt wonderful. I wanted so much to please him. I think I could have come right there, Michael" Now Julie did laugh. "But he didn't give me the chance. He fucked me and I came as soon as he put it in me. And then I came again. And again. And he kept fucking me. Right upstairs. Right on our bed."

"You fucking bitch. You're lying." He was towering over her now, breathing heavy from the effort.

'Yes. I'm lying,' she thought. 'But it should be true. And look at you. You're still a monster, but I think you've grown a little smaller, Michael.'

"Go upstairs if you don't believe me. Go up and smell the sheets. Or I can call him if you'd like. I could invite him over again. I'm sure there are one or two things we didn't get around to this afternoon. Maybe I'll let you watch. Maybe I'll let him --"

His hands were around her neck. "You bitch. You fucking bitch!" He squeezed.

Julie never felt better. 'Look how small he is! He's no ogre. He's a slug. No, a leech. He's an ugly leech and he's never happy unless he's sucking the life out of something.

"He tasted like salt and honey," she whispered.

She heard him groan and suddenly his hands were gone and sweet air rushed in.

Michael was on the floor, crying. "Bitch. You bitch. How could you?"

Another Julie would be apologizing now. Hugging him and telling him it was all a lie. He looked like a child now. Withdrawn. But this Julie knew she was in a war. If she didn't win now, she'd be lost forever.

"Bitch," she sneered? "I'm a bitch when I don't feel like cooking dinner. I'm a bitch when I tell you I like David's teacher. I'm a bitch when I don't want to go out with your drinking buddies. Surely, fucking a man in your bed deserves more than 'Bitch.'

Michael was crying now. Sloppy, choking sobs.

"I wasn't going to let him do it, you know. I didn't even know how much I needed to feel his -- to feel *anything*. I thought I could never do that to you. But then I thought, *why not?* I'm not a person, I'm a

wall. A pretty wall for you to throw your shit at. So I let him. I let him over and over, Michael. And when he wanted to stop, I didn't let him. I took him in my mouth and I whispered things to him until he was hard again.

Michel was shaking his head and trying to stand now. But there was no strength in his legs. No strength at all. She'd finally robbed him of that.

'It's not true, but it should be true.

"I'm going to do it again, Michael. Because I deserve it." She watched him grow smaller, there on the floor, and part of her felt bad. But it was a small part.

"I wanted so little. I needed almost nothing from you. Love. And kindness. Not a lot to ask from my husband. But you wouldn't even give me that. So now I'm taking it. I'm taking as much love and kindness as I deserve."

He was still crying, but it was far away and she could hardly hear it.

"I'm just not going to take it from you. And I'm not going to let you take it from me."

Julie closed her eyes, wondering if she could really do it. When she finally opened them, he was gone.

