

ER Chronicles (3)

by Lillian Ann Slugocki

In 1972 she is still a pretty housewife on a still pretty street of matching houses and hedges. Brick homes, ranch style, wood accents on the roof, now painted green. She grows vegetables in the garden behind the wooden garage; a clothes line bisects the backyard, a small cherry tree, five children and one in her belly. She favors striped T-shirts over her baby belly and navy stretch pants. This is not the life she bargained for, you can see it in her eyes, but she makes the best of it.

She fries up eggs in the morning, makes coffee, takes out the trash, gets her kids up for school. Searches for and finds the plaid skirts, the white blouses, the navy blue knee socks for her two girls, the dark pants, the clip on ties, the black shoes for the boys because they walk six blocks to the local Catholic school. And one of her daughters, the eldest, is getting out of hand, adolescence has hit her like a sledge hammer. Suddenly she is a beautiful girl with round ass. The baby in her belly flips up, then down, feels his head travel along the tight confines of her cervix.

She knows her husband has been missing all night. Even as he sits there in early morning light, sipping coffee with a drop of brandy, his pants from JC Penney, the short sleeved shirt because the heat will be monstrous in the factory, she lets him drink. And drink some more. The baby moves again, in protest; this is not my world, I didn't ask for this conception, put away your fucking, mother, put away your babies. What's wrong he says, smoothing down the dark moustache, what's gotten into you this morning?

How can she answer a question like that? He should go to work, do his job, and leave her to hers. That's all she knows. There's laundry, dishes, beds, dusting, vacuuming. Put away your fucking, mother. The baby slips again. She grabs her belly, and for one second a moment of tenderness from her husband, that boy is big isn't he? Just like the old man. He scoots out of the green vinyl chair, grabs his industrial lunch box, and thank god is gone.

Available online at «<http://fictionaut.com/stories/lillian-ann-slugocki/er-chronicles-3>»

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Her breasts swell with milk, six more weeks. In the shower she sees that her nipples are large and brown, feels the weight of them in the hot water, and suddenly her hand is between her legs, seeking the pleasure that's always been denied her, always and forever. She opens up with desire, carefully lowering herself into the tub, legs splayed open, the water hitting her vulva, the tender pink lips, the brown nipples and the orgasm is shameful and thrilling--- as it always is, because this is her destiny and she knows better than anyone that she cannot outrun it--- and this is why she has stopped trying.

Climbing out of the tub, warm and slippery, a sharp pain grips her. She cries out but no one is there to hear her. The baby slips again, turns and dips, presses down hard on her bladder, helplessly she pisses herself. It feels good, but the pain is still there. The pain that will always be there. Put away your fucking, mother, this is going to be your last child. No one else is going to emerge from your cunt, warm and bloody with life. She rolls out of the tub, lays panting on the small green rug that matches the fake green ferns, the towel rack and wall paper. She understands the fraud. She understands she plays no part in the world unfolding around her, around her children, the man she married, her foreign parents, or even the geometry of the blue lake, one mile down the road.

She grabs her cotton house coat, awkwardly tight, and tip toes into the kitchen, hand on her belly, pain still gripping the small of her back. She can see the baby, his mouth opened wide, but no sound coming out, but all the teeth are there. She can see the teeth. Maybe the teeth are tearing into her. Maybe she is bleeding. She dials 911, opens the front door and lays down on the couch, her naked body exposed to the world. The breeze feels good. The silence feels good, even the pain is good because it alone is pure.

Minutes pass and she drifts asleep, a warm pool of blood at her feet. When the police arrive, they try not to look at her full breasts, the slack belly, and the slippery baby squirming on the shag carpet. *Put away your fucking, mother.* The ambulance pulls out of the drive way. She tries not to look back, knows that she shouldn't,

but can't help herself. She sees the girl she used to be on the farm,
sitting in a meadow of wild flowers. The morning sun high over her
head, a flat coin of light, warming her limbs, her heart, her now
empty womb.

