

1. The Knife (or, Ignorance is Bliss)

by Marc Lowe

He showed me the knife, said it was his best friend. This knife is older than you, he said. Here, run your finger along its blade. Like this. He showed me how to do it. No, I said. I don't like to play with knives. Knives are dangerous. They cut people, things. He grinned his stupid grin at me, tilted his head to the side and squinted his beady eyes. Like you, he said. Just like you, Julia.

Suddenly, I felt panic in my breast. Run, my instincts said, but to where? how? I was sitting next to him. All that separated us was the blade he still held in his thick hand. Here, he said. Touch it. Feel its coolness, its sharp precision. Do you know how old this knife is? I shook my head, meaning that no, I would not touch it. But he interpreted it as a no to his question, and proceeded to answer. This knife, he said, was handcrafted before you were born. You're how old now? Twenty-five, twenty-six? This blade is at least thirty, thirty-five years old. Can't compete with that, now, can you?

Again, I shook my head. No, I can't compete with it, and I don't really want to. Leave me alone, I wanted to shout, but I withheld the impulse to speak and sat meekly, staring at the tabletop, noticing the imperfections in the wood, the diagonal scratch across its dusty surface. Then, suddenly and without warning, he leaned in toward me and licked my earlobe, like a cat. I instinctively pulled back, shutting my eyes tight, as if that would make everything go away. But he came for seconds moments later, licking both the lobe and part of the ear canal this time. Stop! I finally screamed, and then he quickly and decisively plunged the knife deep into my throat.

I awoke some time later, a large circle of blood surrounding my head and neck like a halo. Sitting up (I had been lying on the floor, next to the chair), I pulled the knife from my throat and looked around. No sign of him. No sign of anyone. Was I alive? dead?

something else? I wanted to search for a mirror, but I kept falling flat on my face every time I tried to move. Perhaps I was on the cusp of death after all.

Why, I kept asking myself, had he done it. What had I ever done to hurt him? Was it the time I cheated on him with that French guy, his acquaintance from work? Or the time I embarrassed him in front of his friends and family by pointing out all of his ridiculous faults? Or the time I refused to have sex with him for nearly four months because I said he smelled funny and was a lousy lay? I couldn't figure it out. I'd never so much as hurt a fly in my lifetime. I was innocent, while he was a homicidal maniac. That's all. He was simply insane.

The knife. Older than me. I feel a rush of bubbling blood flow into my throat then pour out of my mouth. The taste of my karma, perhaps. Or perhaps the taste of his madness. Perhaps they are one and the same. Did I cause this? Or did he cause me to cause this? No matter. I cannot go on any longer. I can feel my life force fleeing from my body, my soul shooting up through the roof and into the sky. I am free now, free like a bird, free like an angel. The knife grows faint, distant. Soon, I can no longer even see the room my body inhabits.

