

Routine

by Michelle Elvy

Every day starts with silence. She wakes to the weight of it, carefully picks her way through the morning, fearing feeling like shattered glass. *Hungry?* Naw. *Here, have some eggs.* Click and the can's open, out come the twins thunder and lightning. Pass the ketchup, pass the can. I'll have some of that, she decides, and feels the soothing snake slide down her throat too. She pours cereal, snap-crackle-pop go her nerves.

She watches him stab his plate, hears the fork clink on china and dink on teeth, why does he eat so fuckin loud, with that dribble of spit at the edge of his lip, that nosehair wild and damp, I'd like to reach over and pluck that fucker out. But she sees past the grime the smell the waste as she always does, pulls long and slow on her Camel and falls back into the past, when they drank beer for breakfast because they were coming off an all-night high of skin and sweat and the Rolling fucking Stones. If she looks past the grey of today she can recall olive arms and chocolate eyes and a smile that made her weep with joy. She could live there forever, in that smokey memory, but a small voice brings her back and she gets up to put the toddler on the toilet.

Leaning on the kitchen sink, she hears the remote hit the wall, and she's fully awake now. He's steel edge and nothing soft anymore, slams the fridge door, mutters something doesn't matter what content is of no importance the room is all mood now, electricity and sweat and the smell of anger on his breath as he leans in close. She tenses, but only a little, backs against the wall. Just before contact, she steadies her hand on the side of the sink and tilts her head sideways slightly, moving reflexively with the rush of air, and in that moment her hair falls over her left nostril and she smells Suave Strawberry. Then she closes her eyes and lingers in this last flash of silence. Hold your breath, hold on. She knows what's coming.

