

Little Pi.ec.es

by Sam Nam

I scare my daughter when she sleeps because she thinks I'm going to kill her. I yell in her ear when she naps. I shake her shoulders in the middle of the night. I pummel her with a pillow. She wakes up with her arms flailing and her mouth squealing. She must fight to live, she thinks. She must react quickly. She must be ready for murder. But then she realizes it's me, and I hug her, and I laugh, and she moans.

I inch into her room. She's rolled up in Barbie sheets with big blonde faces all over her body. Her black hair is an amorphous mass, a spilt mess of coagulated oil. I navigate the pitchy room, heading toward her bed, relying on memory and blacker shades of black for the definition of shapes.

I catalogue the different ways I've scared her this week because I have to keep her guessing. I decide to jump on her this time. Yes, that's a change. She won't expect that. I'll swoop down on her like an eagle, and she'll squirm in my grasp like a furry rodent.

I open my maw as I leap toward the bed. I'm not Dad anymore. I'm a vampire. I'm a boogeyman. I'm six years old. I'm that annoying kid. I'm what my father used to smack around. I love it.

I land on my little girl. I land on her awkwardly. I break her. Her body bends too easily. It's unnatural. It's wrong. Her scalp rips off. Her head slips away and lands on the floor with a thump. I jump off the bed. I'm ready to scream. I expect blood and guts. I expect questions I can't answer. I expect the police. I expect a divorce. I expect my own suicide.

The closet door bursts open and a little troll pops out. I can barely see the troll's slit eyes and crooked teeth. The creature's jocular

expression is sinister and pernicious. The troll doubles over in laughter and speaks in my daughter's voice: "I got you, Daddy! I got you!"

I look at the black T-shirt in my hand. I look at the sleeping bag in the bed. I look at the volleyball on the floor.

"I got you, I got you, I got you!" My daughter is laughing too hard to see me tremble. She's hunched over, slapping her knees and hopping up and down. I can't even look at her. I pick up the volleyball next to my foot and put it back on the pillow. I step away from the bed, staring at the illusion. I feel embarrassed for not laughing it off. I feel weird for putting the head back on the body.

My daughter stops laughing because she can hear my hard breathing. I'm still coming up for air. We stand in silence, staring at the limbless body as if it were a dead daughter or a dead sister with a name like Leslie or Susan or Jane, something ordinary, something instantly forgettable.

I imagine my daughter in the future, replaying this moment in her head. She's on the beach at night, a young woman bursting with promise. She lies on the sand, snuggled beneath her lover's weight, admiring the fit of her frame tangled with his. He leans down to kiss her. A neuron flashes in her mind, searching for the appropriate pyrotechnics. But the neuron flips the wrong switch, and my daughter gets this silly memory of me replayed in her head. The scene comes to her as a sliver, and then as pieces, and then the memory hijacks her train of thought.

She sits up. Her lover complains. She ignores him and listens to the waves, wondering if anyone will ever fear losing her as much I do at this moment.

