

# Baby's Breath

## A Smile and a Ribbon

The soft sound of snow crunching underfoot gives me comfort. Her building is at the end of the block. She lives on the north side. Bottom floor. Middle apartment. I see her. 1, 2, 3, 4, 5 steps. Wrong key. Lock clicks. She drops her coat and scarf in the entry and kicks off those... vixen shoes. She shuffles to the kitchen and pours a glass of scotch. (I am inside) She lights a cigarette and blows the smoke over the match. (She doesn't notice) The gray smog rises from her lips like a cremation furnace. The simple elegance of this quiet moment is almost irresistible. (But, I wait)

She slugs back the scotch, finishes her smoke and ashes it in the sink. She unties her hair and enters the hallway, past the childless bedroom with the empty crib, past the altar coated in wax like a wedding cake, and the tiny packages of meat, dead flowers, and baby's breath.

She enters the bathroom, where she undresses. She sits on the edge of the bath. Her naked body folded in half, heavy tits hanging like mushy stalactites over her lap. (Oh, precious) She closes her eyes and holds her head as if it might float away.

For a moment, my thoughts drift again, this time to the hammer I am holding. The handle is smooth as bone, the forged steel head is heavy, and I feel powerful. She reaches for the faucet and I snap back to the moment.

Bubbles brim the edge of the tub. Her fingers check the water temperature and I am ready.

I move behind her. She doesn't hear. I swing the hammer. She doesn't see. I crack her skull. She's in the tub. Facedown. I am drowning her, mashing her head to the bottom, knifing the claw of the hammer into her spine and ribs over and over and over and over and over and over and over and over and...

Her body stops pretending to care and surrenders as it is supposed to. Just to be sure, I press hard, keeping her head beneath the bloody water a few moments more. Her neck snaps, her nose breaks, and her face collapses against the bottom of the tub. I see my reflection in the mirror and soapy foam has formed a half smile over the black nylon mask I am wearing.

I lean to her. The water glistens like glass. I hover over the surface, soft breath causing tiny quakes, and whisper, "I have done to you what nature has done to me."

She doesn't reply.

I stand and turn off the light. The room is dark and empty. Just like I am now.

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