

The Cliff's Edge

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That she will fall from the cliff's edge.

That her son's sweaty hand will slip from her grasp and her son will fall from the cliff's edge.

That her outstretched fingers will fail to catch onto her daughter's onesie as her daughter waddles out past the cliff's edge.

That her flabby biceps won't support her husband's weight for very long as her husband, clutching at her forearm, dangles below the cliff's edge.

That the dog will still go for the frisbee after she mindlessly tosses it over the cliff's edge while she's fixing PB&Js for her daughter, son and husband.

That she'll awaken to find not her husband lying next to her but the armed intruder, who has already quietly murdered her husband, son, daughter and dog.

That she'll awaken to the sense of the armed intruder's caress and, having mistaken it for her husband's, guide his hand toward her inner thigh.

That she and her husband will head out to the living room to find the armed intruder cuddled under blankets with their son and daughter, the three of them out there watching Netflix together.

That the armed intruder has previously surveilled them and learned of the spot on the dog's belly where if you rub it for even just barely a second it's like the Vulcan nerve pinch.

That she'll awaken to the sound of the dog's menacing growls issuing from the hallway. That she'll open her daughter's bedroom door to find several ex-cons playing poker around the Dora table.

That one day her husband will awaken before she does, decide he's had it with family life, take off in the Honda.

That one day her husband will not awaken.

That one day her son will not awaken, that one day her daughter will not awaken.

That one day she will not awaken. (And no one will be around to give a shit.)

That she'll flip a kitchen lightswitch while standing in a puddle of Cinnamon Life, get electrocuted.

That her husband will leave his electric razor plugged in, that she'll accidentally knock it into the tub with her butt, electrocuting her daughter.

That while she's making her son's breakfast, her daughter will pick the safety cover from an outlet with a fork tine, get electrocuted.

That her son, rushing to make the bus, will use a fork to dig a piece of toast out of the toaster, get electrocuted.

That she or her son or her husband or even her daughter will simply touch the toaster and, for no apparent reason, get electrocuted.

That KitchenAid, Inc. sent the recall notice on the toaster to their old address.

That while out for his morning pee the dog will escape the yard, wander around the neighborhood, head back home. To their old address.

That one morning the maul-the-kids switch will flip on in the dog's brain.

That while out for his morning pee the dog will escape the yard and the maul-the-neighbors'-kids switch will flip on in his brain.

That the dog will jump up on her daughter, knocking her daughter down, fracturing her daughter's leg, fracturing her daughter's tailbone, concussing her daughter, fracturing her daughter's skull into dozens of tiny pieces.

That the dog will lick her daughter's lips mere seconds after licking his own anus.

That while out for his morning pee the dog will escape the yard and be run over by her son's school bus, as witnessed by her son, who was peering out the window to *smell the roses with his eyes*, the same thing she's always encouraging him to do on a drive.

That while doing the dishes in the morning she'll forget about one of her yellow-gloved hands in the garbage disposal and with the other yellow-gloved hand flip the switch to the garbage disposal.

That while doing the dishes in the morning she'll flip the switch to the garbage disposal with one yellow-gloved hand as the other yellow-gloved hand is touching the dishwasher, get electrocuted.

(That maybe a yellow glove can protect her hand from moisture, but no way is it going to stop an electrical current.)

That sometimes while doing the dishes in the morning she feels almost as if her yellow-gloved hand, headed toward the switch to the garbage disposal with the intention of mutilating her other hand, has a mind of its own, has a dark will of its own, and she has to take a minute to really stare down that wayward yellow-gloved hand.

That one morning her yellow-gloved hand will finally lose its mind completely, plunge into the dishwasher for the Santoku knife, and before she even has a chance to begin thinking about doing any bargaining with it, the brachial artery beneath her other yellow-gloved hand will have already been severed.

That during a moment of fearlessness, she'll head off to the closet with the Santoku knife, close the door behind her.

That during a moment of fearfulness, she'll head off to the closet with the Santoku knife, close the door behind her.

That she'll fail to close the door behind her, that her daughter will come waddling in, spend the whole day messing around in a pool of blood.

That the cost of a full-time nanny and her daughter's therapy bills will be too much for her husband to bear.

That her husband will remarry a blonde. A tall blonde in heels. With a degree in tourism and hotel management. Kathy. Her son and daughter's new mom, Kathy.

That her son and daughter will grow up without her, without her fear, without her fear to protect them, without her fear to ruin them, without her love to keep them feeling loved, without her love to keep them feeling safe, without her anxiety to keep them feeling safe, without her anxiety to keep them feeling loved, without her anxiety to keep them feeling anxious, without her anxiety to ruin them.

That during her husband's commute to work a semi will ram the Honda, crushing it like a soda can.

That during her husband's commute to work the Honda will have a blowout, flip through the air, finally come to rest in the middle of the freeway, and be rammed by a semi, crushing it like a soda can.

That during a portion of her husband's commute to work in which electrical lines run alongside the freeway, a strong gale will pick up, knocking an electrical pole onto the roof of the Honda, at once electrocuting her husband and crushing him like a soda can.

That during her husband's commute to work he will receive a text from her about how tonight after the kids go to sleep maybe they can watch a little porn together, maybe fool around. That when he looks up from the phone, it's too late to brake—crushed like a soda can.

That the Windex causes cancer.

That the Windex looks exactly like the Gatorade.

That she's not happy, whatever that means.

That there must be something missing.

That she is happy. Whatever that means.

That while playing with her daughter and drinking a Clementine Izze in the early afternoon before their nap she will submit to a sudden urge to smash the glass Izze bottle over her daughter's head.

(That she at once fears and welcomes her dark reveries. That obsessing over the dark stuff is at once painful and pleasurable to her.)

That while playing with her daughter in the early afternoon before their nap the doorbell will ring and the handsome smile of a charismatic murderer-rapist posing as a city inspector or a Comcast employee or a political activist or a Neighborhood Watch representative will entice her to open the door just a little bit wider than she knows she ever should.

(That it's a way for her to preempt the dark stuff from actually happening in real life, or it's a way to consider the dark stuff beforehand in the event any of it really does happen in real life, to be ready for it, to practice it in her head so it's not so completely unmanageable when it does happen, or that it's a way to flush the dark stuff out of her system, to entertain it merely in her head so to never have to entertain it in real life.)

That while playing with her daughter in the early afternoon before their nap she'll run the tub, go get her daughter, put her daughter in the tub, turn the lock, close the bathroom door, go take a nap.

(That the dark stuff occurs to her so often because she's a woman, because she's weak, because women are weak, because woman are supposed to be weak, or because women are supposed to fear, because women are supposed to live their lives in a state of fear, in fear of the world in general, because the world in general belongs to men, and since men want to continue running everything they need for her to live in a constant state of fear.)

That while playing with her daughter in the early afternoon before their nap she will bend over and fellate the empty Clementine Izze bottle, to show her daughter how it's done.

(That this is just some silly bullshit she plays around with in her head to kill the time.)

That she will fall from the cliff's edge.

That she will cautiously approach the cliff's edge to take in a view of the world's majesty—to *smell the roses with her eyes*—and the ground will collapse beneath her feet, sucking her down.

That she will be holding her daughter, at the time.

That her son and husband will rush to try to save them. That her son and husband will get sucked down with her and her daughter.

That the dog will be left at the cliff's edge all alone. Quarter loaf of bread, the dregs from some old jars of peanut butter and jelly to get him by for the rest of his life. Which he'll spend up there at the cliff's edge, awaiting their return.

That she and her daughter will be awakened from their nap by a text from her husband saying there's been a shooting at their son's school.

That they'll be awakened from their nap by a text saying there's been a shooting at their son's school and that her husband is outside the school with all the other parents waiting to find out whose kids are alive and whose kids are dead.

That they'll be awakened from their nap by a text saying there's been a shooting at their son's school, that footage from the helicopters suggests the shooter is headed directly toward their house. Time to get up from their nap.

That they'll be awakened from their nap by a text saying there's been a shooting at their son's school, that the worst of the massacre occurred in her son's classroom, that her son was among the children shot to death.

That they'll be awakened from their nap by a text saying there's been a shooting at her son's school. That their son was the shooter.

That her children are not safe in this world.

That no one in this world is safe.

That the world is ending. (And there's no other world but this one.)

That none of this will ever end.

That eventually everything must end, even this.

That one day she will die.

That one day she will die, as will he, as will he, as will she, as will the dog. (And that it won't be such a big deal.)

That there must be something missing.

That she's not happy, whatever that means.

That she is happy.

Whatever that means.

That while doing his math homework at the kitchen counter after returning home from school, a drop of dark blood will drip from her son's left nostril. That soon his whole worksheet is doused in it, not a single equation visible.

That while doing his math homework her son will grow frustrated with his equations, grasp the pencil in his fist, stab himself in the jugular.

That while doing his math homework her son will ask for her help. That she'll sit down next to him at the kitchen counter, pat him on the back, soon grow frustrated with his equations, grasp the pencil and stab first her son, then herself, in the jugular.

That the bloody pencil will fall to the floor. That it will later be discovered by her daughter, crawling on the floor, who will use it to stab herself in the jugular.

That maybe there's something missing for everyone. Not just her.

That maybe every last mom sitting on the bleachers at her son's baseball practice is worrying about the fate of the sun, the fate of the wind, the fate of the grass, the fate of the bleachers, the fate of the batting helmets. Not just her.

That maybe every last mom sitting on the bleachers is thinking that maybe there's something missing for everyone. Not just her.

That the Gatorade causes cancer.

That the Gatorade looks exactly like the Windex.

That their friends will come over for dinner. Mac and cheese, applesauce, broccoli. Milk. That one of them will choke on an undercooked broccoli floret. That a lawsuit will impend.

That their friends will come over for dinner. That the dog will maul their friends' baby when nobody's looking. That a lawsuit will impend.

That their friends will come over for dinner. That she just couldn't help but add a little pinch of bleach to the mac and cheese. That vomiting will impend. And a lawsuit.

That their friends will come over for dinner. That she and the red-haired husband will sneak away to the hallway bathroom when nobody's looking. That a pregnancy will impend. And a couple divorces.

That her son will come kiss her and her husband and her daughter goodnight, head off to his room, close the door, retrieve a noose from the bottom of his Lego chest, take a deep breath.

That her son will come kiss her and her husband and her daughter goodnight, head off to his room, close the door, retrieve a noose from the bottom of his Lego chest, not even take a deep breath.

That she will move her hand across her husband's thigh while they're lying together in bed. That instead of a penis, she'll discover a slice of multigrain wrapped around a banana lathered in peanut butter.

That her husband will move his hand across her thigh while they're lying together in bed. That instead of a clitoris, he'll discover a chewed-up nipple from a baby bottle.

That just as she's closing her eyes to fall asleep for the night, she will see, through the window, the armed intruder, out there in the backyard with a bunch of his buddies. That she'll sit up and attempt to signal to him through the window: *Hurry up! We've been expecting you!*

That just as she's closing her eyes to fall asleep for the night, she will see, through the window, the tiny moon exploding into a million tiny pieces.

That just as she's closing her eyes to fall asleep for the night, she will see, through the window, her son, daughter, husband and dog, up in the sky, floating away toward Cassiopeia. That she will smile contentedly, close her eyes, finally get a full night's sleep.

That she will fall from the cliff's edge.

That she, her husband, her son and her daughter will remain standing at the cliff's edge for all eternity. All of them standing there transfixed by the world's terror, the world's beauty.

That they will stand together at the cliff's edge in the hot sun eating PB&Js for all eternity. The world's beauty, the world's terror—big whoop. They'll eat their PB&Js pretending they're somewhere else, back home in the kitchen, a bunch of Legos and Dora crap strewn all over the counter.

That she will stand with her family at the cliff's edge for all eternity, all of them pretending they're happy.

That she will stand with her family at the cliff's edge for all eternity, or that she will fall with her family from the cliff's edge for all eternity, or that some combination of the two. But that, regardless, she'll keep trying her best to be happy about it. Whatever that means.

