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Joe

Another year, another Christmas. One that should be filled with mildly annoying yet heart warming traditions: a house filled with adults, most of which I had no interest in interacting with, a kitchen overcrowd with people, talking about nothing in particular and blocking any chance of escaping until after minutes have passed they final hear you asking them to move, the smell of delicious food wafting through my nostrils, tormenting me with the fact that it wont be ready to eat for hours as my aunt complains joking to her friends about how my family is always late for lunch...My cousin smiling doing her best to make sure we felt at home even though it pretty much was home to us. This year, it wouldn't be like that, or any year, ever again, no matter how much I wished it was.

"Amy" my mother says as she lightly shakes my shoulder trying to wake me. She gives me a sympathetic smile, her brown eyes silently apologizing for more than just waking me as I role over and look up at her. When I see this I remember and the thought of getting out from underneath the deep green blanket, and soft cotton sheets that cover me becomes increasingly more upsetting. Her hand continues to rest on my shoulder, the red nail polish on her nails glistening in the sunlight that creeps through the blinds. The expression on her face never falters until I give her a half hearted smiles and she nods slightly, taking her thin hand back to her side as she leaves the room and I begin to detach myself from my warm bed.

I meet my parents at the mahogany table in the dinning room that we hardly ever use. The table is much to large for just the three of us so my mother over fills it with pancakes, fruit, sausages, eggs, three kinds of beverages including, orange juice, hot

chocolate, and some tea I couldn't name because I hated it. They both smiled at me as I sat and I smiled back, more than I had with my mother a few minutes before, but still with a hint of sadness. "Merry Christmas" my father says as cheerful as the circumstances would allow though I still didn't understand how he did it. I looked at him and answered softly as he poured some tea into the old red metal mug with the black handle that sat in front of him. It was chipping after decades of constant use and it certainly didn't match the light green dish ware at the table, but it made him happy for some reason so my mother and I just let him use it, stealing glances at each other every once in awhile to acknowledge how peculiar it was.

We spend the rest of breakfast making small talk, my father laughing at something his boss did at work and my mother going on about how ridiculous she is and how she should really appreciate my father more. I do my best to be attentive and upbeat like they are, but it seems almost impossible to me so instead I focus on my pancakes trying to finish up the last bites as I listen. If they notice they don't draw any attention to it I guess in an attempt to keep me from feeling any worse about the whole situation. Soon after my father begins to collect the empty plates from the table and take them into the kitchen as my mother takes care of the leftovers. I begin picking up mostly empty glass, all except my mothers which still has a bit of orange juice swaying around inside as she can never seem to eat or drink very much at once.

After we had cleaned the table we all began to dress for lunch at my aunts house, same as we did every year. We put on our heavy coats, bracing ourselves for the cold as we picked up the bags of gifts and made our way out to the maroon sedan sitting in our drive way. It was over stuffed as all the bags could not fit in the trunk and

so I found myself in the backseat trying not to be swallowed by all the gifts shifting in the seat around me. However if this had been the only thing I had to worry about I would have been happy.

As we made the familiar drive, about an hour into the suburbs and away from our house in the city, I never said much. I watched as my parents chatted, christmas carols playing lightly under their voices, but I couldn't pay attention to what they were saying. Instead I found my mind consumed with thoughts of my cousin, the purple and black striped sweater she had gotten me last christmas, all the gifts that had come before it and the fact that this year I wouldn't be getting one and even more upsetting I wouldn't get to see her face light up as I opened it or as I handed her her own gift. I tried to shake the thoughts free from my skull, but I couldn't seem to make them go away or make any sense of what had happened. Nothing seemed to be able to distract me.

The only other thought that seemed to be able to squeeze its way in was of my parents. I looked at them and wondered if they were having as much trouble as I was, if they were simply better at this than I was, being older perhaps they had simply gone through such a loss enough times that they knew just how to handle it. If that were the case, I wish they would just turn around and explain it to me. Unfortunately they continue facing forward as I sit in the back seat, presents spilling into my lap and one of my earbuds stuck into my ears with no sound coming out.

Too Cool

She stood only a few feet away, her black pumps clicking the yellow kitchen tiles as she shifted her feet awkwardly. She acted as if she didn't know me. I suppose at this point that was true and to be honest I didn't know her either nor did I really want to. Time doesn't always make things easier, sometimes it just pushes people apart.

Her hair once thick and arranged in puffy braids was now slick and glossy, I suppose the result of her straightening it. She was taller now, more womanly, but for the most part her face and body looked the same, a little plump, but not fat. She stood near Danielle and Lillian. I had known them just as long as She had, the three of us were still fairly close, but She didn't seem like She was at all aware of that, or maybe She just didn't care. That seemed like her, the her that existed in the present anyway.

It had been a few years since I had moved to Florida and this was the first time I had visited my home town for more than a few hours. Danielle and Lillian were twins, both incredibly kind, everyone liked them, but unfortunately they were a little oblivious sometimes to put it nicely, like right now for instance. Anytime either of them spoke they looked around at each other and both of us engaging everyone, smiling as they reminisced. However anytime She spoke she made sure to only look at them, trying to change the subject to things that had happened long after I had gone.

I rolled my eyes and observed them, sipping my drink slowly and casting a smug look I was sure would make her as uncomfortable as I thought She was a bitch. As Danielle began to speak cheerful again, I knew it was working as She shifted under my stare and her pumps continued clicking against the floor. My smirk only grew bigger as She tried to pretend she didn't notice I was looking at her.

I wondered what was going through her head really, what I could have possibly done to make her act this way towards me. All I had ever done was leave, and it's not as if I had any choice in the matter or that She'd ever tried to keep in touch the way Danielle and Lillian had. Knowing that it could be nothing that warranted this behavior, I continued my quiet assault, ignoring all the things I could have said to make the trunk of the somehow partly invisible elephant in the room sound off noisily and startle everyone. Like asking if She remembered when She first moved her and I had been the first one to talk to her, or when I'd introduced her to Danielle and Lillian, the first time She told me I was her best friend or the fact that I had lent her the necklace She was fiddling with and never gotten it back.

All those things made me laugh internally, for now that was enough and my smirk continued to grow even bigger, as I continued to watch her squirm before me. I knew that somewhere She knew exactly what I was thinking and She was ashamed of herself. Even as Danielle and Lillian turned their attention to me, suddenly realizing how quiet I had gotten I never stopped looking at her even as I answered them. Now She was the one who had gotten quiet, She was looking down now, her arms hanging behind her back, shifting the hem of her navy mini dress. Her feet had stopped tapping as she looked only at her pumps, the patent leather reflecting her sad face back up into her pupils. My smirk softened as now, i was sure she felt it.

I looked up at Lillian and smile as she asks about my parents and my smile brightened as I tell her what she wants to know. I forget her like She's tried to forget me all this time, turning away and pretending I never knew her. I still don't know why that is the way She wants it, but I let it go and I stop torturing her. We have out grown each

other, like the jumper I loved as a kid, the onsies from my grandmother I used to wear to bed or my first pair of shiny black pumps. If She honestly believed She had gotten to cool for me or the memories we shared, I had to be okay with that, but not before I let her know what She had given up. I'm sure now that whether She says it or not that She remembers, and I am content knowing however sad it is that it's come to this, in some twisted way we've both gotten what we wanted.

Self Evaluation

I think these two stories best represent the kind of things I like to write. They both have a lot of emotion yet are subtle and very character with little action. I enjoy writing this way because I find while the stories may not be the most interesting they are more relatable and that if they can really make you feel something they can be more memorable than the most action packed tales. I did struggle a little in figure out what to write about from week to week I think mostly because after taking narrative forms last semester I have gotten in a really comfortable place writing very personal things in short forms, so when asked to start writing fiction again and thinking about the possibility of longer writing I was a bit out of sorts. I think as a result of that I wrote shorter stories with more of a personal touch than in the past. I think that these stories were a good balance of fiction and the work I was doing in narrative forms and a great start in getting back into writing more fiction.