

Aligator

Ali put the iced tea in a mason jar on the table next to Rick's rocking chair, walked to the end of the porch and lit a cigarette. She looked out pensively at the empty dirt field where their crops used to grow. She hadn't showered in days and neither had he. They said they were conserving water and electricity, but really, didn't want to shower. He opened a sugar packet he stole from Chewey's, the local diner, and dumped the whole thing. He mixed it around with his finger, then licked it off. "Be nice," he said without looking over at her.

"I am."

"I am," he mocked her, showing she wasn't.

She obediently turned and sat in the other rocking chair. She locked eyes with a gecko until it darted. "I want to put it back the way it was," he said. She didn't move. "I don't care for the silent treatment." She still didn't move, except for the gentle rocking. This was her way of rolling her eyes. There was no way she was sharing the torrent of thoughts in her head. He wouldn't understand.

He sat with the silence as long as he could take it, sighed, then got up to walk off the porch. "Where you going?" she asked. He was glad she said something. "To talk to Earl and figure out how we can get our crops back." He turned to leave, too fast to let her respond. They both knew Earl didn't have a clue and he was bent on getting drunk. The seed store was also the town bar. She watched him escape along the dirt road that went down the hill. She didn't love him anymore but he still had a great ass.

When he was out of sight she went inside and turned on the window unit in the living room. She took off her dress and her panties and lay on the ratty couch. Her favorite part was the rusty coil poking up through the cushion lightly scratching her butt cheek. It was a comforting kind of pain. She never wore a bra anymore to cut back on laundry, plus she didn't like wearing them anyway, never did. When she was a kid she used to look at her Grandma's National Geographics with all the naked African women. She liked how their nipples pointed out. She asked her Grandma why theirs did that but her Mom's didn't. Grandma said it was because Americans wear bras. She said she didn't want to wear one then but Grandma said she had to because it was proper for ladies. Doesn't matter anymore, because she's a grown up and can do what she wants, but her nipples still don't point out.

She liked to walk around the house naked. Back when she and Rick had corn they both used to walk around in the buff and screwed most of the time they weren't working. Now, not so much. If she streaked around he'd surely want to but it didn't seem right. She knew it was a matter of time before she left him but couldn't find the easy way to do it. They'd been together five years before the drought, which was a little over a year ago. Truth is, she was surprised she never got pregnant because they didn't always have time to look around for condoms. Anyway, it was nice to live far enough out in the country where they could walk around naked.

The whispering urge to masturbate tickled her legs. She noticed from the first time how it came up on her like a gentle breeze in her heart. She noticed those things because her Grandma told her once to always mind her feelings. They sneak up on you. She said, "if you don't pay attention to the first part of a feeling, it will overpower you before you know it's there and make you do things you regret." So she was good at

noticing when a feeling started, which is a rare talent. She decided not to. Sometimes it was more pleasurable to feel the pain of lust without indulging. It made her heart thunder instead of beating. Feeling something different was always good but they couldn't afford booze or drugs. Rick was about to run his tab up at Earl's, if he let him. Instead she let the air blow over her from the window unit and wondered how much it cost. Probably a dollar an hour. Doesn't matter. They're not paying it anyway so she may as well run it till they come turn it off. If the guy came while Rick was gone she could offer him sex to leave it on. She wondered if that would work. Maybe not. Don't they work for the government? It was getting harder not to masturbate.

A bald eagle landed in the open doorway. She forgot she left the door open. She sat up afraid and curious. The eagle looked at her like he knew her, directly into her eyes and into her soul. She wasn't sure it was real. Could this be happening? How does a bald eagle land on your porch and look at you like this?

"You're a bitch you know," the eagle said matter-of-factly.

She clamored for her panties. "Don't bother, I've already seen everything anyway," he said, smiling. It looked like a smile, but it was hard to say for sure because he had a beak. It came out in his eyes. It was a loving smile, like the way her Grandma looked at her when she wet the bed and told her she'd out grow it. "Besides, you're not my type sweetie, so pretend I'm a doctor." He winked.

"Am I dead?" she whispered nervously.

"Everybody is, until you know you're alive," he danced a little jig for emphasis and wiggled what would have been his eyebrows if eagles had them.

"Eagle's can't talk."

"Hmmm," he pondered, tapping the tip of his wing to his beak, "I must not be an eagle then." He paced around the room thinking this over. "All of my life I've been pretty sure I was an eagle. I fly. I live in a nest. I eat rats. This is perplexing." As she was about to jump off the couch and run out of the room he suddenly turned to block her, fanning his wings to push her back. "Maybe I'm a monkey."

"Monkeys don't talk either," she said and he stopped fanning.

"I don't know any monkeys," he said. "Pretty sure I'm an eagle, and you're a bit of a bitch."

"Why am I a bitch?"

He smiled and grabbed her pack of cigarettes off the coffee table with his talon. He pulled one out, put it in his beak and leaned forward asking for a light. He was glad she asked. She was hypnotized by the way he moved so naturally, doing things you wouldn't expect an eagle to do. She picked up the butane lighter and flicked it until it lit. He got comfortable and talked with the cigarette hanging from his beak. "I've been watching the two of you from that tree out in the middle of the field. At first I didn't know what you were because you're not like any of the other creatures around here. Then you started pulling your hides off and making babies all over the place. I've never seen animals pull their hides off. The snake sheds it's skin, but you put your hides back on. Anyway, the two of you were constantly doing it until the corn died. Then you started moving away from him every time he came near until he eventually stopped."

"He changed."

"He looks the same to me. Except now he walks hunched over like he's carrying a big rabbit on his shoulders."

“When we came out here he planted crops right away and worked until sundown. Now he goes into town and gets drunk.”

“I don’t know if you notice, but it hasn’t rained in over a year. How can you expect him to grow corn if there’s no water?” he took a deep drag, then pulled the cigarette out as he blew smoke rings.

“He’s not doing anything. He should at least find a job,” she said, pulling her panties up her legs. She couldn’t take being naked in front of this weird eagle anymore.

“Why don’t you find a job?” he asked, looking down his beak like he was wearing bifocals. This eagle really reminded her of her Grandma.

“That’s not how I was raised. I take care of the home and he works. That’s what I was taught.”

The eagle took another drag and looked pensively at the motionless, dusty ceiling fan. “I respect that, but you’re not exactly nesting either,” he looked back at her as she slipped her dress on. “What do you want?”

It started to sink in that she was being judged by a talking eagle. First of all, why hasn’t anyone ever mentioned that eagles can talk? Second of all, who the hell does he think he is coming into her house and laying into her about their relationship? And third of all and not least, he’s been watching them have sex? “I want you to get out of my house.”

“In a minute, but I’m not leaving until you answer me.”

“None of this is your business.”

“Lady, we’re way past notions of reality. It’s as much my business, as eagles can talk and smoke cigarettes. You want me to leave, answer the question and I’ll go back to shitting on your El Camino.”

He had a point. She may as well answer him.

“I want to fly and be free.”

“You don’t have wings.”

“I know, but I want to feel like I’m flying. I want to be able to move from one place to the next without any effort or obstacles.”

“It’s not all it’s cracked up to be. I wish I could walk around and lift things the way you creatures do. I can’t even light my own cigarettes. Plus, I don’t see you constantly hunting. If I let up my babies go hungry,” he puts his butt out in the ash tray. “Every creature in the forest pairs up. Some creatures have to fight to the death to make it happen. I envy the two of you. My lady wandered off a while back and left me with the kids. If I went looking for her the snakes would eat them. Seriously, you need to lighten up and love your man. He sticks around. Flying ain’t freedom.”

He didn’t notice her picking up the marble ash tray. She readies to throw it, “that don’t even make any sense. You’re a crazy eagle not no Buddha!” She throws it at him hitting his shoulder. He shrieks and jumps to the door flying out in one motion while leaving a big eagle turd in the doorway.