

CARRIE PIEPER

(waiting)

silence
like nothing you've
ever heard
interrupting every
thought
pacing around the
room
waiting
for a break

in the silence
fingers go
numb
pounding on
soundproof
walls
with nothing
on the other side

silence
lies on
an empty
bed
so still
and quiet
it may as
well not
be there
at all

then all at once
silence breaks
a tiny bell fills the air
the voice of a savior

dead legs given life
a body leaping to
the ring in the air

but what
has begun
is just as
soon over

an answer
to an unasked
question
permeates
the room

everything
goes quiet
again
air thick
and noiseless
as fog

then
a corpse
falls
down
without a
sound
and silence
caresses
fresh bruises
stamped
dark blue
across pale
white skin.

GREG WHITE

My Broken Television is a Metaphor

I'm not suicidal, but I've been going through the motions, and that might be just as bad. I don't love my wife. I doubt I ever did. But we got married because we were at the age when people should get married. We don't have any kids, thank god. We rarely have sex and when we do, it's a pale imitation of what sex should be. We're just two relatively out of shape people rubbing up against one another, grunting rhythmically to make our partner believe it feels great, all the while picturing someone better, or mentally balancing the checkbook. During sex, our shadows look like they have early onset diabetes. I'm fat. Not fat, but flabby. It's horrible. When we orgasm, our bodies convulse and we lay down, our sides slouching with the excess weight of our late 30s. Nobody says anything. It's a routine, a chore, no more enriching or depleting than taking out the garbage. It's terrible.

Our marriage was never the most romantic or fiery of partnerships. We met at a get-together and it was a relationship of convenience from the start. She was willing to sleep with me regularly. I was willing to let her dictate the décor of my home. It got to the point where we either needed to get married or end the damn thing, so we got married. What pushed it over the edge was my need for health insurance. It made financial sense. Nothing big, just a trip to the courthouse and dinner with family and friends. Over time, any of the convenience disappeared and was replaced with a hefty dose of resentment. I resented the fact that she never cleaned up the messes she made, she resented everything I did. We've mostly stopped talking altogether.

The last few weeks, she looks less plump than me. Her New Year's Resolution was to lose weight, get in shape, reignite our marriage, and have a happy life. That's what she resolved for both of us. I watch TV

while she's at the gym. Sometimes, when I'm sitting there, I rub my pudgy sides and remember when they used to be firm. She's in better shape but we still don't have much sex. Not that I mind. It's a lot of effort to pretend I enjoy it. She's been happier, too. I began to think she was having an affair, and I think good for her. That's my reaction when it dawns on me she's probably screwing someone from work, maybe some nice young guy from the gym who has a thing for older women. I'm okay with it. And I'm not okay with the fact that I'm okay with my wife screwing some other guy. I don't love her, but I should at least have enough respect for myself to be angry at the betrayal. But I'm not. I actually want her to be fucking someone else.

I tuck the thought away and think she's probably too nice and/or stupid to have an affair. She's not clandestine enough to have an affair with any success. She lied about forgetting to record one of my shows once, and before she could even get to the "I swear!" part of the lie, she broke down in tears. She explained that she was sad not because she forgot to record the show but that she tried lying to me and it pained her to know that we were now in the lying phase of our marriage. So I think there's no way she's having an affair. She would have called after the first kiss to confess.

I run through this exact same thought process every night when we eat dinner in silence, hoping that I'll work up the effort to say something over our take out. She doesn't cook much and neither do I. She's looking in her glass of wine when she says, "I'm having an affair." As I process what she says and think about how to react—feigned anger culminating in a few broken dishes, perhaps a few tears from sadness, or something more volcanic—I hear the worst possible sound emanate from my lips.

"Hrmpf."

It's the sound I make when I try to squeeze out a fart in front of her. There's no Old Testament rage, no heartbroken wail, no accusatory tone, just complete and utter indifference. I realize here that I'm screwed when the divorce proceedings begin.

"Did you just fucking fart when I told you I was screwing someone else?" she says. I avoid making eye contact. My wife just told me she's sleeping with someone else and I found a way to turn myself into the bad guy. I don't even have to fart just now.

"No, honey, I did not just fart."

"Well, it sounded like you just fucking farted, Daniel," she says.

"I'm just trying to process this. It's kind of a big thing."

"You sure are acting like it," she says.

"It's a lot to take in," I say. And then I raise my voice, trying to make her feel better. "You are, after all, fucking another person!" I yell, but it's obviously insincere. That makes it worse.

"Are you—are you pretending to be upset with me?" she says,

stretching out the syllables in 'pretending' and emphasizing them for maximum impact. "What is wrong with you, Daniel?"

I adjust myself in my seat. I hate it when she gets mad at me because then, after everything she says, she bookends it with my name. It's exasperating. I actually do have to fart now but think better of it. I have a home and some money to protect. Since anger as a simulated emotion is out, I try sadness to equally disastrous results. I don't cry well, since snot makes me gag and I produce a lot of saliva as is, so I never perfected the fake cry. She spots this act with ease.

"I really don't know how to respond to this," I say.

"That's pretty fucking obvious," she says. "Anything—literally anything—would be better than this."

I get up to refill my drink—cherry cola, the cheap knockoff stuff—and sit back down. "Who is he?"

"Someone from the gym." She's not making eye contact with me.

"What does he do?"

"He's in college."

I knew it. I knew it. I feel the beginnings of a smile start on my lips but I fight it back.

"Good for you," I say.

She looks up at me now and I see a shred of happiness in her eyes. She's happy I'm taking on a sarcastic tone. It implies anger, anger which I'm not used to showing, and it's revealing itself through caustic jeering. It shows her I'm willing to fight back. If I play the rest of this conversation right, I think I can perhaps save my marriage, this whole affair business being an unfortunate hiccup on our road to redemption and a loving marriage. Doing so would require a lot of energy, though, and it's more energy than I think I'm willing to exert.

"What did you say?" she says, hope in her eyes.

I can't hold it in anymore. I fart.

"I said good for you. I think it's good that you found someone who can please you."

The fart wafts up into my nose and it smells like the inside of a pumpkin.

"I've grown to care about you over the course of our relationship and it's been clear for quite some time that I haven't been giving you what you need. I think it's good that you've taken the initiative and found happiness somewhere. I hope he treats you well."

"You've grown to care about me? What the fuck is wrong with you? You think it's good I've taken the initiative? Am I a fucking employee? I swear to God, Daniel, you'd better make me understand this," she says.

"I want the best for you, I really do."

"What the hell is wrong with you?" she says.

"I'm just trying to be pragmatic about this entire situation. I don't

think me getting angry will help anybody right now. If we stay level-headed, I'm sure we can have an outcome that will be mutually beneficial."

I struggle with fighting. I have never been good at it. I want the tension to go away, so I adopt the typical HR persona in which I attempt to minimize any animosity with carefully chosen words. I used to lie, but I stopped because I was told that it is not conducive to creating lasting, impactful relationships. What my wife wants, though, isn't an HR rep. She wants a fire-breathing asshole of a husband, castigating her for her adulterous indiscretions with someone who she's almost old enough to be the mother of. If it were an ideal world, I would be that person for her, but it's not an ideal world.

"Oh, fuck your pragmatism, Daniel."

"I really don't know what you want from me," I say, and there it is. I lie again. I haven't lied in years, but I comfortably slip into it. It's here where I think we both know the marriage is no longer salvageable. I know exactly what she wants—a fight—but I am unwilling to give her one. Fucking someone else is one thing, but me lying is another entirely.

"I want you to fight for me," she screams. She throws the wine glass at the wall. My only thought is that was a twenty dollar wine glass and those curtains are positively ruined.

"I don't think I can do that," I say. She's standing by the counter now, arms up against it, supporting her weight.

"I want you to fight for me, Daniel. I want you to scream that you love me and you can't believe I would do that to you, betray you like that. Scream like you're actually angered that the woman you love fucked someone else," she yells. She's got a shrill voice. The neighbors must be upset at their dinners being interrupted by this.

"I don't know if I ever loved you, to be honest." Like the fart that wouldn't stay in, this just falls out.

"I want a divorce," she says.

"I can understand that. I think that's probably the best idea for both of us, considering the circumstances."

"You're a terrible person. I want you to pack a bag and leave."

"This is my house," I say. "I'm not going to leave."

"I'm not leaving," she declares. If I would have been a bit less stolid, I would have at least some power in this discussion, but I forfeited all of it through my sheer indifference.

"Can't I just stay in the guestroom? I'll be very quiet," I say. Surely this will appeal to her sense of reason.

"No, you can't stay in the fucking guestroom. Given what's just happened, how can you even suggest that?"

"But what about my TV?" I whine. It's a literal whine, that of a kid. I have no earthly idea why I say that, but I do. It's a lovely TV, the last big purchase I made. Wonderful picture and outstanding sound. It's got some sort of slick sound doohickey that balances everything so when I watch my action movies there isn't ever a drastic change during the explosions. On all my other TVs, the loud explosions would be so loud in contrast to the dialogue that it was maddening. But not this TV. This TV was special. I loved that TV.

"Tell me you're not going to fight for that fucking TV." It's an understandable request. I don't want to point out why I would fight for it, but if she presses the issue I may have to. "I swear to God, I'll put my fucking shoe through that thing."

"Don't say that. That's outrageous."

"You're outrageous. I'm disgusted. I'll kick a hole in that thing, I swear."

She's crying. I'm upset that she's crying, but now I'm worried about my TV.

"It's a discontinued model and I doubt that the sound doohickey you know I like has been held over on newer models since high-end sound is all the rage now," I say.

Her face changes when I say this, the hurt and pain written in the wrinkles above her eyes. She stands up and makes her way towards the TV. I don't want to watch, so I stay put. I hear her kick the TV, but nothing shatters. The Japanese make solid products. She lets out an exasperated howl, and then I hear it. The glass makes a loud crinkle sound and I know my marriage is over. She walks back into the kitchen, tears streaming down her face, little pieces of whatever constitutes a television screen these days trailing behind her.

"Not the TV," I sigh.

"Pack your shit and get. The. Fuck. Out."

I pack a bag and leave.

I really liked that TV.