

## The Scanning of the Bees

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It was mid-July. The month of orchids and delphiniums – swollen plastic skies, bitten skin, air tasting heavily of wax, wind: a shaking box of matches. But even the bees could hear the silence that morning. *An underlying endobronchial mass or tumor is of concern.*

On the way to the hospital, they have to stop at the gas station. It is early and the world looks as if someone has put a sepia lens on, everything moss-brown, all light and shadow. They don't talk to one another, watch each others hands. While the tank fills, a fat man eats his powdered donut in the next car over, she imagines he is late for work again, checks his cellphone, no answer from his daughter. In the car behind them, sits a young woman in lace, she attends Junior college off of I-94, paints her lips rouge, the color of berries. The cashier inside, her father – a dentist, no a priest: English is her third tongue, she loves classical films and fishing, oil paintings and the smell of lavender.

Once the car is alive again, they move to the hospital, find parking on the third lot. The B section is painted blue. She's not nervous, but walks slowly in her sneakers, hands wisp at her sides, hair braided in two. Inside, she says goodbye to her father. Inside, the nurses instruct her to change into a white gown, take off the necklace she's been wearing since last Easter, make sure the blood work is done properly, and when she warns them that she is prone to fainting, they don't make eye contact with her, instead the older of the two nurses – Elsie, from southern Michigan, thick accent, recently divorced to an ex-marine – asks her when she's eaten last, is she pregnant? The room has green chairs, an old television hanging in the corner, there is a documentary about some sort of bird: feet scratch carpet, a boy with a red neck, scars on his face, shaven head sits across from her, he reads an anime magazine, maybe Tolstoy, who knows, and taps his thumb against the cover. She watches him, the ways in which his jaw clenches, and he turns the page.

When her name is called, she stands, wrists full of hot liquid, she can feel it burning even in her teeth. They make her climb into a strange machine, ask her to state the date of her birth, ask for her name, if she's feeling okay. A woman with a small mouth walks in, wearing pearl earrings, dress shoes, cold hands. The machine makes her feel claustrophobic, she says she can't handle needles, not anymore, not since what happened last time, but the woman just smiles at

her, tells her to breathe, breathe, breathe, tells her she's just gotten back from *the* wedding, she had to wear an awfully ugly bridesmaids dress, there was glitter everywhere.

When the IV is inserted, the woman leaves the room, then her voice appears through a microphone, "breathe, breathe, breathe." A special dye, contrast, is needed to highlight the lungs. She tastes metal on her mouth, red in her stomach, against her ribs, between her thighs, crawling, aching, laughing. The room is a blinding white, the machines, the walls, the sheets, the gowns, the computers in the corner, the tiles on the floor, the pieces of papers on the side, all numbers and theories.

The room is small: if it were a person, it would be an old woman smoking on her lawn, a lemon tree growing quietly in between the rose bushes, her – wearing an apron with seagulls on it, hands dry from washing the dishes in the kitchen sink.

As they're taking the scans, the girl looks up at the ceiling, a poster of color: two palms trees and ocean. After it is over, she asks for the results. What is it? What's in me? Nobody replies, they say they'll call, let her know when she can come back for the answers. In the car, the radio is static, a woman calls in about her child. He's not eating again.

At home, she washes her hands, her feet, writes about a woman called Margarita: two sons, a loving husband. They take a trip to the East Islands, and she is so full of it – of life that she can barely swallow her words. There is music everywhere, in her lungs, in her hair, curled inside of her knees. That same night, they eat scallops and drink cold beer, talk about the election, how they should go to church more. That same night, she has a stroke, dies of a brain aneurysm a week later. Her husband, Frank, cries out so loud that even the bees start singing.