

The Crying

The crying began like wind slipping through the cracks of an old window, like the cool pressure of whistling through a missing tooth. It was faint, almost imperceptible, a bit of a whimper, distant, something that should've been easy to ignore. You moved to open your window and slam it shut again, you expected the paint to chip and to not bother repainting it. You did not expect it to be forced open by the crying, louder, more insistent, like a rusty hinge swinging back and forth.

You lay in bed and wondered as the noise pressed into your scar like gravel, traced your tattoo like laughter. It was a cat trapped somewhere it shouldn't be. It was the neighbour's baby. It slipped under the bedroom door and crept closer to you. You felt it curl against your own crescent-moon form in your bedsheets, and you cradled it, thrashing, as it thread your thoughts into a loop, the limits of your tangled limbs. There was a pressure in your stomach where it settled, and there was a gnawing hunger.

You made your way down the hall and dipped a cookie in a glass of milk. The crying didn't stop, it was still hungry, and in the dim kitchen lights you could almost see it, an infant with eyes the size of its mouth and tiny hands that pinched and pinched. It blinked and you felt the gaps between your bones. It looked like what you'd imagined in your child: vagueness, ghostliness, something that could've been.

It clawed at your ears in the silence of your office between the taps on the keyboard, the hum of the fridge you hadn't yet fixed, the loose spring on the couch when you sat down to watch a trashy show and the slosh of wine in your stained glass. You drank it like it was something wrong, like a miscarriage or the reason why you felt your ribs grate your skin when you breathed in too deeply.

At night the cries filled the room and pressed against your eardrums, it now cradled you with nails digging in your skin as it towered over the bed. The bedboard creaked its cries as it snapped, and you clutched your pillow, trying to replace something, as your mattress met the

floor. The threads of your limbs together in your head went taut. There were earplugs and there was music and there was a loud distorted wailing.

You rocked the infant as the cries reached a fever pitch, and your arms curled around the empty space. You murmured soft, half-words, some soothing babble because you couldn't manage anything more. Your throat was hoarse and you sucked your thumb. You bit it, it bled and tasted like growth. You wrapped your blanket around yourself and noticed it was stained.

In the kitchen you brought a spoon to your mouth and nursed it with your tongue as their crescent-moon shapes met each other. You hummed and offered a taste to the air and it cooed in between bawls. A mush of nonsense trickled down your chin to your fuzzy rabbit shirt. You curled up on the couch and brought your knees to your chest and rocked to the rhythm of the crying.