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English 491

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Crushed Red

He always misses this part, when she turns the stove on to preheat, and for some reason he's always shocked when she slides the large glass casserole dish into the already burning hot oven. He's not sure if he's not seeing this because she does it when he's not looking, or if it's like hearing an ambulance, you know it's there but after a while it fades into background noise.

One of the four burners is on, a large pot sits atop it, warming. She hasn't said much today, but she's more focused than usual, so he doesn't think much of the silence. He watches her walk to the pantry, her light brown hair tied into a messy bun that bounces slightly with each step, the countless number of shining studs in her ears seem to gleam as she passes the window above the sink, warm sunlight pouring in. She opens the pantry door and takes out the bottle of 'EVOO,' *her words*, extra virgin olive oil to him, and walks back to the pot. He watches her twist the cap off and pour a small pool of olive oil, which starts to sizzle at the bottom of the pot immediately.

“Hand me the cutting board will you,” she says without turning away from the stovetop. He stands there, amazed that she’s spoken, and after a few seconds he picks up the cutting board which has minced carrots, onions and celery in individual piles. She doesn’t like to let the ingredients touch until they hit the bottom of the pot and sizzle in the olive oil. She told him once before that it was like hearing them speak to each other, the sizzling sounds were their voices and they were agreeing that their sacrifice had to be made for the perfect tomato sauce.

She puts down her wooden spoon and walks over to the refrigerator. She opens the fridge door and pulls out a packet of ground beef, then lets the door swing shut. He watches her walk back to the pot, open the packet, and drop the beef in. The sizzling gets louder as the beef mixes with the carrots, onions, and celery. It’s the only sound that separates them from complete silence.

She's stirring. He watches her nervously, his usual contentment replaced by sweating palms and a dry mouth, as though he’s been stranded in the desert for days without water. He's used to this, her stirring, watching as the beginnings of 'the best lasagna in the world,' *her words*, takes form. She’s watching the ingredients sizzle, like she always does. She won’t look away; she won’t look at him. "Let it breathe," he say nervously.

"In a minute," she says, "will you hand me the red plate?" She's referring to the plate of peeled tomatoes that she gutted and squashed down roughly with a fork about five minutes before. It was a technique her mother taught her. Maybe crushing tomatoes isn’t the only thing she learned from her mother, he thinks.

He turns to the countertop on his left, it's one of those "L" shaped ones that people who love to cook go mad for. He picks up the plate and hands it to her, her left arm outstretched at her side, hand out, palm up, and ready to take the plate, with the purpose of not having to look at him. Of course, he thinks. He watches her pour the tomatoes in, the sizzling sound ceases as the crushed red fills the pot. He gulps, trying to get his dry throat lubricated again.

“Can you fill up the second pot with water?” she asks. He nods even though she isn’t looking at him, and gets the pot from the cabinet under the counter. He walks to the sink and runs the faucet, letting the pot rest at the bottom of the sink as it fills. Aren’t you making the pasta too soon? He thinks, but doesn’t ask this aloud. He knows the tomato sauce will need to cook for at least three hours, so why was she sprinting to the finish line? The pot at the bottom of the sink is full and overflowing, the excess water pouring down into the drain. He watches this happen, unable to move just yet. This is all wrong, he thinks. He turns away from the sink that continues to run, and faces her back. Please turn around, he thinks, but can’t get the words out. He watches her messy bun bounce as she stirs more vigorously than usual. You don’t love me anymore, do you? He thinks as he traces her figure sadly.

To be continued