



Another Day

Opal Reinbold

There he sat, a little hunched over, his glasses slightly askew on the end of his nose. He had combed his hair but the little cowlick in the front always won. His white hair stuck up against the scented oil he had so meticulously combed into his hair. In front of him sat his bowl. A gooey clump flooded with milk. He had piled a big spoonful of brown sugar on top and now he messily mixed up the concoction. He felt his mouth water in anticipation. His piece of dry toast sat next to his bowl on a chipped plate of tan with a brown strip around the edge. He was very focused on what was in front of him.

She sat across the way. She had dressed up today. She had on her pale green sweater, the one that her niece had knitted, over her white silk blouse—usually reserved for Sunday best. But on this day, she wanted to look special, she had even worn her pearl earrings. Her glasses were round and sat precisely on her nose. She sat up straight over her cream of wheat. She was very precise and poured just enough cream to cover the cream of wheat in her bowl. She then poured the maple syrup over the cream; it always gave her pleasure to see them mix. Her toast was heavily buttered with orange marmalade—the one treat she allowed herself beyond the maple syrup.

The little table in the window, always theirs for fifty years, now sat alone today—the other tables moved away and they could barely see the morning dawning through the condensation on the window. With his tweed jacket and grey cashmere sweater and all of the grey and tan and faded white, you may have thought for a moment of an Andrew Wyeth painting, a quiet tableau of the little couple in the bay window at breakfast.

As she began to eat, she felt deliciously excited, her hands shaking. She reached over to cover his free hand, gnarled and clenched on the table. She covered it with her small hand, so pale and colored now with age spots and wrinkles. It felt no less special to him because of how it looked.

They looked at one another across the table, with conspiratorial smiles on their lips—it felt good to live dangerously, even for just this moment. She noticed a little tear at the corner of his eye, just behind his glasses.

They sat that way for a time, savoring the freedom and the familiarity of the moment. This same scene had played out over the years every Saturday for as long as they could remember, their table, the same breakfast, this moment. But today it was like a little miracle they both cherished for that moment, and then they began to eat their breakfast. He with big noisy sips of his oatmeal, she with her dainty spoonfuls of Cream

of Wheat. From time to time they took a deep draft of the hot coffee and felt it warm them and fill them with a little private joy.

They did not hear Jamie approach as they sat in their reverie. Jamie, with his straw hair all over the place. She thought someone once used the term “bedroom hair” and she immediately thought of Jamie. He had been their waiter for years, his big snake tattoos, his earrings; and this morning he wore a face covering that was black with a skeleton’s bone smile. He stood back and told his usual stories to their delight—asked them to look toward the window while he refilled their coffee, lovingly paying them the special attention he always did. He was so happy to see them in their place, he had worried.

They stayed awhile that way. Eating and drinking their coffee, smiling quietly at one another in comfortable silence, just enjoying this familiar moment.

It was warm and quiet as people started to come into The Skillet as morning awakened in the neighborhood.

Finally, they gathered their things, he pulled out her chair and helped her with her coat. He put on his heavy leather gloves, she, her embroidered tan, delicate ones. She pulled on the yellow calico mask—it felt so odd but she loved the color, he put on his grey cotton mask. They waved at Jamie and walked slowly out and into the early morning quiet streets.

Jamie came to clear the table in the little window and watched as they walked down the street, he saw her put her head on his shoulder and they walked slowly back to their place arm in arm. He stood and watched as they walked away. He did not know when he would see them again; or if he would see them again.

He took a deep breath and thought, “I will wear these goddamn masks even if I hate them and they are hot and they itch.” He went back to the kitchen with the empty dishes balanced in his arm.

