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His House
By Justin Gonzalez

“It’s so nice to meet you finally!” The words muddled out of my mouth, while I stood at the foot of his white gates. His house was immaculate, overgrown, a tribute to all materialism had to offer.

“So nice to see you, Holiday!” He embraced me with a welcoming hug—the kind of hug that was especially strange to my solitary skin.

I never hugged anyone... I thought to myself. So natural, this raw physical contact felt foreign to my untouched skin. When He finally pulled his welcoming embrace, I said: “I have to say, I wasn't expecting to meet you so soon.” I managed to put a smile on my face hoping He wouldn't see through it and view for himself the discomfort I felt from it all—his house, the gates, firm physical contact. Is He the vengeful type? I thought as I gazed at the gates and the large wooden door of his home. It was all disgustingly opulent for my taste.

With two firm shakes of my hand, He welcomed me into his bright white painted living room. The walls reflected all the light that radiated from the center crystal chandelier. The place I lived in, in the city, was only a quarter the size of the living room alone. The welcoming embrace disgusted me, but I still looked on with fake wonder in my eyes and pep in my step. But it was all an elaborate song and dance, one that I had learned the steps through the course of my life as a sort of survival tactic. My thoughts once again drifted to the possible vengeful nature of the man. If I don't seem happy to be here, what will happen to me? I thought while we walked through the archway and into a new room. The sparkling living room led into what I can only describe as a massive dining hall. The sturdy,

wooden table seemed to go on and on with no real end in sight. The wooden table was decorated purposefully with plants and fruit. Mangos, cubes of glimmering watermelon, cherries all perfectly preserved with no sign of rot or decay. Not even a single fruit fly could be seen dashing around the fruits and fresh green leaves. The floors of the dining hall were constructed out of marble as pure as the first flakes of winter. It was the kind of marble one would expect to see in a magnificent ancient Roman temple in the days of Julius Caesar.

Beyond the wooden table and the white marble floor was a large window that stretched all the way to the ceiling which must have been at least 12 feet high. The window revealed the man's entire estate. For miles it seemed, I saw men, women, children of all ages and creeds living happily in the warm sunlight of the world that was foreign to me. You have to remember that I never thought I would see this place with my own eyes. The scene seemed straight out of the painting *A Sunday Afternoon on the Island of La Grande Jatte*. It was beautiful, and I could not deny it but that could not change the way I felt about Him and his vanity. While I was in awe of the view, I came to realize again this man lived like *this*, in a literal ivory tower. How could He do this? While other people suffered, yet still He does nothing. The piercing thoughts fueled my anger and resentment toward him and all He stood for, I thought while walking through his sacred hall.

He has saved the people in his home but not those beyond the white gates. People like me. I needed help, His help, for years living as a struggling artist with nothing but my work to keep me alive, but there was nothing. Not even a reassuring wave when He drove past the city into his grand estate. Living day-to-day, eating leftover top ramen from my

roommate's garbage. Having to pick between eating and paying the rent because I was not going to stop buying paint and canvases. "The lowest of the low," I remembered thinking as I drank the salty liquid and stale noodles. A failed artist forced into the confines of a rodent-infested room. When I only had 40 cents to fill the tank of my 1983 Honda. Nothing. So here we were walking through his great hall. With the sweetest fruits seemingly never endless, anyone would try to sneak even a minuscule taste.

We continued walking, each step lasting an eternity, seemingly leading to our ultimate goal. I didn't tire for some reason. My stride of confidence seemed to gain traction with every step. There He was, watching me. We walked side by side; his gaze locked onto me. Though He appeared to walk at the same pace, He led the way. He had a way of making his will known only when He wanted to reveal himself, and I hated him for that. Finally, we stopped before an elevator with the same marble white doors. It displayed the number of floors that seemed to go on forever just like our walk and just like the wooden table. He pressed a seemingly random button to one of the many, equally arbitrary floors. Suddenly, I felt something familiar, a presence, a feeling that I had felt for years. No matter how familiar it felt, I could not place where it originated from. A place? A person? My family? All I could recall is that the feeling seemed like it was from a lifetime ago.

The elevator door opened, and He stepped in. A slight departure from his continuously welcoming presence. He turned and motioned me into the white carpeted, pearl-colored elevator. With a smile and a quick step, I motioned my numb, energetic body into the elevator with no visual signs of disdain even though I felt like my insides were being twisted and my head

was full of anger. The doors closed, and I found myself standing shoulder to shoulder with him once again. I felt it, that commanding presence, that all-powerful gaze fixed solely upon my suffering body. My resentment grew, filling me from my head to my toes with deep hatred. Hatred, because I had lived like a dog my entire life, pain, suffering, awkwardness. Pain and suffering had hurt the most, but the awkwardness was unbearable. The overeating, the reluctance to dance, the feeling that all those people around me looked at ME then just as fast as they looked, they looked through ME like I had been a ghost my entire life. Something like being stuck between realities, normal but also abnormal. I was a stranger in a world I denied. This in-between reality became my home for the entirety of my life. It was an awful place to live. All that time. All that time.... you could have helped me, but you didn't, I thought all while looking straight forward knowing that He was looking right through me. His green eyes burrowed holes into my unconscious mind, or rather that is how I felt.

There was no helping but hating him for not showing himself when I was in the darkest depths of my mind. There I stood in his white elevator, the numbers on the floor counter whizzing by: 24, 25, 26. On and on like the dark brown wooden dining table. I looked as happy as I possibly could. A fake smile from cheek to cheek in an attempt to please him. Fronting an ecstatic demeanor that acted to shield my true emotions about him. He stood, arms crossed, relaxed.

His presence had been so intense that I suddenly realized He was dressed all in white. White slippers, white sweatpants that outlined the curves of his legs. A white button-up shirt. Even the buttons on the shirt were a bright pearl white. So clean, I thought as I remembered the yellow stained dress shirts that I had to wear during essential job interviews

because I couldn't afford to buy a crisp, new one from even the Goodwill. You could have helped me... The hatred coming to the point of explosive anger. Just as I was about to explode with the fiery rage of a life that was beyond hard, the elevator rang and stopped on floor 65. "This is our stop," He said as He put his hand on my shoulder, motioning me out of the large white elevator.

When I stepped out, there was only one hallway leading to a single door. The lights of the hall seemed to point in all directions to the door, illuminating it in a heavenly aura that beckoned me to it. We walked now honestly side by side as we both knew our final destination. The door.

"You know, Holiday..." He said in that commanding voice. "I know you are conflicted. Much anger and sorrow is crowding your soul."

I reeled back still trying to hold the illusion of happiness with my body language. To assure him of my content soul I asked, "What do you mean?" With a smile on my face, I uttered the words, "There's no conflict." I knew my soul was breaking in two.

"You forget who you are talking to, Holiday." He uttered the final words of his declarative statement, and we reached the door. I looked upon it with the strongest gaze I had ever felt. I felt my eyes grow wide and my conflicted soul looked at the door just like my wide eyes did. That door was familiar. Then, breaking the silence, He stated with a firm tone, "Yes it is."

I looked away from the door right at his face. Did I say that out loud?

"No you didn't," He said. "You'll have to forgive me, but you haven't realized that we are one and the same, Holiday. I know you are caught up in your life and the way it went, but you have to realize I give all my children the will to live the way they desire." He touched his face, picking at the freshly trimmed scuffle of his beard. "Even if that means you hurt each

other. I have sworn to let my children be as they are.”

My front of happiness began to falter, and the real me was dangerously close to coming out. I then shifted my gaze to the door. The faded cracking purple paint. The peephole was looking back at me like an all-seeing glass eye. My throat choked up with phlegm. I swallowed and readied myself to ask the most pressing question of my entire life. The question that had come into my mind almost every day during the shit show that was my life: “Then why don’t you help us? You could help us to be better! To not be so evil and full of hatred!” I realized that my voice had raised and that my stance had shifted into one of defiance, confrontation, and anger. My fake shield of happiness had disappeared and there I stood challenging Him of all things. He stood there with his arms to his side: calm, collected, at peace. Everything that I was pretending to be.

He let out a deep sigh and prepared himself to respond. His head turned and met my gaze, the deep green irises seemed to show me eternity and the black pupil, the end. “Because not even I have all the answers.”

His words struck me, and it pierced my confrontational stance leaving me naked and unprotected. There I stood, finally just me, no happy mask to hide my sadness, no battle-ready stance to shield my heart. Just...me and the man, in front of the old purple door. He reached down into the pocket of his white sweats. Out came a faded gold key worn down by the current of time. Slowly, He lifted his hand to the old lock of the purple door. He inserted the key, and it made a familiar clicking noise as the gears turned to the unlocked position. His leathery olive-colored hand reached for the tattered door handle. With the force of his hand, He turned that familiar timeworn handle and opened the door all in one swift, perfect motion.

There inside was my childhood home just as I remembered it years ago. A happier age from a lifetime ago.

“You are home,” He said. “Come and go as you please.”

I took one step into the home from a happier life. For the first time in a long time, a real smile had breached my face. When I turned around to the purple door, it was closed, and the man was gone.