

Cyanide

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There's a leak in the roof.

The water drips downwards, splashing its way onto the pillow and soaking across my face, greeting me each morning. I open my mouth and wait patiently for the droplets. That staleness, having crept in through layers of soft, rotting wood and faulty paneling is borderline acidic — but the taste never fails to push me from my cocoon of warm blankets, sending my body running towards the sink to gag and rinse away the flavor with a slightly better one. Here in the bathroom, the cool tiles of the floor send shivers up and down my legs, thin knees and paper skin knocking together. I pull out my toothbrush and smile at myself in the mirror. The landlord told me when I moved in to contact him immediately if anything was wrong with the apartment, but whether he meant it or not, I am happy with my leak, clutching it to my chest like a secret and closing the door of my bedroom carefully before I leave each morning — a refusal to share even a little of this precious luxury with the outside world.

At night, my eyes trace the black mold that has spread around the bubble the water has created in the plaster in smooth, circular patterns that lull me to sleep more than any lullaby ever could. Each morning, the gentle splash serves as the perfect alarm clock, urging me out of bed and into the world. The faultiness of this building has given me a precious gift, allowing me small tastes of suffering, from the slow drain in the kitchen sink, to the wind that whistles in through the faulty paneling around the windows, to the broken air conditioning. Every month when my mother sends me my rent, she tuts impatiently over the phone, surprised at the low prices and reminding me that her and my father expect me to move into a better neighborhood soon — god knows they can afford it, want something to throw their money at in a refusal to let it pile up, stack against the walls and overflow. They've never been ones for charity — but, then again, they had me. Despite what they say, I like this apartment, like the quiet dirtiness of everything behind its walls, the layers of refuse even the paint, layered time and time again, cannot cover up.

Out of the bathroom, I turn to the matter of breakfast. There's a small apple in the fridge, picked specifically for its stunted size, and I draw it out, sitting at the counter and eating all ninety calories methodically as my legs thump rhythmically against my chair with each bite — chewing at each thump. Ev-

ery piece of the apple is consumed, including the core, but the seeds I save for last, picking out and placing on my tongue, swirling them around within my mouth and feeling them knock against my teeth. When I was a kid, the maid would cut out the core of the apple for me, flushing the sweet center and its precious seeds down the garbage disposal, one by one.

“There's cyanide in the seeds,” she'd say, voice lilting, and even as a child I was fascinated by the idea of letting something so deadly so close to our bodies, hidden away inside a snack we were all encouraged to eat more of. When I was older, of course, I looked it up, let down to find that the so-called amount of poison in the seeds exists only in a nearly harmless chemical called amygdalin — convertible to cyanide only if the seeds are chewed up, and even then, in large quantities. Despite this, I am careful to swallow each seed whole, counting one by one as they hit my stomach, their value so small I don't even count them as part of the overall caloric number of the apple, logged carefully into my food journal and stored away in a cabinet that sticks deliciously, stubbornly, shut each time I try to open it.

Weekends are my least favorite part of the week — nothing to do. Try as I might to convince them, the yoga collective that I work at won't book classes for weekends, stressing the need for mental as well as physical rest. Without work though, the circles my mind runs in are the opposite of the well-deserved break I'm sure they imagine me taking. My thoughts do more stretching to fill the space of the empty days than they ever could in the studio, as I push down the back of some cow who's quickly failing New Year's resolution is to lose weight. No amount of sleeping in or idle hours can compare to that feeling — the soothing burn of my muscles as I sink into a particularly hard pose, the resentment coming in waves off the women I teach as they eye my body — every rib countable, the curve of my stomach as it arches inwards instead of bloating out, all of my form's angles with edges so sharp they could cut. The only thing even slightly similar is the satisfaction of inputting calories into my food journal, subtracting the work of the day, and coming up with a negative number.

There's dinner at my parent's house every Sunday, of course, but each minute until then is like a ticking clock, spelling out unimaginable boredom, with nothing to do but pace around the house, feeling every piece of food shifting within my stomach, a perfectly split balance of either feeling guilty for daring to eat, or sick from my lack of doing so. The memory of

from around the area — their smiles too shiny and their phones too poised, positioning every meal they receive into the perfect photo, seemingly desperate for people to know that they have the ability to put away twice their daily recommended value of calories and keep asking for more. I see them on my way to the yoga studio on weekdays, headed up the street with my custom mat tucked below my arm. I have to walk two miles away from the street where I live to call a cab — the ones that pass the streets here smell on the inside, both like feet and Pine-Sol air freshener.

My stomach rumbles again, screaming, and I reluctantly make my way to the fridge, pull out another apple, and repeat the same process. I reach the end of the apple, pop the seeds in my mouth, counting them as they hit my teeth.

I bite down.

The feeling of the seeds with their poisonous insides exposed hitting my stomach makes my hands shake and I stand up, the screech of the chair echoing throughout the apartment as it pushes back against my thighs. I can feel sweat starting to bead at my temples as I imagine the amygdalin working its way through my system, the chemicals of my body already beginning to change it to cyanide. Deep down, I know I cannot have eaten enough seeds to make whatever is coursing through my veins kill me, but the rapid thump of my heartbeat promises otherwise. My breathing begins to speed up and I wonder again if it is the anxiety or the poison before deciding I need to do something to soothe my mind, regardless of whether I am dying or not.

Moving deeper into the kitchen, I slide open a stiff drawer and pull out an old knife, rust gathering at its edges. Clutching the dull end of it tightly in my hand, I make my way towards the bedroom, moving with purpose. The apples and their seeds have turned into a riot in my stomach, sloshing around inside of me in a way that makes me pause for a second in my mission to visit the bathroom, eyeing the porcelain rim of the toilet before deciding that to vomit would be a weakness, letting my base emotions of fear get the better of me.

Back in my bedroom, the water bubble above the bed gleams in the midday sun, bloated and shining with condensation. The paint around it chips off and sags into the swell of the water as it pushes outwards, reminding me of the round stomachs of the women from yoga, puffing over their size twelve waistbands like a declaration of weakness. The knife in my hand feels heavy as I stand underneath my precious bubble, angling the blade upwards into the most tender part of the leak, the smallest hole that already drips downwards onto the mattress.

When I pop the bubble, I decide, I'll stand underneath it, and let the refuse I imagine has gathered within seep into every pore. I will show up at my parent's house for dinner, dressed in my Sunday best, stomach empty and aching, without having rinsed it off, mold crawling up and down my skin — the living embodiment of everything they'd like to forget, to push aside from their pretty world.