

### Cooking an Egg

The apartment is sixty-three degrees. The heat hasn't kicked on in two days but no one from maintenance has come to fix it and you just really don't want to get charged for the frozen pipes that could burst if it gets even colder. You're living on the money you made over the summer and the scraps you get as a crime reporter for a local newspaper. You can't afford bursting pipes.

You turn on the stove— the front left burner, never the others— and crack an egg into the pan that you stole from your old roommate before they moved out. You didn't steal it, you think. You suppose that you just never mentioned that they forgot it.

The egg doesn't pop or sizzle when it hits the pan. It's still too early for that. Instead it just sits there as you stand over it, prodding at it with the spatula. You put your hand in the pan but it is still too cool to burn you.

When you were five and lived in the house that was haunted, your father made biscuits and gravy every Saturday morning. No one had ever asked him to do it, he just did it. And you loved that about him. The biscuits always came out of a cardboard tube but he prided himself on the homemade gravy he would whip up. You'd stand at his waist and peek over the stove to watch him whisk the cream and sausage together. It's all in the wrist, he'd tell you. He'd tell you to not put your fingers on the stove but you just needed support when you were on your tiptoes looking at the bubbling gravy. You burned your pointer finger once by doing this and he stopped whisking to wrap your finger in ice. He walked you out to the living room and told you to watch T.V. until breakfast was ready.

Your family moved out of the house that was haunted two years after that, but you went back when you were older and someone else was selling the house. You saw the kitchen and there was a new stove, but what surprised you most was how tiny the kitchen had been.

Your mother made you a grilled cheese after you spilled blue paint on the carpet at the house out in the country— but not alone in the country, in a plain and tiny subdivision filled with retirees. You spilled blue paint on the carpet and she yelled at you because you were irresponsible and didn't respect what she worked to give you. You were grounded but she still had to make lunch for you and your older sister. You had to stand next to her as she flipped the sandwiches on the stove. You were still young enough to feel bad when your mother yelled at you. You still felt guilt instead of pity. So you stood next to her and kept your head down and traced the seams in the hardwood with your toes.

The egg is popping in the pan now— it's too hot. A speck of grease lands on your wrist as you go to turn the heat down and you want to cry but you don't. That would be obnoxious.

During the summers when you lived out in the country, your older sister was in charge when your parents went to work. She swore that she made the best macaroni and cheese, even though it came out of a box. And you believed her. She'd make lunch and you'd set the table and prepare the sides. The table setting consisted of two paper napkins, two white bowls, and two forks. The sides consisted of fruit snacks and pretzels. The two of you never fought when your parents were gone. You would pretend that you lived on your own and that you were roommates— roommates were always happy and never fought, you thought.

You flip the egg. Delicately. Don't pop the yolk.

The summer after your freshman year of college you move back into your parents' house to work and save money. They spend a week in Cape Cod in July and you throw a party. You get your sister to buy you beer and vodka, but before you do all that you want to cook a nice dinner for all your friends. Your roommate from freshman year comes over to help you and she boils the pasta as you toss a garden salad.

When everyone comes over they eat your salad and her pasta, but they drink out of red plastic cups at your parents' dinner table. And they find out you threw a party when they come home from Cape Cod because you never moved the furniture back into place.

Your partner prepares the chicken, searing strips in a pan on his stove. It is a Friday night and you are making a casserole together. His back is turned to you as he hunches over the tiny stove in his tiny kitchen in the tiny apartment that is carved out of the tiny house. You are sitting on the ground mixing a sauce and thinking about how much you love him. You think about living with him, moving him to the city where you go to school, and eating casserole every night before climbing into bed. And the broken heat wouldn't matter as much. He turns around and tells you that he forgot to preheat the oven. But that's okay, because you have all the time in the world.

You turn the knob on the stove to off and its click travels through the entire apartment. No one is there to hear it. You pick up the pan to flip the egg onto your plate. But the yolk breaks.