Confessions of a Dismembered Ragdoll

She visits my office every Thursday complaining that she didn’t get any sleep the day before or the day before that or the day before that. In fact, she doesn’t really get much sleep at all, because she never sleeps and she never has since she was born. I can see it in the way she shuffles through my door, dragging her feet as if she has cement blocks chained to her ankles. She lifts one foot in front of the other, wrestling against a current of restless nights and nightmares with her bloodshot eyes wide open. Unlike mine, her days never end. They just loop right into the next. Her life is like one long, very hard day that won’t come to a close until she shuts her eyes for good.

She tells me that she occasionally admires her husband while he’s sleeping. She stands over the bed, wondering what he’s dreaming about behind his sealed eyelashes. She envies the steady rise and fall of his chest, his feet that don’t squirm in the sheets, but rather lay motionless, rooted in the mattress. He doesn’t have to lay awake squeezing his eyelids together for hours. He doesn’t know the loneliness she falls victim to every night. The loneliness that drags her out of bed by her ankles, even though she is clinging on to her headboard with all of the strength she can muster, shrieking out for help. No one hears her shrill cries, because they blend in with their dreams.

Her husband didn’t realize the extent of her suffering until their first year of marriage. Every night she would pretend to sleep peacefully by his side, trying to mirror the slow pulse of his heart. If you were to tear both of their hearts out of their chests and compare them side by side, you would find that hers beats three times before his even beats once. Sometimes she would have a competition with herself to see how long she could go without inhaling, but after a few long seconds her lungs would cave in to the necessity for air. The week that they were moving in
to their first home, she snapped. She couldn’t lay there paralyzed like a limp rag doll any longer.

A slave to the cotton that stuffed her belly, weighing her down into the memory foam. Her fixed eyes like buttons, unblinking. She snapped like a rag doll, cotton intestines spraying all around the room blending in with the stuffing in her pillows. That night, she painted every wall in her house a different color. She painted the kitchen a grape hue for the sour taste on her chapped lips that usually comes at four in the morning. She painted the living room a crimson red, the color of the ribbons sewed in to her rag doll head. She heard her husband’s indulgent snores echoing from across the hall and painted the guest room green. With each stroke, she painted over the cracks in her smile and the tears in her stitches. For once, she forgot that she was the only one awake. The sound of the paint brush hitting the wall broke her silence. She painted even though her wrists were tired, and her knees wanted to embrace the hardwood floor. When she painted, sometimes she zoned out, painting over one spot over and over again. This was the closest to sleep she ever got. Her husband woke that morning to the scent of fresh paint and signed her up for sessions with me.

The red numbers on her digital clock tick by like centuries. She grinds her teeth, chewing into the time she has to spend without anyone to talk to. As a newborn, her piercing screams would go on into the night, leaving no time for her parents to breathe. Her parents had never seen anything like it. The average person dies after eleven days without sleep. It’s been thirty four years and she’s still alive, although she would’ve rather died after those eleven days. She’s always awake, but never truly there. Ears always half listening, eyes always half open. She leaves the window in her bedroom cracked just enough so she can sneak out without the alarm going off. She escapes the silence that rings in her ears to keep her sanity. She steps out into a city of screeching buses, buzzing ambulance sirens, glowing signs, and distant laughter. She
floats across the streets like a paper bag with her hands crammed in her pockets, hoping to soak in the energy that seeps through the pavement. She presses her nose up against the glass of hotels, making a mini fog. She wonders if she should work night shifts to help make ends meet. She wonders if they hire rag dolls.

She sits across from my desk with a weak smile painted on her face. Her eye bags run down her cheeks and into the couch. She tells me that she works night shifts at that hotel now. She says it’s not as bad as it seems, but I don’t believe her.