

I Have a Bomb in My Purse

A bell rings when I open the door. None of the retail associates turn around, too busy flipping through the dresses on the rack, too busy firing compliments at the women trying on fine lace and intricate beading in the dressing rooms. None except one whose nametag reads "Helen." She looks up and meets my gaze. She waddles around the store with an ill-fitting bra under her black uniform. Her smile lines reflect years of complimenting and commissions from finding brides their "perfect dress." She may know the departed look in my eyes. She may know what's nestled in between my tampons and mascara.

I have a bomb in my purse.

My red leather purse, handed down from my mother, conceals a weapon of mass destruction. I carry it on my shoulder so that I can flip through the dresses with the same freedom and excitement as the other women in the store. With the pulse of the timer so close to my heart, I feel my body sync up with the bomb.

I walk over to the first rack of dresses. The white is blinding. I see a dress that looks like mine. The beaded bodice feels rough on my palm. My finger traces the spaces between the pearls and diamonds. I take the dress from the rack and hold it up. I smooth the tulle. The train grazes the floor. I imagine feeling the weight of it hang heavy on my back as I step my way forward, towards my husband. I want to die in this dress. I want the detective on my case to bag this dress for evidence. I want the coroner to peel the tulle off my burnt body. I want him to identify my body in this dress.

"Do you want me to put that in a dressing room for you?"

"Yes, please."

I listen in on a woman shopping with her bridal party. I listen as her friends gush about her husband and how amazing they are and how their venue is gorgeous and how they will be perfect forever. I cannot wait for them to die.

I listen to Helen's younger counterpart pretend to be interested when an over-excited bride flips through her wedding planning binder.

"We are going for a Hollywood-Romance vibe, you see here, look, I'm going to have clapboards as my centerpieces!"

I imagine the pages catching wind and floating through the air, fleeing the rubble and bodies. I find Helen.

"I am ready to try on."

"Follow me sweetie."

I follow Helen to the dressing room. When she swings open the door, I see my dress hanging, waiting for me. I put my bag on the little bench next to the mirror. Helen comes up behind me.

"Now you let me know if you need any help getting the dress on. I'll be right outside."

I slide the lace sleeves off the hanger. Before I put it on, I bury my face in the bodice. I caress the train. Everything is silent for the faint pulse. Everything is silent until a woman goes into the room next to me to try on. I hear the rustle of her dress, she is probably inching it up her body. I

hear her take a deep breath, she is probably obsessing over herself in the mirror. The lock on her door clicks, she is overcome by a flood of stupid compliments from pitchy voices. *That dress was made for you! It looks so romantic! So sexy!* I open the door and peek out. I see her bridal party waving white boards with 10s written on them, one of their 10's covers a shoddily erased 7. I would have given it a solid 4—the princess cut swallows her figure and the sweetheart neckline looks cheap. I recede into my dressing room.

I step into my own dress. The tulle itches my legs. I reach my arms behind my back to tighten the corset. I look in the mirror. I look classy, I look beautiful. More beautiful than all of these bitches.

“Do you need any help in there honey?”

“I’m coming out now.”

I grab my purse, clutch it in my chest. There it is, there is the pulse, it’s getting faster. I open the door. Helen smiles her forced smile.

“That dress is made for you. Your husband will be a happy man.”

“I have a bomb in my purse.”

## Pills

Margot waits patiently for her mom to wake up so that she can get out of bed. She has been staring at her ceiling for two hours, tracing the divots in the pink popcorn finish with her eyes. The pink lace ruffle of her throw pillow itches her forearm and her stuffed animals pile on her legs. Her Disney princess comforter is too thick and Margot lies in a pool of moisture accumulated over the night. She hates how her room is set up like an American Girl Doll bed set. She wishes she had her iPad, but it is on the top shelf. It used to be on her nightstand, although that changed when her mom found out Margot would get up early and talk to strangers online.

The door creaks open. Her mom parks the wheelchair outside the door. She is in her crumpled nurse's uniform she bought online after she quit her job to take care of Margot. She grabs Margot by her armpits and drags her out onto the chair. She pets Margot's head, caresses her blonde hair that has now grown to the nape of her back. She hastily brushes out the knots, sending jolts of pain to Margot's scalp. She tells Margot how pretty she looks, like a doll. The hallway is so narrow that Margot's pinkies scratch the walls as they make their way toward the kitchen.

A banner is waiting in the kitchen for Margot— Happy Birthday Princess! A cake sits on the counter. It is big enough for eight people, but Margot knows that her mom will end up eating the whole thing. Her mom lights a candle and sticks it in the center of the cake. She warbles through the tune of Happy Birthday, drawing out each *to my dear Margot*. She tells Margot they will blow it out together on the count of three, to make a wish, but Margot's weak breath doesn't affect the candle's flame. Margot doesn't see any numbers anywhere, but she has been keeping track. She knows that she is 18 now.

Next to the cake are the pills. Normal medicine organizers can't fit how many pills Margot takes a day. So, every Sunday while *Wheel of Fortune* plays, her mom takes out all the pills and organizes them in plastic baggies for each day of the week. The pills could be confused with candies to the untrained eye, an eye that hasn't seen that many different pills in the same plastic baggy.

Her mom takes out the first pill, it is white and chalky and Margot can already taste the metal on her tongue. She can taste her arms slowly losing feeling after this pill was introduced. She can taste her doctors sharing their confusion, sharing their contradicting diagnoses. Margot can taste her mom's satisfaction when she stopped being able to dress herself, when she stopped being able to yelp when her mom did her hair, when she degenerated into a life-sized doll. Her mom sticks her chubby fingers down Margot's throat, placing the pill on the back of her tongue. She then holds Margot's forehead and chin, shutting her mouth. She tells Margot to swallow, her smile stiff and eyes wide. Margot swallows.

The second, third, and fourth pill are coated in gelatin. They don't taste like anything. They taste like the liquid that is pumped into Margot's feeding tube even though she knows she can still chew and swallow.

The fifth pill is a dull red and circular. It tastes like bile and rotten bananas. It tastes like moving two states away the day after she overheard the lady from child protective services questioning her mom on their overflowing medicine closet. It tastes like changing doctors every year when they start to recognize the tortured look in Margot's eyes, when they start to suspect something.

Margot has been waiting for the sixth pill. It is about an inch long and as thick as the width of her thumb. Her mom used to crush it up and feed it to her in spoonfulls of applesauce, but Margot has been working up her mother's trust for the past two years. Now, Margot takes the pill whole. Her mom once again sticks her chubby fingers in Margot's mouth, placing the pill at the back of her throat and closing her chin. Margot has been practicing. She twists her tongue to have the pill sit in the bag of her throat lengthwise. She gulps. She feels the pill block her throat, feels it restrict the stale air from entering her lungs. It feels like the overwhelming sweetness of a maple-glazed donut from her favorite coffee shop, like the burn of lactic acid after a run, like conversations on the internet with Evan. The pills that render her motionless work to stop the usual flailing and gasping that happens when someone chokes. Margot's face slowly turns purple as her mom tries to find the seventh pill of the day in the bag. Margot's eyes close as her mom walks to the medicine closet. She smiles when she remembers how she was able to whine and blubber last Sunday while her mom was finishing up organizing the sixth pills, how her mom simply zipped up the baggies after caring for her instead of putting the seventh pills in. Margot's thoughts fade as her mom angrily rummages through the dozens of identical prescription bottles. Her heart stops beating just as her mom proudly holds up the correct bottle.

The seventh pill is bright blue and oblong. It falls onto the linoleum floor as her mom lets out a guttural scream.