

I enter Cash's room with a platter of tonight's dinner. It has been a while since I've seen my brother go out. He had never fully healed and overworked himself so it's no surprise that he became bedridden like this.

"Feeling any better today?" I say.

"Hardly." He says.

It's not what I want to hear, but it's not what I want to contemplate either. *Hardly. I am hardly any better myself.* I am his sister, and he, my brother. I will take it upon myself to take care of him, for he is kind to me. *Unlike Darl, but Darl is gone now, so I can say that. That I am hardly better.*

Pa had said I put on some weight. I already know I am short on time. Darl is gone now, so we are rationed more at the table, but Pa knows no such division. And neither does the pulse within me.

"Your hair is longer now, Dewey Dell." Cash speaks. It is sudden. It is rare to hear him speak like he used to nowadays. Why does he pick on my hair the way Pa picks on the seams of my dress? I don't want to see him the way I must see him, and he must not see me.

*He must not.*

"In the closet, you will find my toolbox. I have a pair of scissors for you." He says.

"Eat your food." I say. I place the platter down and briskly turn. The last thing I need for Cash to do is snip at my seams.

"I reckon Pa doesn't have the money for a haircut." He says.

*Why must you keep talking?*

"Good night, Cash." I say and close the door behind me.

But why did he have to point that out? I toss and turn in bed and feel the way my hair awkwardly shifts around me, all over my face, and into the crevices of my bed. Did it always use to be like this? I used to move like water in the safety of my bed, but this hair holds me back. I hate this added weight.

I will cut it off at once.

I sneak back into Cash's room. In the shroud of night, nobody notices me, and neither does he, for he lies still in his bed. If I hadn't known any better, I would have thought he were dead. I am not here for him anyway.

The scissors. They're big, so I hold them with both hands, getting some sticky black stuff onto my palms. It feels stagnant and disgusting, but there is no luster to capture the gentle moonlight, and for that I am grateful.

The scissors. Meant for the hands of a working man, for Cash's hands. Meant for cutting rope and wires. Then one clean cut should be enough to cut my human hair.

*One clean cut. And I'll be rid of this stagnant feeling. One clean cut. And I'll be rid of this anchoring weight. One clean cut. One clean cut. One clean cut.*

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I chose to write in the perspective of Dewey Dell relatively shortly after the events of the book. This is heavily inspired by her train of thought during the wagon ride to go bury their mother. I liked that even though she is already speaking in first person, she still has this alter ego that talks in italics towards her and sometimes sways her judgment of reality and actions even, and so I chose to mirror that in another moment of desperation—*delusion* almost.

As the clock ticks, she's closer to her due date, and it becomes increasingly harder to hide from the others that she is pregnant out of wedlock. Even with Darl gone, her problems only worsen. My judgment is that she would be reasonably paranoid by now, even more than she was before. She had wanted to *kill Darl* over this before, because it had only been *one* person who knew her secret. But once she can no longer mask her pregnancy behind weight gain or other excuses, *everyone* will know her secret, and she cannot kill everyone. I saw it appropriate to make her jump the gun and take matters into her own hands before the clock runs out.

I tried to retain the gothic element by leaving the ending ambiguous. :)