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Michael Baccam

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Baccam: You Are a Giant, You Think

YOU ARE A GIANT, YOU THINK

**MICHAEL
BACCAM**

First, there will be ants. They'll crawl on that half-peeled apple, the one you dropped, and use their pincers to carry off the pieces. And you'll just sit there. Unwilling to stand, to bother pushing yourself to your feet and bracing your leg with a hand. You'd let someone carry you if they would. Carry you everywhere. You'd point to the kitchen and your husband would put you on his back, take you to the fridge so you could grab a Popsicle or a Bud. There would be no shame living this way.

But now you aren't even the wife of a bad husband. You're worse. Thirty-six, sitting on this porch, waiting for your husband to ask you to come back. You're peeling apples in this old-people's town while your grandmother sleeps inside. She jerks in and out of consciousness, only waking long enough to suck drool back into her mouth. The television is too loud. Her face is blue-lit.

You remind yourself that she wasn't always like this. Once, she killed a snake for you. You were seven and in her yard, on crutches after the second operation to elongate your tibia, after the doctor cracked it into three pieces. You pushed yourself around, looking through the vegetable garden, and you saw it: a dark green coil with a yellow stripe down its back. You screamed and let go of the crutches, folded onto the dry, sandy dirt. And even though the snake moved away, you screamed louder. Then

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your grandmother came outside with a cleaver. She walked into that garden, pushing aside her mint and tomatoes, and stepped on the snake. She grabbed it by the tail and carried it to the sycamore, pinned her hand against the bark, against the snake, and swung the knife into the tree. It was simple, like cutting rope, and the tail-half of the body fell to the ground, briefly tightening into itself before dying. Your grandmother tossed the snake's head into the bushes and dropped the cleaver. She left it all there and carried you inside.

Later, you found the head and picked it up, considered its dead eyes. You took it with you, your small hand wrapped around its neck, and grabbed a rock from under the porch. Then you laid the snake on the ground, straightened its half-body, and smashed its head into the earth, swept dirt over it. After that, you went looking for snakes, a paring knife pressed between your hand and the crutch. You went looking, even though you never found them.

Now, you watch for ants. You can see their paths to the house, dotted lines leading to sandy mounds. And after the ants, there will be fruit flies, you tell yourself, then gnats, then cockroaches. They'll swarm the house, block the windows. You're sure of this.

But you won't stop them. For now, you buy two bags of apples and set yourself outside, on the porch, peeling. You'll make your grandmother a pie. For all you care you'll make a pie for every house on the block. And after it's dark, after the neighbors have dead-bolted their doors, you'll sneak up their walkways and leave a pie on each porch. That's what you'll do. Not even a word. Though maybe you'll pull the heads off their tulips or slide the welcome mats to the bottom of their porch steps. Maybe you will think this is exciting.

Inside, a man on the television says, "Three-hundred and seventy-five days of geese," and for a moment you stop peeling and look at the apples. These are ugly, you think. These are the ugliest apples you've ever seen. Too much green skin at the

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crowns. Too many flat sides, blunt edges, bruises.

You put the knife down.

You aren't concentrating, just flicking the knife like a child whittling a stick. Slow down. Pick up the knife and start at the stem. Curl it around the apple so a coil grows toward the ground.

Think about the cash you stole from your husband. Five thousand and change, even though you didn't need it. This after you grew accustomed to him pulling his shoulder away when you settled into him on the couch, after months of him going to Cleveland for business and staying the whole weekend even if it was only a four-hour drive. After he'd come home late and sleep on the sofa, ignoring the sound of you running the shower to let him know you were still awake.

So you became used to sleeping alone, running a fan to replace your husband's breathing, pretending to not be afraid of the city. In bed, you thought of taking a pair of scissors to every piece of clothing he owned, thought of how you could break his arm with a hammer if you wanted. But all you did was leave – something neither of you ever thought could happen because what would you do anyway? Catch a train to Pittsburgh. To Florida. A bus to your grandmother's. Make some pies. Check the missing persons web sites and play out his words in your head, his pleas on the local news to help him find his wife. He'd hold a picture of you and him at that Fourth of July barbecue, the blue and silver Chicago skyline in the background, and he looks good in the photo, your husband, tall and broad, genuinely happy. You stand at his shoulder, sweaty and sunburned.

The news will say there is a 98% chance that you are dead.

You imagine that he will come to your grandmother's house to kill you. He will strangle you. He will bash in your temple with a can of Campbell's Chunky soup. He will hold your wrists down and tie you to your bed and start a fire underneath it. Then, he will turn himself in. Or he'll take you alive, tie you up and put you in the backseat as he drives the car off a bridge. His

forehead will crack the windshield and the water will lift your body to the car roof until you both drown.

You're always disappointed at the end of your fantasies, so you start over, imagining new deaths. But they're all a joke. He doesn't care enough to do something like that. Any of that. Anyway, he expects you'll come back.

You will not go back.

And when a gnat settles in front of you on the white, paint-peeled bench, you will put the knife down again. You'll lean forward and press your finger to the gnat, to the bench, applying just enough pressure so it cannot crawl away. You'll press your finger to that gnat and think you feel every vibration of its wings, its legs, its body. You are a giant, you'll think. You are a whale. You'll push your finger forward, slowly, feeling the gnat's body roll. Back and forth. Until its legs are broken underneath, until the wings rub away, until the body vanishes.

You'll keep rubbing at that same stretch of wood, the paint splintering into your finger. But you will never finish those apples.

Instead, you'll sit and wait for the ants. They'll crowd every rug, your bedsheets, your grandmother's recliner. Your grandmother will be dead. Your pies will be too sweet. And the ants will crawl up your back, along your shoulder. You won't move. They'll pile on top of each other, swarm the porch, smother the walls. They'll carry this whole goddamn house away.