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## Her

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# Her

*Haley Bucher*

## I. 1930

From the grand balcony we observe the party, set apart from the other guests who are mingling, sipping, and chatting below. Nobody knows we are here. We cannot be seen or heard and unlike those poor, ignorant people, we know what we are looking for. We know there is something here, something not quite right; a presence that is not objective like us but malevolent. We are tracking it; we are watching it evolve.

We spot June across the room. Small and timid with shoulder length brown hair, a raccoon mask of freckles, and hazel eyes, she is dressed in a flattering but forgettable forest green shift. June is observing the party from a safe distance, conscious of the fact that she has only been invited because she had been standing next to a friend of the host who had felt inclined to extend the invitation to June after inviting her friend Pearl. The tall and slender Pearl always seemed to showcase her plain beauty in a distinguished and unafraid manner that drew others to her. June picked her out of the crowd after only a minute of searching. Pearl had chosen a most becoming dress for the occasion, a light pink, satiny, A-line number that clung subtly to her waist and hips. *Of course*, June thought.

Pearl was looking for someone. She needed a man, an intelligent, likeable, mysterious man. She entered the room and knew he'd be there. She spotted Johnson lounging near the muted sofa across the room, engaged in polite but heated conversation with a visiting gentleman. Sly movements, confidant gaze, and such presence! Yes, he'd do quite well.

"I'm sorry to interrupt gentlemen, but may I have a word with you, Mr. Johnson?"

"Of course, Ms..."

"Diveré, but please, call me Pearl."

She led Johnson to a corner. She had imagined the way the scene would play out in her mind. She smoothed her dress across her hips, looked up and arched her brow. She saw the corner of his mouth twitch almost imperceptibly and knew that she had chosen correctly. She watched his eyes carefully. He looked amused, curious, *interested*. Good. Pearl clasped his hands as if they were old friends, and began to speak, making sure to keep eye contact. His hands were warm, hearty hands, and well maintained, much like her own manicured fingertips, a shade lighter than her blush colored dress, Johnson noticed.

“Mr. Johnson, I must say...” she began, before twisting those fingertips into his palms in a practiced manner. He felt himself lean forward before closing his eyes.

We watch Johnson teeter before collapsing. He is dead but no one notices him, not now. There is nothing we can do for Johnson. And she, this Pearl whose identity She has stolen, is undoubtedly dead as well. This is our third encounter with Her. We are no closer to stopping Her, but we are beginning to discern Her patterns.

## II. 1954

Each time She appears it's closer to the present. We're running out of time.

We watch Dick enter the house. He takes his coat off, hangs it on the hook, and places his keys on the entry table. He slips off his shoes and sighs, rubbing his forehead. He's had a long day at work. He can't wait to relax in front of the television with a beer. Usually he's an early riser and preps dinner for himself in the morning so he has something to eat when he gets home, but this morning was particularly rough and he didn't have the time. Before, he wouldn't have had to worry about cooking for himself, but since his insane ex-wife, Jane, had been sent to prison six months ago after a series of incidents ending in an attempted murder, he had been on his own.

We know something Dick doesn't though. Jane is not insane. Jane is dead. *She* is Jane now.

We see Dick digging through the refrigerator for leftovers, which he warms and brings into the living room. He turns on the television and relaxes in his chair. We see the size eight nude pumps

resting in the hallway that he did not, and we know he should have turned on the overhead light in the living room before settling into his chair with his dinner. But he is tired.

Though the room is already dark and the only light comes from the animated television and the lamp across the room, Dick feels a shadow pass over his face and shivers. He opens his eyes but the room is just as he'd left it a moment before. *That's strange*, he thinks. *I must just be really out of it today*. He swallows a bite of rice, realizing as he does that the whistles and voices on the television have gotten noticeably quieter. He stands and goes to turn up the volume, noticing as he does a small cylindrical tube resting on the top of the set, which he instantly knows to be Jane's cherry red lipstick. He frowns. *I thought I'd finally gotten all of her things packed up. I don't know how I missed this*, he thinks. Shaking his head, he replaces the lipstick and turns off the television. *It's time for bed*.

Dick gathers his dishes and places them in the kitchen sink. He walks through the living room on his way to the bedroom, feeling uneasy. It isn't just him, something is off. Quite literally. The lamp he had left on is off. Trying not to panic, he turns around as quickly as he dares and goes instead through the sitting room to get to the stairs. He is oddly calm, considering he's finally realized what is happening.

Dick takes a deep breath and rounds the corner, knowing that she is watching. The light at the top of the stairs is off. *Leave*, a voice in his head says. *Get out, now!* But he can't. He doesn't know why, but he can't. Instead he reaches the stairs and climbs the first two, his hand trailing behind him on the banister. The hall light flickers on as he takes a third step, and all he sees is her face. He looks into those far off brown eyes framed by tangled blond hair. *Poor Dick, if only you knew. She's not your Jane*.

Dick is compelled to climb the stairs. He freezes when he reaches the top, fully aware that she has come to finish what she started, what she attempted, before being carted off to prison. Dick falls into her arms and is dragged into the bedroom. She shuts the door. We do not see it, but we are aware of the moment he goes. The hall light goes out.

We couldn't have helped him. But we are closer.

### III. 2002

We lost track of Her for a while. We can't afford to lose Her again. We're running out of time.

We see Katie retie her apron around her baby blue, grease-stained uniform. She sighs at Sam, busy tossing a sticky wad of dough, and nods when he asks if she is covering for Renee again. Today is the fifth day in a row Katie has pulled a double for the girl, always coming up with last minute reasons to get out of work. She'd have fired her by now if she was the boss, though seeing as Renee is the owner's niece, she doubts that'll happen any time soon.

We watch Katie inhale, close her eyes, hold the breath for as long as she can, then slowly release all of her air. She is ordinary at best, on the shorter side with shoulder length mousy brown hair, brown eyes, and a slightly crooked smile. And unlike Renee, she is paying her own way through college, waitressing at the diner just down the street while also working as a hostess at the pizza parlor, just allowing her to scrape by. Though she is exhausted, sweaty, and stressed from getting behind on her homework, Katie puts on a smile, reminding herself that kindness and customer service pay. Literally. She grabs her pen, making her way to the back booth where a tall blonde woman has taken a seat.

"What can I get for you tonight?" Katie asks.

"Just a soda for now. Coke," answers the woman, surveying the dining area.

Katie walks behind the counter to grab a glass, noticing that the woman seems jumpy and reaches for her side when the child sitting a few booths over gives a sudden yell. *Weird*, Katie thinks. It isn't her place to judge, however, as she's seen much weirder and has other customers to attend to.

"Here you are. Let me know if you need anything else," she says with a smile, dropping off the woman's Coke as she greets the family of six that has just entered the restaurant. She looks at the clock behind the counter. Five more hours to go. After seating the family of six and listing the night's specials, she returns to the blonde woman who has hardly touched her drink. The woman asks if there is a phone that she can use and mumbles an excuse about needing to check on some business of hers.

“Of course,” Katie motions, leading the woman behind the counter and through the swinging door marked, “Employees Only.” “It’s on the wall right over there,” she says, pointing to a dirtied white phone, the cord hopelessly tangled and attached to a chipped handset. To the right of the phone stands Sam’s work station and to the left, the large sweaty oven used to cook the town famous wood-fired pizzas. The fire inside is calm and the small dying flames lazily lick the burnt brick sides. Katie stokes the flames, adding several large chunks of wood and stirring the ultra-hot embers around them. She sighs, weary of the heat and exhausted from her double shift.

We know what is going to happen but we cannot do anything to help, not yet. It must happen in order to for us to stop Her.

The woman hangs up the phone and comes up behind Katie. She pushes her headfirst into the oven, cracking her head on the brick. Katie’s hair ignites and sizzles with her blood. Katie must burn. But now so will She.

#### IV. 2020

*Then, for that moment, she had seen an illumination; a match burning in a crocus; an inner meaning almost expressed. But the close withdrew; the hard softened. It was over – the moment.* ~Virginia Woolf

We watch Her awake to unfamiliar surroundings. She is not where She had fallen. She is lying in a hospital bed in a cramped room with small windows and heavy drapes that let through minimal light. The room smells of stale urine and bleach. There is a chair next to Her bed; empty. Another bed within arm’s reach of Hers; empty. The solid wooden door is shut tight and three of the five fluorescent ceiling lights are out. The two that are still functional flicker and hum, the only noise She can discern.

She gets the impression that this room is rarely used. She is right. She worries She has been forgotten. She is very, very wrong.

We watch Her struggle.

She opens her mouth to call out but finds Herself unable to do so; She can’t form the words. She tries to sit up but can’t; Her muscles won’t respond. Her neck is the only extremity She can move, the rest are

limp and uncooperative. Her eyes grow wide with panic as She realizes she is paralyzed, realizes She is trapped in this body; a pale, frail, limp vessel. She cranes Her neck as far as She can, taking note of the three discarded needles on the bedside table and the scalpel that sits on the filing cabinet in the corner, the only clean instrument in a room blanketed in dust. Then She hears two distinct sets of footsteps in the hallway outside, a slow and heavy clomping next to a hurried stiletto tap.

Now *we* are the footsteps; *we* enter the room. We are no longer objective. We are no longer confined to passivity. She is vulnerable.

We watch Her shut her eyes and try to reach the light again.

Our touch sends Her into blackness.