

NATALIE MORRILL

Ossicles

The child had a thought like a nail through the sole of her foot, stuck. The hatted aunt with lips like scrambled egg looked at the child but could not see the thought; she saw only the child, staring into the corner at the floor where, the hatted aunt proved with a glance, there was nothing except off-yellow off-white smears six inches up from the floor, and dust.

Are you hungry at all, she said to the child.

But the staring seated child with the thought like a nail through the sole of her foot went sit, sit, sit.

So the hatted aunt with lips like scrambled egg and eyes like boiled eggs sat and watched the wall.

The uncle of the child came now tall and smear-coloured from the office halfway down the hall, and he said to the hatted aunt, Thank you for waiting. If we hurry we can make it there by seven. And the hatted aunt said, I wish we had gone to your – and the child could not hear what the hatted aunt said to the uncle after that, for she said it with her face hidden behind her hat and her mouth hidden up against the uncle's smear-coloured coat.

The uncle said, Come Emily, and he reached his sallow fingers out at the child until she peered up from the thought she was having, and laid her hand in his fingers to hold. She followed the uncle into the elevator and the hatted aunt followed after them.

Outside it was all evening, and shadows rising like deep pooling water between the buildings, and the child was caught again on the thought like a nail. The uncle did not notice it so much except that now and again he had to tug the child by the hand when she forgot to walk. The hatted aunt did not notice it because she had her purse open in front of her as she walked and she was searching through it and saying, Herbert, where did I.

Meanwhile the child almost did not notice the dark rising purple from the storm drains, and she almost did not feel the uncle's fingers around her hand, and she almost forgot to cross her eyes at the yellow dog graffitied in the alley between the corner store and the hardware store, but at the last moment she did remember and the yellow dog did not try to follow them. But the thought like a nail caught and caught and caught, and she looked down at her hand, and wondered.

When they rounded the corner and there on the side of a building was the twenty-foot man, slick like wet soap and drinking a wet cold glass of milk and saying BONES NEED MILK[®], the uncle did not feel what happened inside the child's thought. He only pushed open the door of a restaurant called Minelli's and held it for the hatted aunt as he said to her, I don't even think I spoke to him during the trip. And the hatted aunt might have replied, but the child did not hear her, because the thought like a nail through the sole of her foot went *twist*.

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Marcus Lauzon has seven puppies.

He said he has, he has seven puppies now, and he named them Cleatus, Heatus, Hercules, Pinnocchio, Tama-Tama and Sam. And Le Dauphin.

Because I named them, I named them that.

I don't think he has seven puppies, Em.

Why did he name them after your ponies?

Why did he

He let you name his