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Eric

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Eric

I like Eric. I like when you yell at him, not really yell but say "Eric" in that voice that makes kids, made me, real scared that I had done something wrong. And when you say *Eric* in that tone, even if you follow it with something benign like, "I like what you're making but I called, clean up time," he looks scared, like a dog. He nods his head the whole time you're talking. He doesn't even know what you're going to say, he just keeps nodding.

Sometimes, if I see a dog outside a store, I say "bad dog". I like to watch their bodies just slink off their bones. Their eyes do this weird thing- as if they can't bear to look at you, but they have to peek to see how mad you really are. So their eyes, which are already bulging, roll, - roll out and roll in and roll sideways. And their ears get really tense. They're afraid to hear what you're going to say. They know they're guilty. They know they can't remember all the rules.

The other kids don't even listen to me. Four and five years old, and they have no respect for teachers. They put their hands on their ears when I say, "clean up time."

It's their mothers really, they're the ones that truly drive me crazy. The kids are running around wild, throwing their shoes, saying they won't go home and the mothers are trying to reason with them, *Darling, please, I really need for you to put your shoes on so we can go home. Because if we don't leave soon, I'll be late picking up your daddy, and then he'll be angry with me, very angry and very hungry. And you'll be hungry too, and dinner won't be ready on time. Then daddy will be grouchy all night and you'll be crying and I'll curse him under my breath, because men's lives and men's needs are so important, and he has the job that makes the money. He grew up knowing how to do the work. And he'll hear me cursing and he'll yell at me that I have no idea*

how hard it is for him and the responsibility and the burden he carries, and if I could put a business together that would be great, but I can't. I can't even pay the fucking parking tickets on time, so they double, and he has to do everything. And then I just hate myself so much because he's right. I couldn't have gotten the insurance or the mortgage or put the crib together or fixed the sink even. He did it. I can't even follow cooking directions. And then I get so depressed. But even though I'm hating myself, I'm thinking about killing him. I lie in bed imagining I have a knife. But as I raise the knife above his chest, my anger slinks away. He continues to snore heavily. I watch the walls and ceiling, hidden by night, show bits of themselves in as the darkness grays. I bring my knife hand toward my neck. I imagine feeling the coolness of the blade touch my skin, circling my collarbone, snaking its way over my breasts. My breathing quickens until the knife reaches my stomach. My hand goes limp with disappointment. Then I surprise myself and push against the bloot. I slice through the fat of my belly. The flesh cuts soft as butter, easy and bloodless, until I reach the womb. Then all the menstrual periods of all my life, that thick jammy gel, will ooze out of me, and I will stick to the bed. I won't ever be able to get out of bed. It will cake around me, but not crack.

It's not like that with Eric. His mother walks erect into the classroom, her black hair cut sharp to her face, staying stiffly in place, her heels clicking on the linoleum floor. She never bends to the small chairs or three foot cubbies. Her perfumed scent, like an alligator trail in the swamp, cuts through the moist, almondy smell of sweat-dampened four and five year olds. She says "Eric put your shoes on, we're leaving," and he just nods and does it.

