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“Sometimes there was no dialogue—just a kick or a push or a punch.”

## STARING

Katrina Robinson

I hated the way he looked at me, with a curled lip and narrowed eyes. Always watching, waiting for me to mess up. To trip over my lanky, adolescent legs. To do something – *anything* – that he deemed wrong.

“You clumsy bitch!” and the accompanying slap.

“Getting too big for your britches, ain’t ya?” and a shove.

“Your mother’s daughter – that’s who you are!” and several rapid smacks on the ass with a belt.

Sometimes there was no dialogue – just a kick or a push or a punch. Or, as I got older, a pinch or a grab or a squeeze. I preferred the way he’d treated me when I was a child. At least then, my face was the only thing I needed to protect from his assault.

For years, he stared at me with his bloodshot, jaundiced eyes; and for years, I kept my head down and did what I was supposed to do. I made his dinner. I fetched his slippers, like a dog. I darned his socks . . . and then later, I cried in muffled frustration with those same socks stuffed into my mouth and his fleshy weapon stuffed into *me*. I endured the beatings, the fondling, the verbal destruction, the constant interior battle I suffered through as I wondered what I’d done to make the universe want to punish me so cruelly.

And then, on my nineteenth birthday, my world morphed into another, strange yet wonderful existence. The universe answered my prayers: Daddy had a stroke.

His watery blue eyes still watched me from his gaunt, sunken-in face every waking minute during every day. His heated gaze still penetrated my clothing even while he was confined to a wheelchair. His crooked mouth drooled, and his eyes rolled with rage at his inability to reach out and grab

what was his.

I endured the glare, as I had for over nineteen years – for 7,004 days. For 10,085,760 excruciatingly slow minutes.

But last night, I awoke from a dream – a nightmare, really, and one I’ve had dozens of times since my puberty-stricken body had sprouted nubby breasts. Him on top of me, his breath rank and his weight crushing and his hands groping like an animal’s clumsy, dangerous claws.

Panting, I swiped a hand across my face, ridding it of tears and sweat. Then I stood, put on my robe, and tied the sash so tightly that it pinched my waist and made me gasp. As I passed my dresser, I reached out a hand and grabbed something without looking. I walked to his bedroom.

He woke up when I plunged the sewing scissors into his left eye, and the garbled screams that ripped from his throat made the corners of my lips turn up involuntarily.

He has cried and moaned since I removed his eyes. It’s been four hours – 14,400 sweet seconds. I know I should clean up the blood . . . the rug is as good as garbage . . . but I can’t stop looking at him, my eyes narrowed and mad giggles bubbling through my lips.

I can’t stop staring.