

# without words

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Honorable Mention, Short Story

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## I. Events

1. The urge sneaks up on me out of nowhere. I am standing above my bathroom toilet in my small one-bedroom apartment. I shake and realize that the words my father just said to me have made me consider going back into my old ways. *Chubs is who you are. Am I not right about that?* he'd said. I am wearing my favorite baggy blue jeans. *The ones that always make me feel thin.* My hair is tied back in a ponytail, wet like the inside of my mouth before I vomit. There is a picture above the toilet by Cecilia Lasbury that reads, "There are only two lasting bequests we can hope to give our children. One of these is roots; the other, wings." *If only I had wings.* The shower curtain still wet from the morning shower, sticks itself to the inside of the dirty bathtub. I am waiting to hear the phone ring, hoping my father will call me back and apologize for that name he has been calling me for the last year. *Chubs.*

2. I answer the phone with agitation. My father is calling me back. He doesn't remember to say hello. *Hello is too caring.* The rest of my house is a mess, I notice. Dirty dishes from food I only half finished. Ripped up birthday and holiday cards are spread across stained carpet from the night before. I can't stand the fact that my father had an affair with my mother. Everyone else refers to it as a mistake. But I know it is my father's mistake. Dirty laundry accumulates in piles beyond my bathroom and I still don't have the desire to wash them. Why wash your clothes when you are too ugly to look at? I haven't been able to stick my finger down my throat and clean out my sins. *What happened?* he says. As if he can't believe I hung up on him. Not his daughter. I know better. *I hung up because of what you called me,* I say to him. He is making me jump back into dieting again. Death dieting.

## II. Characters

1. The girl stands approximately five feet five inches tall. An ordinary height. When she sees herself naked or dressed in front of her bathroom mirror she feels fat. Even if she is not. She sees the years that she has taken out on her body. Her skin is the color of an acorn squash and her hair finds comfort in clumps on the floor. Nothing pretty can ever be put on her body. Clothes only accentuate her uneven rolls. Her pants are always too long and too tight when the zipper is pulled up. Her tops are always solid in color. She'd heard that stripes make you look fatter. She wears no makeup, no curls in her hair. She hasn't washed her hair in three days. She doesn't care if anyone else thinks she looks ugly anymore. She is ugly, isn't she?

2. The father. A southern Baptist from Kentucky. He has nothing except for apartment complexes that he owns and a wife. He assumes she doesn't love him but stays with him out of comfort. This is fine with him. He can get what he wants from any woman. For six years he'd had a sexual relationship with the mother of his accidental child. The minister that he visited didn't even know, as his mistress sat across the room at the end pew with her parents. He has friends everywhere. At the country club, the bank. Even the town mayor. They all like him. Even though he's been lying to them for the past twenty-four years.

He'd set up different telephone numbers for his daughter to call and a separate post office box which made his lies travel twenty miles farther into town. At night he lies in bed wondering what his life would be like with her. With the woman that he couldn't choose over his wife.

### ***III People & Circumstances That Lead To Her Eating Disorder***

1. The stepfather, whom she never calls father. He doesn't deserve the title. She remembers those times, late at night, sitting at the kitchen table. She counted walnuts, peanuts, or even M&M's to understand math. She never got math. And she never got him. He'd interrupt and try to explain to her that two times two equals four, not six. But she didn't get it. He'd become outraged and throw the piles on the floor. The tree outside would always stop moving when he got mad, she noticed. He doesn't understand that she is good at other things. Like English, perhaps. He tells her she is stupid. That all those chips she shoved in her mouth instead of the apple her mother cut her for a snack made her dumb. And fat, of course.

2. The mother. She isn't strong in defending herself against either man she'd been with, but strong when it came to defending her children. She knows this, of course, but doesn't want anyone else to know. *Leave her the fuck alone*, she'd scream in defense of her daughter. She still remembers the time her daughter, at eight years old, had to rehearse a lie for the homeowners association about a hole her husband had placed in the wall. Her daughter looked weak but willing, like her that day. The daughter said, *I was running in from the pool and forgot to wear my flip-flops like mommy always tells me to. I fell on the tile and my foot just hit the wall really hard. I did it on accident.* The hole was gone in a few days. Along with the tension. If anyone knew that her husband had done such a thing then what would they think? She just does what she has to do to survive and make sure her kids get through school. This is more important than her happiness and safety isn't it?

3. The birth father, which she only met a year ago. His initial meeting with her seemed rehearsed. Give her an envelope with five hundred dollars in cash but only after you give her the once over. A once over, five times that is. Since then, she talks with her father once a week. He is only a financial provider. *The word care is just a word*, she often says. He smothers her with guilt gifts. Material things. An eight hundred dollar couch. Eleven hundred dollars a month. Plus additional spending money for times with her friends. But along with this comes his opinion. *You're fat*, he says to her often. Why doesn't she want to be like all other women? A wife who has dinner ready because she is supposed to. Skirts past the knee and button down shirts to hide what other men shouldn't see. Then there comes the remark about her weight. *Did you check into Weight Watchers?* he says. She hasn't but she told him that she'd paid for a membership. The weight will be coming off soon. No matter what.

#### *IV. How I Said It All*

1. I stand by the telephone that holds nothing but a dial tone. I have just told my father what I know has needed to be said for a long time. *I am not fat*, I said. *I am who I am. That is how it has always been. With or without you.* I don't wait for a response from him. There has always been time for a response. This time I have no interest.

2. I resume my position above the toilet. The urge to vomit isn't there. Instead I watch as pieces of birthday and holiday card phrases, such as *good luck* or *until next year*, fall from my hands and into the toilet. I look up and see that Cecilia Lasbury is still waiting. *Waiting to give me my wings.* My hair is still wet from my own fear; I pull it loose from the ponytail.

