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The Importance of Spoons

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The Importance of Spoons

Author Bio

Natalie Orga is a first year intending to major in English with a writing concentration and minor in Studio Art. She is from Bear, Delaware, and hopes to become a published novelist in the future. She would like to thank her dog for being extremely fluffy.

The Importance of Spoons

Would you keep a secret? I know I don't have an alibi. I know that I am technically doomed. After all, here I sit, right? This place...it disgusts me. Doesn't it hurt you to stay? Doesn't it make your heart feel strained, grimy, tainted just to walk through those doors? It hurts, doesn't it? I know it does. It hurts me, too. I bet you can't *wait* to take a shower when you get home, scrub the hopelessness from your skin, wash the tears from your hair. I don't blame you, of course. It's this place. It's full of small-minded people and dirt. I'm not allowed a spoon, you know. Or a fork, never mind a knife. And I know that I can't escape this place, probably not for as long as I live. Because I *have* an alibi, but the only person I'm going to tell is you. And you're going to keep my secret, because you promised. You promised.

I know that I was in that dining room, with the weapon in my hands, the victim's blood on my skin, the body at my feet. But darling, don't you see? I'm innocent. I didn't kill my father. He killed himself. Don't you see? Ah, well. I suppose not. The trouble with the world is that everyone has such small, narrow-minded perspectives. So closed-off to reality. Or to imagination. Would it kill you to let a bit of imagination in, to open those dry-rotted shutters in your mind and see the light? It killed him, I know. See, that's the trouble. Doesn't it hurt you to stay? It hurts me.

Did you know I'm not allowed a spoon here? I have to tilt the bowl in my hands to drink the soup, which isn't very good, mind you. Just broth. I tilt the bowl, and some of it trickles down my chin and stains my dress. It's hot on my skin, like tears. They don't regularly wash my dress. It's not even pretty. It's white and baggy and made of a fabric that isn't exactly soft but it isn't rough, either. It's like a plastic. I've looked in the mirror a few times since I've been here, and the dress is so enormous on me. I'm drowning it. My legs look like brown twigs, my bones casting shadows over my skin. My arms are the same.

My body is so distinct here. I can see every bone, every joint, every ligament, every muscular band. My collar bones jut, my shoulders arch aggressively, my skin is taught against my cheekbones. I imagine that I would be a perfect subject for an artist, a figure-drawer. Somebody trying to document the anatomy of the human form, spot-on, with every bone shaded and defined. Ribs like piano keys, or bars on a bird cage. Knees like the peaks of a mountain. I like the thought of being art. But I like how I looked before much better.

My cheekbones used to be layered with a bit more flesh. My bones weren't so clear, and I was smooth, not so angular. That night, I remember looking in the mirror. I had painted my lips so meticulously. They gleamed scarlet. My hair wasn't ragged and short as it is now. Try to imagine it platinum blonde, soft and curled. Eyes bright; unfocused, but not lost. A dress very different from the one I have on now. It was navy blue and printed with cherries, fitted at the waist with a narrow red belt, the Peter Pan collar opened a few buttons to seem relaxed but elegant. I was such a strange creature then. I wasn't sure what I was going to do that night. I had made dinner for my father, who had come home the day before, and I knew I was going to do something about it, but I hadn't

come to a decision.

It was the first time anybody had come to the house in a long time, you know. Father hadn't let anybody visit for months. I'd lost track of how many. But it doesn't really matter, does it? The time always spirals away in the end. What matters is how it's spent. And mine was spent alone, behind doors that were locked tight. Time always spins away from us. It will pass, whether I sit here in this plastic dress with my bones sharp enough to slice, or whether I rejoin society with lipstick and spoons, or whether they put me on an electric chair and switch my life away. Time will pass.

The dinner was soup. And let me tell you, it was much better than what I have here. It had lumps of meats and hearty chunks of vegetables floating in the spiced heat. I used a spoon. I think it's rather ridiculous that they don't allow spoons here. I'm allowed other things to eat with: cups, bowls, plates. I could just as easily break a shard from one of those and slit my throat. If I wanted to kill myself, I would have done it. See, that's the trouble. People are so small-minded. That's why they don't understand that I am innocent. It hurts you, doesn't it? Staying here.

Just look at you, shifting around on my cot like you want to stand, but your legs are frozen in plaster. You can't even grasp it, can you? Well, try to. My entire life will be lived this way, ending each day on the exact place you are perched. But it doesn't matter, because I am innocent. I know this, and you will, too, and nothing matters so long as someone understands.

I ate my soup with a spoon. My father did, too. He always slurped, and it was so tiresome. I had used my finest china and lit an enormous candle in the center of the table. I'd even laid out a tablecloth. I'm a good daughter, you know. I always do my best. I was wearing lipstick. Did I tell you that? Well, I was. It was red. So, so, red.

My husband never liked me to wear it. He said I was beautiful without "all that garbage" on my face. But he wasn't there that night. He was dead. I'm sure you know that because you've undoubtedly read my file. I bet "widow" is written all over it. Big, blocky letters, red like blood. Red like lipstick.

My husband never liked me to wear it, but my father did. The more I put on, the more lovely he said I was. When I stopped putting it on after John died, father said I looked like I had given up. I had. But you know that. You've read my file. I'll bet it's big. Lots of papers. I'll bet it smells like ink and dust. I love that smell; I could eat it up, I think.

Lipstick. It left crimson blossoms on my spoon when I sipped, all sticky and unnecessary. I never really liked makeup, but father needed to know that I was trying, or he'd get mean again. And I just wasn't ready for that. I never was, but that night especially. Something felt different. I felt balanced on the wispiest of strings, tottering but fearless. I think that maybe *I* was preparing to be the mean one that night. I put on my makeup that night so carefully that it was almost cruel and tightened that belt around my waist so slowly. Father needed to know that I was trying, or he'd get mean again. And then *I* would have to get mean. And *I* am much better at it. Or at least, I am now that John is gone.

I had cleaned my house. Or, at least, the kitchen. I had lived alone for so long, I'd forgotten what the floor looked like. So I shoved everything on it upstairs and locked the door. Nobody should have to know, nobody should

have to see. It doesn't matter what kind of things I'd let accumulate around me, like great snow drifts. Father didn't let anyone visit, so who cared? I could run screaming if I wanted. I could claw my flesh raw with my own nails. But now father was back to visit, and I had to make it seem as though nothing had ever happened, so that maybe he would chip the cement from around the doorway. Father said that I was looking much better, and how was I feeling? I lied. I told him I felt spectacular, never better, on top of the world. He smiled, that rare, slow-spreading smile. He told me that he knew I would be better without that troublesome husband, anyway, that his death was God's gift to me. God's beautiful gift.

I wanted to scream, wanted to tear my hair out from the roots. But I am a good daughter, and I granted him a thin, dainty smile. I told him he was right, he had been right from the beginning, as he always was. He seemed so pleased at this. I wanted to vomit.

"God is good, father," I said softly.

"That he is, my darling. I knew that man was going to run you straight into the poor house, with all his fancies of helping the homeless and donating to soup kitchens and the like. I told him, I did. Hadn't he read Darwin? Revolutionary stuff. The poor are only poor because of natural selection. The best thing to do is to let nature run its course. You can't lift a ruffian from the dirt any more than you can stop a tsunami or an earthquake. I told him, I did. Revolutionary stuff," he blabbered, slurping his soup.

"Revolutionary," I said numbly.

"But then he had to go and get himself killed, contracting the illnesses of the beggars and spreading it into my home. Exposing *my* daughter. I knew then that he never loved you, or he wouldn't have put you in danger. I prayed every night for that ailment to stop his heart, and it did, bless. God is good," he exclaimed. He examined his reflection in his spoon, and I realized how ugly he truly was.

Wrinkled and pallid with iron-gray hair and cold little eyes. He seemed to like what he saw in his spoon, because he smiled. His teeth were crooked and very white. He hadn't gotten mean yet, but he was steam-rolling in that direction. I wasn't afraid, however, because John was gone, and I was meaner. I was meaner than my father.

I'm not allowed a spoon here; isn't that strange? My spoon quivered in my hand that night, and I remember watching my own reflection bob up and down, as if in slow motion, all smeared with red lipstick and wet with the soup I had made.

"God is good, father," I had said, my lips cold, as if all blood had deserted them.

"Right, my girl. Right. But the worst thing he did was done after he was six feet under. He made you think *you* were ill," he slurped. "An illness of the mind. He must have planted that idea in your head long before he choked, but you were so *sure* you had...what was it? You were silly. Silly, silly, silly girl. It's a cry for attention. But you know that now, and everything will be lovely again. You aren't poor. You were born rich and powerful, chosen by nature." Here, father looked so blissful in all his meanness, all his ugliness that I almost sobbed. Chosen. His lips, thick and chapped, formed that word with a kind of

excruciating pleasure.

“Something as silly as a made-up mind disease can’t take you down. Darwin proves it. Revolutionary stuff,” he continued.

“Revolutionary.”

“But I saved you. I prayed, and I told the doctors to ignore you, that you were just playing, that your dead husband had infected your heart with the will to cry for attention, to be silly. Silly, silly, silly girl.”

“Silly,” I repeated. I stood, removing my empty soup bowl from the table and gracefully taking father’s as well. I left the spoons on the folded fabric napkins, poised for dessert. A perfect lady. His beady eyes watched me, and I smiled serenely.

He loved to tell stories, especially of his own successes. And keeping me locked up was, in his mind, his greatest success. Instead of thinking about that, I decided to categorize the things upstairs, bulging against the closed doors, cloaked in dust. A magical place, where everything used and lived in and worn could pile up to be at home. I tried to list the objects right above my father’s head, smiling wanly.

“And the doctors heeded me, and they left you alone.”

...Two clocks, their faces pried open, their metal innards spilling out. One nightstand, the legs wrenched free and gashed with the marks of strong teeth...

“You see, I knew you simply needed some time on your own to realize what a pestilence that man had been, and then you would see reason.”

...Seven dolls hanging from the ceiling fan, twenty six photo albums with vicious ink blots over every pair of eyes...

“I prayed that God would give you clarity, and he did, bless him.”

...One cat, not moving. Or was it two? I couldn’t be sure; I had to count again. And of course, my mother’s old collection of spoons. There must have been a million spoons up there, and I kept them glistening and polished and laid out in lovely rows all over the floor! The only thing I really kept in order. Silver, cradling, like melted crescents of moonlight. Was it one cat or two?

“God is good,” I agreed.

“God is good, girl, my silly girl. God is good. And now here you are. You were chosen by nature. Darwin says it.”

“Revolutionary stuff,” I murmured, placing the dishes in the sink and turning the hot water on. It burnt my fingers, but I was so much less susceptible to pain then. I ignored it. It hurts me to stay here. It hurts you, too. It hurts us all, though. Get used to it.

I’m not allowed a spoon, or paper, or to read, or to have more than one visitor a month. They say human interaction could frazzle me or damage my fragile mental condition. But I’m not crazy. I have an alibi.

The trouble with people is that they’re so small-minded. Unimaginative lumps of clay waiting to be molded, but they’ve made themselves so cold that nobody can change their shapes. They had potential, once upon a time, to be free, to be open. But they’ve formed themselves into such stiff beings.

I’ll bet my file is a beautiful thing to behold. Huge, teetering stacks of paper, like a throne of information. That’s the sort of thing that I dream of nowadays. Stimulation of the mind, and lots of it. I asked once to hold it, to read it, but, you see, I’m not allowed reading material. It could shake me. I am

a lady with a delicate composition, they say. I laugh at that. Delicate! I am many things, but delicate is not one of them.

Maybe I was at one point. Well, no. I don't think that's quite right. I'm not who I used to be, but I was never delicate. I had a fierce mind and a quick wit and flesh on my bones and silky hair and a spotless house. I had a husband with a heart on fire for helping people who didn't have all that I had, and I had a life. I didn't have lipstick. I didn't appreciate mother's spoon collection, either, I don't think. Did you know, I'm not allowed a spoon here?

Spoons are more important than one might think. Essential. Crucial. They have many purposes, you see. And without them, you have to face the boiling droplets of spilt soup. They are more than just utensils, don't you see? They are symbols. You could be drinking soup by tilting the bowl, but a *spoon* is a luxury. The pinnacle of refinement. Spoons are evidence of a person's worth, the product of the unique ability of humans to adapt their surroundings to them instead of simply bending to nature. Lifting the bowl and pursing your lips around the edge; now that is bending. But picking up a *spoon*. That's defiance. That's showing nature that nobody can control you, that you are free from the restraints of the world. Free from the cement seal on your door, from the boards on your windows.

You've read my file. Could you sneak it to me? If you can even carry it, that is. I bet you can't. I bet it's a spectacle. Sew it into an enormous quilt and bring it in at night, creeping like a shadow. I will tell the guards that I am intolerably cold, and that you are my cousin. You bring me the quilt, and I'll read it, I'll read it all. When I'm through, I'll eat it, so that nobody can ever read it again, and so they don't realize what we've done. I'll devour it, every letter, so that it's a part of me, and I of it. It is *my* file, after all. Won't you do that for me? You are so sweet, so kind. Would you keep a secret? You promised.

I didn't return to the table with dessert. I had planned to, but my hands were somehow empty. After John died, something sick grew inside me. Father didn't believe me; he didn't allow me to heal, to purge myself of the sickness. He told me I was silly and brushed me off. Made me put lipstick on. So I did, but the sickness still festered, and it was his fault, all his fault.

Red is such a garish color. I felt clown-like with it applied all over my lips. Not like a lady at all. Especially not one with a delicate composition.

I'm not allowed a spoon here. It would be easier to eat if only I had one. I could be smooth again, and perhaps my hair would grow silky and wave just so. And perhaps once they saw that I am as beautiful as a siren, I could coerce a doctor into bringing me that dress, the one with the peter pan collar and cherry print. Not the leather belt, though. I never liked that addition. Leave the lipstick behind, as well. John never liked it, and neither did I.

I picked up the spoon from the napkin and tried not to look at my father. He was so incredibly ugly. I don't know how I didn't notice it before that night.

"I'm proud of you, my girl. Proud that I am the reason you are the way you are today. It is my fault you are where you are. All my responsibility, and I am so glad, so proud. My daughter, so beautiful and healthy and strong, all thanks to me."

"Thanks be to the Father," I whispered. My fist curled around the spoon's handle, and in the swooping curve of it, I could see my face quite plainly. I

didn't look right. Distorted and hideous, my face all out of proportion. It was the lipstick, I was sure.

"All because of you." I murmured, as softly as wind. Father's smile faltered, but didn't fade.

"Yes. Because of me," he affirmed.

I was disgusted by my face in the reflection, so I stood, my chest heaving.

"You didn't think that I was sick, so you left me. You isolated me. You boarded my windows and cemented my door," I said dryly, moving towards him gracefully. I was like a swan, like a lady. Delicate composition, no.

"Yes. And aren't you glad?"

"I am what I am today because of you. You've done this to me. You've made me this way. So would you agree that you are now responsible for all of my actions?"

"What an odd sort of question, my girl."

"Would you agree, father?"

"I suppose I would."

"That's rather a shame. Everything I do now is your doing. Because you didn't believe me."

"I left you alone to sort out your silliness."

"And now? If I am silly now, is it me who is being silly, or is it you? You are responsible for everything I do. So which is it?"

Father looked distinctly uncomfortable now. I had reached his side of the table, and stood directly beside him, clutching my spoon. My knuckles were strained white around the handle, the metal cool and smooth.

"I...I don't know. I suppose it is me, because I am the reason you are the lovely lady you are now. I don't believe you would be silly again. God is good, after all. It is I who you have to thank for your condition," he smiled, blissful once more.

"Thanks be to the Father," I said crisply, and I pushed his chair backwards onto the floor. I heard wood splinter as he crashed to the ground, his ugly face a mask of shock. I was graceful as I bent over him, strong as I pinched his nostrils shut, assertive as I shoved my lipstick-stained spoon down his throat. I was patient as I listened to the gargle of his saliva, the struggle of his throat muscles against the metal as he choked. It was rather like slurping. He always slurped. I was firm as I watched blood trickle from the foaming edges of his mouth, his eyes lose focus, his face purple in the candle light. In essence, I was a perfect lady. Lady, I was. Delicate, I was not.

He clawed at my arms, but just as he was stern in not letting doctors near me, as he was stern in cementing the doorway and nailing the windows shut, I was stern with my spoon.

When he was still and his body was rigid, I withdrew the spoon. The red of my lipstick was mixed beautifully with the red of his blood, and I rather liked the color. John would not have liked it. He didn't like me to wear lipstick. But father did. So, for him, I carefully painted my lips. His eyes watched blindly as I rubbed the spoon against my mouth. It was hot, but comfortably so. I lifted my hand from his nose and slid his eyelids shut. His eyes weren't so cold anymore, now that his spirit was gone from them.

Don't you see? I'm innocent. I have an alibi. But you mustn't tell. Could

you bring me my file, please? Father didn't let me have reading material while I was ill, either, and the sickness festered. I truly believe reading would make me better again.

I am innocent. My father killed himself. Don't you see? He killed *himself*. You understand, don't you? Look at you, so sweet, so kind. Listening, like nobody has ever done before. I have an alibi. But you *must* keep it a secret. Because if John knew what I'd done, he would want me to be locked up, too. He would understand, but he would think that it's only right for me to be here. So please, don't tell. For John. It hurts to stay here, doesn't it? It hurts me.

Did I tell you, I'm not allowed a spoon here? A *spoon*, for goodness sake. It's just so *silly*...don't you think?