

And She Followed

Catlin Thompson

It was the third Thursday in October. That meant that Wanda was serving fish shapes and homemade coleslaw. Wanda hated fish shapes. The idea of placing ground up who-knows-what into shapes that were to appear to be fish disgusted her. She didn't even think that the shapes in question actually looked like fish. Maybe a nice oddly-shaped rock, at best. But then again, they could have been fish, she really couldn't ever tell. Damn lazy eye.

Regardless of her thoughts on fish shapes, if she didn't leave in the next few seconds she'd be late for work. She peered around her measly apartment trying to find her keys that she frequently misplaced. Dirty orange shag carpet had swallowed her living room floor, and she felt it stick to her feet as she walked across it to the cool linoleum of the kitchen to check her counters. Stacks of culinary magazines and a collection of ceramic bunnies were moved out of the way in order to check the countertops. The loud ticking to her right made her aware once again of the time as she turned to find that her rather large wall clock was telling her that it was 6:51. She should have left eleven minutes ago just to be on time. She wandered back through her living room and her foot kicked a hair-tie that was on the floor. She promptly picked up and used to tie her wiry red hair back. She reached a closed door and pushed it open, as it did not even have a door handle. She stood in her bedroom and sighed. There was no way the keys were going to be found looking through the mess that consumed her sleeping quarters. At that moment, she began to feel her left eye drift back towards the kitchen, forcing her head to turn in the same direction. Now she remembered. She lurched back through the living room and found her keys lying next to her culinary knives, where she put them—so she wouldn't forget.

It was now 6:58. She hurried over to her apartment door and knelt next to her bin of shoes. It was Thursday, so she had to wear the lime green scrubs with images of dancing milk cows and sheep. Thursday's scrubs made her feel nauseated. She dug through her shoe bin until she found her black sneakers and shoved them into her bag. She grabbed the counter to help her stand and opened the door. Before she shut the door behind her, her eyes met again with the clock—7:03—damn.

On her way down the stairwell she heard her landlord talking loudly to the guy who lived in 16C. 16C had had a party the night before. A window had been shattered and he was being forced to pay for it, at least from what she heard.

October's rent was due and she had not paid it. She slid her back to the wall and held the railing trying to slither down the stairs undetected. She'd

pay her rent, eventually.

She opened the door at the bottom of the stairs and started down the sidewalk. Charcoal clouds covered the sky allowing little natural light to guide her as she walked to her car. She didn't have to walk far. The one nice thing about her apartment was that there was off-street parking behind the building—if she had to say something good about where she lived. Wanda lived where no one else wanted to and every day it pissed her off. She walked over to her car that was being devoured by rust. The inside of the car could be seen through both the passenger side and back driver-side door. She slid into her car and started it—then tried starting it again—and again—until it turned over. She thought about her life as she often did during her drive to work. She hated her job. Not only the dancing cows and fish shapes, but the fact she was a lunch lady. This lunch lady gig was supposed to be temporary—a way for her to save money to go to culinary school.

The movement of Wanda's left eye interjected her thoughts as it focused on her exit, which she nearly missed.

But she was stuck and had no way to move out of her current position, financially at least. At times it almost didn't even seem worth keeping with the job, mostly because of the students. She hated having to serve those pompous little brats each day. Some days she had thoughts of just reaching across the counter, grabbing their heads, and smashing them down into the counter. Some of them were awful, especially the gaggle of blonde haired, polo donning, boys. They would come through the line and when it came time for her to serve them they would move their trays back and forth making it nearly impossible for Wanda to hit their tray. She missed a lot, which was followed by their hideous laughter—not to mention the constant remarks about her eye. Each day they said something pushed Wanda a little further away from her sanity at work.

Wanda pulled her car into the back lot of the school and took the last available space. She had actually been asked to park in the back lot where the buses parked because of the condition of her car. The high school principal didn't want people to get the wrong idea about his most precious school. Asshole. This was just one more thing that Wanda hated about the job. She walked up the stairs to the back entrance and used the sky blue railing to guide her. As her hand slid up the railing she could feel the imperfections in the paint, which gave her a slight bit of satisfaction.

As she reached the back door she saw her co-worker, Margie. Wanda didn't necessarily like Margie but rather tolerated her because she really had no choice. Margie was hefty to say the least. But not all over heavy. She was Santa heavy, carrying all her weight in her belly. Margie always looked awkward standing, especially when she tried to smoke a cigarette and couldn't

use both hands to balance her weight. But, the cigarette wasn't about to smoke itself.

"Morning, Wanda," Margie hacked in-between puffs.

"Hi," Wanda replied. "How was the weekend?" She didn't really care what Margie had to say but felt obligated to ask anyway.

"Oh it was alright. Joe fixed the leak we had in the basement..."

Wanda stopped listening and moved closer to the door. When she figured Margie was done talking she told her she'd see her inside. She walked through the dark hallway that was accented by the same sky blue colored tiles as the outside railings. The lounge for the cooks was located on the left side of the hallway before the kitchen. Wanda popped inside so she could put her shoes on and grab her set of culinary knives. It wasn't necessary that she had her own knives and she rarely used them, but it reminded Wanda of why she stuck with the job. After she crammed her shoes on she headed towards the kitchen to begin preparing lunch. Lunch started at 10:45 and it was 7:42.

10:30 rolled around much quicker than normal for Wanda. She walked over to a drawer in the kitchen and slid it open to grab a pair of tongs. She felt a bit sick as she thought about serving the fish shapes. She walked from the back of the remodeled-last-in-the-1950's kitchen to the serving line where Margie was already at her post with a wide stance. Wanda stood over a heaping pile of golden fish and tried not to gag.

Lunch went with few hitches—the last time she glanced at the clock right across from their post it had been 12:03, which meant there were only 12 minutes left of serving time. The blonde monsters had seemed to skip lunch today, which was okay with Wanda. She already felt on edge after Darla Johnson demanded to know what was in the fish shapes, and didn't leave until Wanda went back to the giant bag the fish shapes were shipped in to read her the label. Wanda had had enough for one day. The clock said it was 12:10.

"We could probably start packing in, don't ya think?" Margie asked.

"I suppose so. Can't imagine anyone coming in at this point."

"I'll go get the dish cart."

Wanda was taking the serving utensils out of the coleslaw and the shapes and the cement-colored tarter sauce when out of the corner of her left eye she saw something glimmering. It was the blonde boys. 12:13 and those bastards strolled in. She thrust the utensils back into their place and walked to the beginning of the serving line.

"Oh God, what is this shit today?" the blue polo kid snarled.

The one wearing a yellow polo contorted his face in a way that felt

familiar to Wanda. She did, after all, hate fish shapes too.

“Whatever, just give me some and please try not to make a mess, and actually hit my tray.”

Wanda felt a tingling in her fingertips and tightened her lips as she grabbed the tongs. She snatched a couple shapes and began to place them on the blue one’s tray. He slid his tray to the left, which forced Wanda to lose the shapes as they fell through the space between the bars on the lunch line.

“Did your lazy eye get in the way of that one?” the blue one jeered, and the other four boys began to snicker. “Didn’t I warn you not to make a mess? God, good thing this is about the hardest your job gets.”

Wanda tightened her fists, making her knuckles turn white. Their laughter continued just as the rage continued to run through her body. Her left eye began to take control—of her focus, of her body, of her actions. The eye rolled itself down and focused in on the coleslaw and studied it. She felt her hand dip deep into the cold mixture but didn’t remember thinking she wanted her hand to do so. As her hand was pulled up, her eyes shifted focus to the large wad of coleslaw dripping in her hand.

The polo boys were still laughing and she lost control. She felt herself let go, and chucked the wad of coleslaw right at the blue polo shirt boy’s face.

Seeing his face dripping with green shards of lettuce made Wanda smile. Her eye snapped to the exit sign and she followed, grabbing her knives on the way out.

Wanda blinked heavily as she regained focus to what had just happened. She felt groggy, almost confused, as to what possessed her to do such a thing. She did, however, have no regrets because still inside her was a tingling sensation, a warmth that surged through her veins, and it felt good.

She left the school unsure of her next move. Charcoal clouds continued to consume the sky and small rain droplets began to fall. She was out of a job and was void of any direction at this point. The curious energy she had felt only moments prior began to creep its way back through her body as her eye focused on her car. She felt herself pulled towards the car as larger and larger raindrops began to pierce her skin. The cool feel of the rain only made her more aware of the sensation she was feeling in her body.

Wanda fumbled with her keys for only a moment until she managed to get inside her car, toss her knives into the passenger seat, and began to drive home. The drumming on the roof of her car became increasingly louder as it became more difficult to see the road home. Shit. She about missed the exit, again.

Wanda spent the rest of the afternoon and most of the evening replaying in her head the events of the afternoon. She had always wanted to

do such a thing, to do something, anything, to those kids, but was convinced she would never act on such an impulse. But what was she to do now, with no job. She hated those boys. Maybe she just hated the blue polo shirt one. This situation she found herself in, she decided, was after all, his fault. As soon as her attention was drawn to the severe storm that was taking place outside her apartment window, she felt it. It was just the same as it was the last time. She felt tingling in her fingertips and her body became very warm, no, energized, with a somewhat familiar force. She felt her mind go at ease and her eye, her left eye, shot its way over to the wall clock—8:44—then to the door—then back to the clock. Her head was then forced in the direction of her door and she followed.

She began to pay close attention to the irregular beats played on the top of her car. Her head began to nod in a sort of rhythm with the drops and she felt her mind go clear, void of any concerns or worries she had earlier during the day. Instead, she felt movement—in her left eye. She focused her attention to the street signs and became very alert having felt a new sense of direction. Her eye was leading her way through the drowning streets engulfed by darkness. The eye shot left. Left. Left. Right. Left. And she followed its every direction until she slowed on an unfamiliar street and felt her hand push the lever into park. She didn't understand where she was, why she was there, or how she had gotten here. The drive seemed like a blur to her.

The rain pounded harder and harder on the roof of her car. Wanda felt tense, her heart began to beat rapidly and her hands began to become tingly but numb all at the same time. It was so dark and she didn't know where she was. She could barely see the rest of the street, only a small way down the road, whatever part of the road her headlights could touch. She had every intention of shifting her car into drive and finding her way home, but her thoughts weren't compelling her body to act. Rather, what started as a small tingling sensation changed into a burning force that flooded through her body. This sensation made her heart rate slow—she felt relaxed and her mind went into a sense of peace. She shut the car off and bowed her head to take a deep breath in recovery from the feelings her body had just encountered and felt her mind drift away into the darkness of the night.

It didn't have to look out the window to know that there was movement. With her head down, the eye rolled up and saw what it was there for. It was focused. Not on the brick two-story house. Not on the plush garden being stomped to death by the rain. Not on the empty driveway. No. It was focused on what was occupied inside the two-story home. Through the darkness it could see into a window. It saw a glimmer that was

complimented by blue. This was its chance and it knew what to do. The eye rolled its way down forcing her head into the direction of the passenger seat. Her knives were sitting patiently, almost aching to be used. The eye looked to her right hand and followed it as it grabbed the knives. The eye darted to the door handle and watched as her left hand gripped and pulled on it allowing Wanda to exit the car.

She stood in the dark street. The rain was hammering down, although Wanda did not notice. The eye darted from her car—to the house—then to the knife set in her right hand. The eye rolled back up to focus on the blue speck in the window of the home—and she followed.