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# Sunday Driving

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SOPHIA STOOD STRAIGHT UP. She walked directly into the kitchen. The teapot was first; she poured warm water into it, letting her fingers play in the stream, testing it for heat. There were leftover grits from the night before, and the smell of fried salmon was still in the room. *The grits are still good*, she thought to herself; *just pour more water into them*. She searched in the refrigerator for eggs but didn't find any. She knew she had bought eggs, remembered it when she picked up ham and bread.

Normally she turned on the radio later in the day, waited until R.J. was taking a nap and would listen to the music from the sixties. She liked it when the girls sang harmonies. She kept the volume low and as she tapped her feet turned around to see her husband was awake. "You're up early. I hope it wasn't the music." He nodded his head. It wasn't the music; it hadn't been playing long enough. He sat at the table smacking his lips letting her know he was ready to eat. "What kind of big plans do you have today? Are you going to the lake?" The grits weren't ready yet. He raised his hand and waved it back and forth. "Do you want to go to town with me? I'm going to visit Murielle, see how she likes that woman who moved into the bed next to hers. You know that woman seems awfully quiet, but that's good for Murielle, she doesn't like a lot of noise."

After his first stroke R.J. was still able to speak well. There was nothing different about him, really. The second made him foggy, he seemed confused sometimes. Years later, when he had his last stroke, he wasn't able to say many words at all. Sometimes, though, a half of a sentence would roll out of him. Often this was while he watched the news; the president would be speaking and R.J. would curl his fingers into a fist and squeeze them fast and hard. It was months before Sophia noticed this. He never threw anything or yelled as his doctor had warned. His doctor was short and young. R.J. called him Boy until the last stroke

when he was unable to speak well and would try to make out “sir.” The doctor had graduated from the same college as their son. Sophia would ask the doctor if he remembered certain buildings and professors that she had heard her son talk about.

The grits were not good. During the night they had gotten hard and cold. She used the knife to get more butter and it coiled up on the side of the silver utensil. She added more to his as well. He made a noise, like clearing his throat but something she knew meant that that was enough. “You think Murielle likes it there? I think she does. I think she knows its best for everybody.” He nodded. “They have a garden there. It ‘s pretty and every single room has a couple of African violets to make it cheery.” She was clearing the plates then, as she spoke of Murielle. “I think she likes it there. I think she does.”

He put his slippers on and scratched his head. Tufts of brown and grey fell in his eyes. She smoothed them over so that he could see and licked her fingers so it would stick. Standing up she noticed his slippers, probably as old as their oldest daughter she thought to herself and with holes in the top and the bottom.

Sophia pulled the sheets back on the bed, not quite making it up, not perfectly, but putting it into place. She opened the bedside table and there were the eggs. Innocently sitting there. She almost wanted to yell at them, the eggs, ask what they were doing in her bedside table. Instead she closed the drawer and went to her vanity.

Sophia rolled the lipstick from the tube slowly. She had worn the color for years. Almost orange but with a hint of what she liked to think of as fresh peaches. Her hair was still brown with a patch of grey near the temples. She brushed it down with her hands and hummed to herself as R.J. washed his hands. “I know you want to get home before dark so we’ll probably want to leave the home by at least six.” She heard him grunt and she nodded. “Why don’t we stop by that chicken place on the way back? We can get dinner and eat outside. You know, I think Murielle really likes that place. I think she likes it there fine.”

The drive to the nursing home was short, only ten minutes. Sophia knew that the drive wouldn’t be bad when she did it every day; it would almost be like walking into the living room to see him. It would not be bad. He took of his hat and sat in on the dashboard. It was corduroy with a small brown feather on the side and far too big for his head. R.J. leaned his seat all the way back; he was going to nap until they arrived. “I can’t believe we are going to have a gas station right down the street from us. Remember when we used to have to drive into town

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to get gas, and now just a jug of milk is gonna be right down the road? I don't know what I am gonna do not having to go into town.”

Sophia drove slowly, occasionally looking out of the side window as she drove. The buildings were all new. When their home was built it was surrounded by only trees and a lake. Now there were shopping malls on both sides and an elementary school down the road. The children from the school would play from noon until almost two, sometimes R.J. would take a walk and the children would wave to him but he would pretend not to see them and stare straight forward.

R.J. was the first to walk into the building. He had his cane in his hand and strode into the nursing home as if he was on business. Sophia could smell sweet magnolias and walked behind him, realizing it was her perfume that he was wearing.