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DERRICK

after Kelly Link's "Lull"

Her husbands would not leave. The smallest one, her husband at seven, was feverish. He was the one she liked the most, although she wondered if he were really a boy, after all. When she brought him ginger ale, he asked for Gatorade. His eyes were the color of lime Life Savers, too green to be real.

There was the one who stayed in the shadows, pushing big glasses up his greasy nose. The glasses were large and clunky, the style of glasses from Derrick's childhood. He spied on her whenever she changed clothes, even peeked through the door when she took baths.

There was another, probably Derrick at around twenty. He was constantly grabbing her, biting her shoulder, asking for sex. At first he called it fucking, but then, looking at her again, he asked politely, calling it sex. She was practically old enough to be that one's mother.

Derrick, the original, the one she had married who had grown older, spent most of his time in the garage. The other Derricks did not like him. He smelled of something, some scent she could almost identify. Wet carpet, perhaps. Or a mold, a mold in the back of a basement. His hair globbed together, and when she tried to comb it, came out in chunks.

"Doesn't that hurt?" she asked him. "You must be in pain."

"It may be time for a separation," he told her. His voice was flat, but still Derrick's.

“The other ones need me,” she said. “Besides, how will we explain, where all these Derricks came from?”

They never left the house. The youngest Derrick was constantly achy, down with low-grade flues. She fed him popsicles and rented action movies for him. She wasn’t careful enough, not the way she would be if he’d been her son. Besides, these Derricks, they probably wouldn’t grow. She was afraid to take them outside. What would happen then, if she took them outside?

The real Derrick had liked experiments as a boy. He said this other must be an imposter.

“Maybe not,” she said, “Maybe you just can’t recognize yourself.”

It really was too exhausting. The house itself began to smell, like old laundry, or rotting wood. Perhaps they were aliens. Or something more sinister.

When she came home from work, with a box of Triscuits, the other Derricks came to the door. They patted her with their soft hands and walked her to the sofa. The littlest Derrick put his head in her lap. Teen-age Derrick brought her a beer from the fridge. They watched *Mystery Science Theatre*, laughing together, and then fell asleep with the light flickering over their pale bodies.

She got up, stretched, and got another beer. It tasted better than the last — colder, crisper.