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Yellow

Amantha Wood

Lettie sat on the white washed edge of her bedroom windowsill smoking a long cigarette. Through the smoke she squinted at the shadow behind her neighbor's window shade. A lone figure, a curvy and vivacious shadow, stood twisting in place, posturing and bending forward, showing off a large ass and tall hair. Lettie wasn't too impressed with the largeness of the ass as much as she wished she could take a yardstick and lay it straight against that tall hair, count the inches, and then slap that big ass with the yard stick and watch the red sting grow. She wondered how many cans of Aqua-Net hairspray it took to hold up that hive. Stubbing out her Slim on the outside stucco of her second story apartment window, Lettie pushed her foot back into the fuzzy pink slipper that had slipped off her nervous foot, picked up the empty plastic laundry basket, and kicked the unfolded clothes under the bed, shoving them far under the yellow dust ruffle. Briefly she doubled over from the pain of another contraction. She pulled open her waistband and peered at the hand towel folded between her thighs. There was still spotting, but not the clumpy mess that had discharged from her body hours ago.

Life with Wade was pretty good. They'd been married for almost two years. Wade used to go through the line at Woolworths department store, where Lettie was a cashier. One day, Wade bought her a yellow rose. As Lettie handed him the change he handed her the rose and asked Lettie to be his date at the Lincoln Elementary School PTA Dance. Wade was a third grade teacher there. When they slow danced together, Lettie felt the intimate warmth of Wade's soft palm through her thin silk dress, just above her buttocks, and fell in love. They planned to have babies and made love voraciously as newlyweds did, but after the third miscarriage, love making became a bit famished, as did Lettie's body. She traded food for Virginia Slims. After each miscarriage, Wade held her and whispered in her ear "We'll just have

to try again, my Yellow Rose." And off he'd go, back to his third grade classroom to grade papers late into the night.

The first two miscarriages had happened early in each pregnancy, Lettie's morning sickness had not even subsided. A visit to the obstetrician's office filled Lettie and Wade with meaningless statistics of common miscarriage rates and continued hope. "Keep trying," said Dr. Boyle. Wade held Lettie's hand as they left Dr. Boyles office and walked slowly through the park towards home; the little buds of flowers showing hopeful signs of warmth in the air. Lettie stopped in front of a patch of small purple blooms, bowed her head into Wade's chest, and cried. Wade hesitated before wrapping his arms around her, stroking her long brown hair.

The third miscarriage happened a week after Lettie and Wade got to hear the heartbeat of the growing fetus in Dr. Boyle's office. Lettie's leg would bounce nervously, remembering the rhythm of that fast little heartbeat, while sitting in the windowsill, smoking, watching the beehive grow.

"Your daddy's a cheating bastard, Lettie," her momma said, she was putting the kettle on the stove. "Here I am pregnant again, and that man is out rolling around with some gawd-damn whore. Now, Lettie, go out in the meadow and pick me some of those purple flowers. Pick me a nice bouquet of that purple Pennyroyal. Go on now." Lettie ran out to the meadow, as fast as her six-year-old legs could go. She wanted to bring back the prettiest flowers for her mamma and make her happy. Lettie thought about how beautiful her mamma was, with her long brown hair just like Lettie's. She picked what she could hold of the purple blossoms, arms full, and ran back to the house. Her mamma took up the flowers from Lettie's arms and cut them up into bits. Then she put all the pieces into the kettle. "Now, Lettie," Momma knelt down and brought Lettie close to her. "After I drink this tea, there won't be a baby in me anymore. I don't want you to say nothing about it, to anybody. I love you so much, Lettie Bug—now go outside and play."

That night Lettie heard her momma yelling in pain. Her daddy took her momma to the hospital while Mrs. Lee from next door came to stay with Lettie. The next morning, daddy came home all by himself. He sat Lettie on his lap and stroked her long brown hair. "Lettie, your momma is gone now. She won't be coming home. She's gone off to Heaven."

It had been months since Lettie and Wade made love, months since the last miscarriage. Lettie only worked part time at Woolworth's, leaving her time in the day to do the household chores. Usually, Wade stayed at work late into the day; sometimes he'd come home for dinner and sometimes they would sit quietly together and watch the T.V. Sometimes, Lettie would feel Wade's stare burn into her, but she wouldn't meet his gaze. One night Wade came home and slipped into bed. He wrapped his arm over Lettie's hip, pulled her close and whispered, "I forgive you." Lettie stared deep and blank into the darkness, wondering if her neighbor's lover buried his nose in her Aqua Net beehive and slapped that large ass. Lettie rolled over and allowed Wade to make love to her. In her mind's eye, she could see them, two nude bodies smashed against each other, both frail and thin with desperation, haunted by unborn children.

The next morning there was a yellow rose in a red, glass vase on the breakfast table. Its yellow petals opened into the beam of sunlight that cut in through the kitchen window. Over in the sink, Wade's breakfast dishes were stacked neatly, the fork and knife gleaming in the beam of sunlight. The smell of bacon lingered in the air and grease had splattered on the range top. Lettie ran to the toilet, lifted the lid, and vomited. Lettie vomited in the morning for the next several weeks as she watched the yellow rose dry up and decided that she was again pregnant. She gathered some cash from their nightstand drawer and set out to Woolworth's to buy Aqua Net. Lettie asked her co-worker Noreen to cover Lettie's shifts over the next week. On her way home through the park, she stopped at the patch of purple Pennyroyal. She thought about her mother's long brown hair and felt a stab of guilt rip through her heart. Hurriedly, she began pulling the Pennyroyal out of the ground and stuffed the purple buds into her Woolworth's sack.

For four days, after Wade had gone to work in his third grade classroom, Lettie brewed a quart of Pennyroyal tea. She drank four cups each day. After each cup, Lettie would sit on the windowsill and blow smoke towards her neighbor's window, her fuzzy pink slipper dangling from the foot of a crossed leg, nervously bouncing. On the third day, when the cramps began, Lettie chain smoked a pack of Slims, sitting in the window, waiting for her neighbor's shadow to appear behind the drawn shade. Lettie knew this was the time of day her neighbor got ready to go somewhere. When the shadow appeared, Lettie thought

the beehive had grown taller. She watched as the shadows hands moved from the pointed breasts to flutter up to pat the beehive and flutter back down to caress the pointed breasts again and finally, the large ass. She watched as an aerosol can of spray orbited the beehive. . . *spray spray pat pat* . . . Lettie's cramps began to make her wince in pain.

On the fourth day and after the first cup of Pennyroyal tea, Letties cramping had become so severe she had to hold on to the kitchen sink while doubled over in pain. Wade hadn't left for work yet. He came to give her a goodbye kiss and saw her face contorted.

"Lettie? You okay? Did you eat something bad?"

"No Wade, it's just my time of month, worse than usual."

"Ahhh," said Wade, in that way a man does, when he doesn't understand the mysterious pain of monthly cramps.

"Well okay then. I'm off to work, have a nice day, my Yellow Rose."

After Wade left, Lettie pulled herself upstairs, the cramps making her thin body contract over so that she crawled up the stairs to their bedroom. She carried a quart of tea with her, three quarts to go. Upstairs, the cramps subsided enough that Lettie could gather towels and her pack of Slims. She sat in front of the dresser mirror and took out the can of Aqua Net, spraying it all around her shoulder length brown hair. With a comb she began to tease and rat and back comb the long strands, making her hair a large fluff of a bush around her head. She gulped down another quart of tea. Two to go. Cramps. She crossed her arms over her abdomen and rocked forward and back. When the cramps backed off, Lettie piled the teased mess on top of her head and sprayed. She poked bobby pins in every direction to help hold up the fluffy mass. Then she teased some more, she sprayed some more, and finally there it was. A beehive. She drank the third quart, went over to the windowsill, and lit a Slim. No shadow appeared, but the cramps came on so strong Lettie yelped in pain. She got up from the window, her Slim falling to the beige carpet. She watched the fibers sizzle, stepped on it, and saw the blood that had made big circles on the inside thighs of her pants. Her abdomen contracted again and she fell to the floor, doubled over in agony. Her blood had stained the crotch and thighs of her pants. She reached for the towels she had gathered and tugged one under her body, wrapping it between her legs like a diaper. A sharp cramp hurled itself from her insides; she could feel something soft and clumpy pass from her body in one final heave. Slowly, she reached into her pants, into her pink cotton underwear, and grabbed the clump. She brought the reddish brown clump up to her heart and held it there. "I forgive you," she whispered to what could've been their first born child.

Lettie sat in the whitewashed windowsill smoking a Slim, watching her neighbor. She looked over at the unfolded, clean and bleached, towels on the floor near their bed. Then, she reached up to run her fingers through her short brown stubby hair. The beehive ended up in the trash. The reddish brown blood clot ended up being flushed down the toilet. Lettie turned back to the drawn shade of her neighbor and wondered how many cans of Aqua Net that fat ass used on her beehive. She stubbed out her Slim and looked down at the cigarette burn in the beige carpet. Briefly she doubled over in pain from another contraction. She peered into her clean jeans and saw blood spots on the hand towel folded between her thighs. Standing upright in her pink fuzzy slippers, she kicked the unfolded laundry under the bed, far under the yellow dust ruffle. Wade would be home from teaching third grade any minute. He'd been coming home early these days. He would call out "Where's my Yellow Rose?" and Lettie would run down the stairs into his arms and look up at Wade and say, "I forgive you too."



Exodus Continues
Scott Peek