

Vaya con Huevos

Two despicables in conversation.

Tempers flare.

I'm the one under the oil painting. The oil painting is mounted on a wall too unblemished for its own good. I want to say this wall reminds me of something but it doesn't. I've never seen anything like this wall.

This evening I will endeavor to put my head through it.

We are two in a room with six others. I don't know the six others but the despicable next to me is friendly with one of them, I think. They kissed each other on the cheek earlier. Perhaps she is the despicable's sister. They look like each other in the way women with legs and feet can sometimes look like each other.

The room has walls and windows and paintings and furniture and I'm sweating and mopping my brow with a handkerchief.

There's nothing sexier than a pregnant woman I say to the despicable, which gets us started. She is the one next to me under the oil painting. The woman that looks like her, that might well be her sister, is on the other side of the room looking at another painting. The despicable uses her tongue to clean her teeth and exercises her eyes back and forth in their sockets. This is the kind of woman my mother warned me against. My mother would sit me down and tell me to keep away from the eye rollers and teeth cleaners. This despicable examines each painting like she is an expert but I don't think she is. Most experts tell you they're experts and this despicable hasn't said anything about herself. She puts her face close to the painting and I'm not sure but I think she is trying to smell what the painting smells like. Oil on wood is what we're told but I don't believe a word from their mouths and neither does she.

Neither of us has been in this house before, knows where there's a bathroom or feels comfortable enough to open the refrigerator and take something out of it. I am not even that comfortable in my own house, which is why I'm losing weight probably. I'm down eleven pounds and can fit into pants I should've thrown away years ago. I hide the weight loss well due to the way I carry myself. I don't know how this is exactly

but it's the only explanation. The same people see me every day and no one's said anything.

I don't like it, this house, this room, these people, and neither does the despicable next to me. There is a ceiling fan slowly oscillating like it's running out of gas, like it's about to fall down and die in the middle of everything. The blades resemble battle-worn sabers covered with nicks, markings and bloodstains. Like Indian artifacts someone dug up in Illinois under a mound of dirt. Everyone here looks like this ceiling fan. When I say everyone here I include myself, the despicable, and the six people paired off and spread across this big room. I think this house and ceiling fan belong to two of them but I'm not sure which two.

There are abstract paintings hanging on every wall. There is no way to describe the paintings other than to say they belong on these walls and no place else. Everyone is walking around the room to look at them. We know to move to the next painting when our replacements come to look at the painting we've been looking at. This takes two minutes, roughly. I pretend to look at the paintings the same as everyone else. To really sell it I squint my eyes, furrow my brow, and tilt my head. I saw an artist look at paintings once and have never forgotten how to mimic it. I forget where I was when I saw the artist look at paintings. I don't think it was someone's house but I could be wrong about that. I try to keep out of houses that have paintings hanging on the walls.

When the people talk they whisper instead of talk. It makes me think someone is sleeping, a child perhaps. Adults are always motivated to keep a sleeping child asleep. In this way I can be considered an adult. Whenever I am around a child I do my best not to disturb its sleeping. If a child is awake I excuse myself and go straight home. Some people find this odd but to me it makes sense. I have nothing to say to children and find their company tedious. I don't think there are any children in this house. Still I can hear the whisperers. I hear two of them say the house is two hundred years old and something about negative space.

I don't know who painted these paintings. Some painters sign their paintings or initial them but the painter who painted these did no such thing. You can't blame him or her. I wouldn't be surprised if there were numbers underneath the oils.

There is no way to tell if the painter was male or female. Perhaps an expert could tell but I don't see how. I'm assuming the painter was male or female as opposed to is male or female because I assume the painter is dead. If the painter is alive I'm certain he or she would not allow strangers to view these paintings. I don't think one of the other six people or

the despicable next to me is responsible for the paintings.

This despicable is not a pregnant woman. She looks like she could be pregnant if she applied herself. She has all the requisite equipment. Perhaps taking long walks, drinking green tea, and changing her name would help. She is taller than me by two or three inches but most of that's hair and shoes. I don't know who she is but she is next to me under this oil painting. She acts like she knows me. She has put her hand on my shoulder twice and left it there for a minute or two each time. She is not sweating so I don't offer her the handkerchief. Every time I use it she thinks there's something wrong with me.

This despicable could be my wife of two years. She resembles my wife in that they are both women of a certain age with eyelashes and painted toenails. There are similarities in complexion, hair color, and deportment. But I think I left my wife home today. I think we argued over how to get here and when I went out the door she stayed in our living room. She wanted to walk and I wanted to drive was the problem.

The two connubial years have included several hangovers and a month of Sundays so I sometimes have trouble recognizing her.

There's nothing sexier than a pregnant woman, she repeats.

I do believe that's true, I say.

You're despicable, she says.

And I say something like it takes one to know one and it takes two to tango but three's a crowd and the more the merrier.

For whatever reason we are whispering this to each other. Something about this room turns you into a librarian.

So the woman next to me whispers You're a despicable except she adds the word fucking as a qualifier.

There is a caged dog in the kitchen of this house no one wants to discuss. This dog looks like a mistake of evolution, like a cross between a fox and a South American rodent. The dog's head is decidedly too small for its body and it has a long and furless tail. The dog hasn't stopped whining but no one pays attention to it. Everyone here is afraid of this dog.

What is with this dog, I say to the despicable.

Don't, she says back.

The more I look at and talk to this despicable the more I think she might be my wife.

This happens to me from time to time. I'll forget the route to my favorite restaurant or lose my place in a book or get lost on the way to the upstairs bathroom at home. The wife I think I left home in the living

room thinks there is something wrong with me. She thinks I should see a doctor, have tests done. She thinks they should stick me in a tube and not let me out until I can retain basic information like everyone else.

The despicable next to me hasn't mentioned any tests, which might be a dead giveaway.

There is no accounting for what is wrong with me. I've never suffered an injury or a disease that would've resulted in a compromise of both short and long term memory. As near as I can remember I've always been this way. I wasn't allowed to walk to school because the one time I did I went missing for two days. My mother hung my picture on street signs and light poles and went on television to get me back home.

Right after she says Don't with a familiarity I find disturbing our replacement couple arrives. They look like they just got released from a concentration camp. Their limbs are impossibly thin, so much so that I want to hook them up to an IV and have them lie down. They are wearing sandals and have yellow toenails. Their eyes are similarly jaundiced. I don't think either of these people will live another day.

These are great, the male one says. You can tell he is the male one because the other has two emaciated breasts under her tank-top.

Aren't they, though, the despicable next to me replies.

They all turn to me as if it's my turn to speak, my turn to say something nice about the paintings, the house, the dog. Instead I say I'm hungry and I wonder what's for dinner.

The skeletons, after consulting each other first, say—I know: we're both starving.

The despicable looks at me in a way I'm sure means something but I don't know what it is.

A fire truck screams by and for a second I expect firemen to burst through the door, administer CPR to the skeletons and liberate the dog. Everyone turns to the front windows to watch the truck drive by but no one is moved enough to go outside. The sirens are loud and then trail off into people whispering things about paintings and the dog's whining.

I haven't been offered a drink and I wonder why not. I see three others cradling glasses on the other side of the room.

There is no indication food will be served any time soon. I don't smell anything cooking and I'm not sure there will be. No one is running into the kitchen to check on anything. I don't know what made me think there was going to be food involved.

The skeletons move on to the next painting and I follow the despicable to a painting hung in the alcove. I can't tell one painting from the

next. They are all the same these paintings and I am finished pretending to look at them.

I listen to the whispering around the room. I hear someone say Define a glass of water and someone else say I like it when someone tells me they're a musician and it turns out they're a drummer. Another says I think the composition here is a little obtuse.

In the alcove the despicable and I stand opposite the pregnant woman. There is also a man standing and whispering with the pregnant woman. One assumes he is the sire. The two of them look like they were hand-picked to breed. Both are tall and stout and have fine skin, hair, and teeth. He probably covered her in a stall under supervision.

This is the kind of woman that should be pregnant 365 days a year. The day after she gives birth to one she should conceive the next.

The despicable positions herself between the pregnant woman and me.

My wife, the one I left in the living room, enjoys the company of other people and seeks it out whenever she can. This is the kind of affair she will drag me to. I have stood in big rooms under oscillating ceiling fans before but cannot say I am comfortable in such environs. I prefer to be in my upstairs study with the air conditioner on and the curtains drawn. My wife calls it the cave. She has never called me a caveman because of how it might reflect on her.

I don't know where she meets the people we socialize with. I don't think they are colleagues. My wife works alone in our house. I'm almost sure of this. There is a table set up in our dining room and people come in and out of the house at all hours.

Secretly she resents me for not having any friends. She tells me this, as she is not good at keeping secrets. I forget what it is I tell her when she says this to me.

I think I do have a few friends but I forget who they are and how to contact them.

Now the word Literally is being bandied about and this bothers us despicable.

These people should be drawn and quartered, the despicable says.

They should be shot and hung from the highest pole, I say.

I thought this would be different, she says. I was under the impression this was going to be something else, she says. Then she says, And it's hanged from the highest pole. People are hanged, not hung.

I say to her, Is it me or does it seem like everything in here is a photocopy? Even the dog looks like he's been left in the wash too long.

That can't be a real dog, I whisper.

A replication of something half-observed and half-misunderstood, she whispers. Then she leans in and whispers Inadequate means to obsequious ends. She puts her hand on my shoulder again and this time rubs it.

This is something my wife does. She likes to rub my shoulders and back and tell me things I don't quite understand. She is an advocate of alternative medicines and homeopathy. She drives twenty miles to buy organic fruits and vegetables from a farmer's market. There are lifestyle magazines around our house, in the bathrooms, the kitchen, etc. I think she might be a masseuse, my wife. This is probably why people come to the house all hours of the day. We do have a massage table set up in the dining room where a dining room table should go. Around the table are crystals and statues of Indian gods. There is a mobile hanging over the table, too. Paper butterflies dangle from the ceiling and sometimes it looks like they are flying.

My wife has strong capable hands but they don't look strong or capable. Her hands are thin and ladylike. Her hands look like a strong wind could blow them clean off her wrists. My mother told me to marry a woman who had hands like this.

I don't say it out loud but I wonder what kind of a massage the pregnant woman gives. My guess is she can rub your muscles into next week.

These people should be run through and handed their own entrails, I say instead.

Extinguished, cleansed, she says back.

Crucifixion, they should bring back crucifixions, I say.

After I say what I say about crucifixions the despicable and I walk toward the front door. I think she is my wife but even if she isn't I might spend the rest of my life with her. As I think this I hear the dog whining but am glad I can't see it in its cage. The pregnant woman and her sire are looking at us and seem upset when I say *Vaya con huevos* to them. Their expressions resemble both the unblemished wall and the paintings on the wall. There is probably an Indian or Chinese or Russian word that describes how these things look but I wouldn't know it. The other four people, including the two skeletons, are whispering and pointing in our direction. I can't hear what it is they're whispering but I don't have to. I know because it is on their faces. It is all over everyone's faces.