

Junior Division, Prose

Kira Horlick, Placentia

**The Red-Eyed Monster (an excerpt)**

She's in the vignette, the scene of his memory, cutting the white-icinged birthday cake with a kitchen knife, levelling it onto cheap paper plates. The tablecloth is white too, patterned with balloons and half see-through. Their son is there, helping his mother with the cake, calling to the other kids to come and sit down on the back step, please come eat cake, it's homemade.

He had just wanted to get away from the noise. That was all it was, they were loud and there was solace in the kitchen, in the cabinet under the sink where the "water bottles" were kept. He knew it was a shameful secret. He knew his son did a quick sniff of every water bottle he found before he drank out of it. He knew and knew and knew, and yet, he didn't know any other option. This is just how men are.

The noise quieted as the sky darkened. One by one, he heard cars pull up to the driveway, heard calls of parents for their children, heard a new voice leave the backyard each time, until only two voices were left.

The kitchen door swung open, and he ducked down behind the counter, waiting. He heard her footsteps pace around the dining room table, before a sigh escaped her lips and she left.

He stood up, shakily, shoving a bottle back under the sink. The kitchen window faced the backyard, on the ground floor, and now he stared out of it in disbelief at what stood there.

Red eyes, watery and blank, staring forward, embedded in a face as pale as the birthday cake, looking at him with contempt. Was it contempt? He's never quite been sure.

It slid a mask on, looking away. His wife entered the backyard, and tried to console the creature, opening her arms for a hug. The monster shook its head, instead picking up

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the remaining paper plates scattered across the folding table and carrying them away,

disappearing from view.