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## Running Into Paper Walls

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### Description

This piece is speculative of what I would be like as a wife if I was not self-aware of my fear of commitment and vulnerability.

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# RUNNING INTO PAPER WALLS

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JULIA SCHULTZ

It's okay to be married to a gamophobic, at least for a while. Just don't try to uproot your life with one is all I can say. To most, gamophobia presents itself in singles living in NYC getting groped at bars and thrill seeking to feel young and commitment free, but it manifests itself in my wife as the inability to let anything in.

We got married, as I am a living testament to today. My fears of her gamophobia were appeased when she said yes to my asking her to marry me. But the longer I live, the more I realize how long that five-second pause between "marry me" and "yes" really was.

To medical doctors, gamophobia isn't diagnosable. It remains an anomaly people ignore. Usually those who suffer from it suffer through their marriages with the comforting fact that at least they aren't alone, destined to die as "old maids."

I remember in October 2020 talking with her as she chopped the ends of brussel sprouts tossing the leafy, green head in the pan already shimmering with oil and the reject pieces into the trash, sometimes chopping off too much of the bottom, wasting the goodness of the leafy green, but I never corrected her.

She liked to get all the brown spots off. Sometimes the speckles surrounding the top of brussels were not so easily removed as peeling back the layers of the brussel sprout. She had to cut them off too—sometimes leaving the sprouts cubed in odd ways with sharp pointy edges where the knife removed the usable pieces tainted slightly with black speckles of age.

Her eyes go white when I talk of moving back home. Like sheets of paper floating through the wind after a street vendor trips and drops his newspapers. Everything stops and he doesn't even run after the valuable assets and income he lost. He just watches them float away.

She started sleeping on the couch. We fall asleep together. She scoots to the far end of the bed and whispers a goodnight almost like she doesn't want me to hear. She has figured out the breathing patterns of an REM cycle sleeper, making me believe she is asleep, keeping me from moving closer or feeling a bit of the warmth she exudes.

The bed is always cold in the morning on her side. The blanket and indented pillow on our green velvet couch give her away even though she tries her best to show she has been working on her computer since five am. I know it's a lie, but I don't intrude. I try to keep her with me as best I can.

One night I caught her sleeping with her car keys in her hand. I wanted so badly to shake her awake and ask if she was leaving me—but I let her be. I needed to keep her close, but the more I try the more she locks the bathroom door when she showers, leaves the dishes perfectly washed and put away after every meal, erasing every trace of her, keeping me from doing anything kind to her, keeping her from owing me something.

I have never been a spiteful person, but I removed the lock from her office. I stopped believing her reasoning for locking the door had been planning a surprise trip for us—it's been four years since that lie has been told, but I let her keep locking the door.

I want to move back home. Despite my alcoholic mother who tries to add a third addition onto my childhood home for me and my wife to move into every time I mention New Jersey, I want to be there. Not there—as in their house, but close. Far enough that you can't walk to the house, hoping my mother's fear of driving even a short distance outweighs her desire to see me and my wife.

She loved New Jersey. I can still remember the way she pressed her hands up against the windows of the car when we passed by bodies

of water—whether the Mullica River, the Atlantic Ocean, or Keyport Waterfront her reaction was always the same. A childlike love for the water I never saw anyone else have.

One spring day we sat pointing at sailboats and watching hovercrafts zoom across the water entertaining children all down the pier when she said, "you know why I think I like the water?" She didn't wait for my guess, "It's because its always consistent, always waiting for me when I come back. The only thing that changes is the amount of sharks reported or the seaweed index for that season."

I still remember moments like this when she opened a piece of her life to me. On the way home from Shoprite lost on County road 542 as she cried to me about her mom being prone to Alzheimer's, or when she told me how much she hated change, leaving her friends in Ohio, or moving away from her family. Her free spirit misled me into believing she really did want to move to Newport, Connecticut, to pursue a career at a publishing company. I believed her and I regret it.

With every new, unlocked memory, or traumatic nightmare, how she wanted to earn her dad's love and believe that she did not have to give the most in every friendship—with every story she shared I swore I was getting to the bottom, away from what she warned me against, the walls, the barriers, the demons that kept her heart so tightly locked. I failed to listen, I failed to understand and now I'm asking her to move back home and I find her sleeping next to the front door and showering at the gym and eating from plastic silverware that can be swept up and discarded in a moment. And the water, the river, the ocean that was a consistent force is now an element of fear, a fear that somehow it has changed, that it won't be the same when she comes back.

As she chops and discards brussel sprouts

into the trash in our kitchen in Middletown, New Jersey, I kiss her on the forehead and tell her I won't change, but I wish I had in time to see her slipping beneath the cracks in the walls she built around me.