



Muse in the fog by Saba Pakdel

The Daily Routine

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(content warning: mentions of suicide)

Ruth Baulter is thirty-two, a mother of three young children and an excellent runner. She awakes each morning at 5:30 am to run in the cold frigid air. This is her daily routine. Her husband, thirty-five and an editor of the local newspaper, wakes at 6:00 am. His name is Arthur Baulter. His face dons silver-wired glasses and his dark brown hair sits messily upon his head while he prepares breakfast.

Ruth runs joyfully down the road, arriving near her home. She smiles and behind each of her joyful steps reflects a small prance. One could imagine Ruth as a young doe frolicking across a glistening green field. The prances concealed a solemn demeanour. Under her shiny blue eyes, one swore that a deep sorrow grew behind her pupils. Though a flash of solemn that quick, no one knew of Ruth's sadness. No one could see it.

Ruth Baulter walked to her home, unlatched the small carabiner from her right shoe and opened her front door. Ruth entered her home for the last time. Today she would leave her picturesque life behind. Arthur and the children did not know about Ruth's plan. Entering the Baulter's home, one noted the small wooden hooks

which promptly held the children's coats. Ruth and Arthur's three young daughters presented a spark of intelligence like their mother and their father's witty humour. Two of the three girls sported Arthur's dark hair, while the youngest donned the same bright blonde hair which Ruth commonly threw into a ponytail.

Ruth entered the kitchen and watched Arthur prepare five plates. The food emitted steam and the smell caused Ruth's stomach to growl. Arthur looked tired — he worked longer hours recently. The tiredness left Arthur's eyes when he turned and saw Ruth in the doorway. His dark brown eyes, almost as dark as his hair, shone back lovingly at the sight of Ruth. His look made Ruth's stomach lurch into a knot. Breathe and smile, thought Ruth.

“Hungry?” said Arthur, he handed her a cup of coffee and gestured her to sit at the table.

“Actually, I'm going to take a shower and get the kids ready for school. I'll eat breakfast soon”, she chuckled at the latter half of her sentence.

“Hey.” He looked at her seriously. He made sure that his dark brown eyes connected with Ruth's blue eyes. “You'll

need your energy. I'll get the kid's ready”. Arthur handed Ruth the plate before he headed out of the kitchen. The plate smelled wonderful. She smiled at her husband and began to scoop the food into her mouth — almost forcefully.

After the children were chased down, tickled, and fed, Arthur took them to school. Ruth waved at her children through the window. Their faces were smiling back at her. She smiled back and quickly turned away from the window. Ruth looked at the clock, 8:00 am. Ruth returned her plate and utensils to the sink, her dishes were the last ones. She stared at her dishes for a few moments. The plate felt smooth in her hands. Ruth turned on the sink's faucet and began lathering the plate and utensils with soap. The plate's soapy exterior felt alien to her hands. The suds felt strange. Smooth and lifeless. Ruth washed the plate and utensils before she dried them with a small kitchen towelette, and placed the flatware into the cupboard.

Ruth, for the last time, exited the kitchen and walked up the wooden stairs. Her feet padded against each step. Slow thumps echoed within the Baulter's home. She walked past the numerous family photos which hung on the wall. Photos from the early years

of motherhood, vacations, and recent images of marathons. Ruth eyed her wedding photo once she reached the top of the stairs. The photo stood tall against the pale blue wall. Images of their wedding resurfaced in her mind. Arthur and her were young, they may have been too young. Not much time had passed until the children came into their lives. After reminiscing, she continued down the hallway to the bathroom. As she walked down the hall, her hand traced the walls — she felt the smooth cold interior and subtle bumps and ridges. For a small moment, the house spoke to her.

She reached the bathroom. She opened the door and stripped off her clothing. One article at a time. It was peaceful and quiet. The act was freeing. All the aspects of life that she desperately wanted to control were absolved in that moment. Each piece of clothing hit the floor with a gentle thud. Each article peeled back the falsity of her joyful demeanour and her daily façade. Ruth, naked in front of the bathroom mirror, stared at herself. Her blonde hair was still pulled into a ponytail and her eyes carried bags of tiredness underneath them. The shiny blue of her eyes carried no spark as she stared in the mirror. They looked dull in the pale bathroom light. Her face reflected a deep fatigue, both physically

and mentally. The corner of her mouth turned downwards slightly, as if her sadness could not be hidden. Her body was fit and athletic, but this fact did not mean anything to Ruth.

She knew that life was not a test and that death could not be predicted. Some may have believed Ruth knew better, some thought Ruth was naïve. Life itself was the reward and she had reaped her award. She filled the bathtub. The water splattered as Ruth stared at the water level — which raised slowly and steadily.

“I don’t know if I can kill this character” she said. Her voice, barely a whisper. The author sat staring at her laptop screen. The screen shone brightly in the darkness and reflected in her glasses. In the small bedroom, her husband laid asleep as the author frivolously typed away. She had spent most of her night in thought. Specifically, she thought of Ruth Baulter. The author, unable to type any more, rose from her chair and closed the writing application. She left the laptop on, allowing the device to put itself to sleep. She stood in front of the empty desktop for a few moments — silent. She needed a few days to think about the life of Ruth Baulter. She stood from her chair and quietly walked to the bed. She carefully slipped into the sheets beside her sleeping husband. She took a deep breathe as she stared up at the bedroom ceiling. The author

recounted the short life of her character. After a few moments, she sat up in bed and stared into the dark bedroom. She slowly peeled back the bedsheets and walked back to her desk. She looked at the laptop which eagerly stared back at her. In the darkness, she felt that the device encouraged her to return. The laptop invited her to finish her story. She sat down at the desk, opened the writing application and began to type.

And thus Ruth Baulter watched her bathtub fill, for it would be the last time. She stepped into the tub and continued to watch the water. The water felt warm and she watched the level increase as she made herself comfortable.

She slowly submerged her head.

She closed her eyes.

The author typed in the last period. She sat quietly staring at her laptop screen. A small tear had began to run down her right cheek. While writing the last paragraph of this character's life, Ruth Baulter stared at the screen — and cried. Tears trickled down her cheeks, along her jaw, and trailed down her neck. She muffled a whimper. She did not want her husband to awake. She saved the document and closed the writing application. With a gentle hand, she closed the laptop screen and viewed the closed device with a deep grief. She rose from her chair and she returned to the bed. Ruth slowly

and carefully moved the bedsheets and settled herself in bed. A small whimper escaped her mouth as she pulled the blanket around her. Her husband shuffled in his sleep, awaking for a moment. He looked at her with sleepy eyes in the dark. He said nothing, turned to face her and wrapped his arm around her. He nuzzled his face in her hair and tucked her head under his chin. Mrs. Baulter sighed and bugged her husband back. She was glad that she could hold him.