

# Introduction: The Evolution of Intersectionality in Western Feminism

Corissa Schrade

Throughout western history, people feared what they did not know; anything considered different made society feel uncomfortable. Humans have been conditioned to dislike differences and stay away from them. Because of this, western culture tends to ostracize people different from them and focus on similarities among themselves. Even though several social movements surrounded around equality molds American history, the tendency to think in binaries prevails. Humans see oppositional categorizing as essential; a person is boy or girl, black or white, straight or gay; the amounts of binaries are endless. Not only does society place individuals into opposing groups, they also exclude each other within those groups. Intragroup differences go unaddressed, especially in social movements. However, the study of intersectionality emphasizes the importance of accepting differences as differences and forming genuine empathetic relationships with people of different identities. According to popular belief, third wave feminism gave birth to intersectionality, but with close examination of the waves of western feminism, one sees how the ideas associated with intersectionality date back to the abolitionist movement.

Throughout mainstream western society, most people know the first wave of feminism as the Suffrage Movement that fought for women to receive the right to vote,

but in the beginning of its founding, first wave feminism surpassed this simple definition. Prior to Seneca Falls and the Declaration of Sentiments, women participated in a social movement separate from Women's Suffrage: the abolitionist movement. During a time when the white patriarchy reigned supreme socially and politically, both white women and people of color began to challenge the patriarchy. The Grimke sisters were some of the first individuals to incorporate intersectionality into their lectures. As the first women to lecture in front of attentive crowds filled with both women and men, the Grimke sisters used their position to advocate for women to join in the abolitionist fight. The sisters explained how gender inequality connected with racial inequality through the oppressive slavery system. They saw that the two groups' oppressions were related and encouraged women to identify with the black liberation movement. Women began identifying their oppression in the system of marriage or their role as a factor worker with slavery. White middle class women began to work side by side with abolitionists, portraying for the first time the foundation of intersectionality in a social movement. From their participation in the abolitionist movement, women learned how to challenge male supremacy and organize a social movement. White middle class women played a huge role in the abolitionist movement and expected their freedom would come with the freeing of slaves. When women did not receive the right to vote immediately after the passage of the thirteenth amendment, women began to reformulate their approach towards suffrage. White middle class women regretted putting their suffrage efforts on hold to focus on the abolitionist movement. Because these women's motivations for siding with the abolition of slaves was not on moral grounds and rested in their desire to gain power, the white middle class women leading the Suffrage Movement falsely practiced intersectionality

and did not form genuine empathetic relationships with the black liberation movement. The focus of the Suffrage Movement turned to winning over the southern states and appealing to the democrats because republicans took up black liberation. These two opposing efforts in American politics at the time represented the concept of binary thinking that intersectionality strives to eradicate. In order to gain more votes, white women utilized their race to their advantage. White women argued their right to vote due to their literacy compared to that of black men receiving the right to vote. Angela Davis describes the movement's ideology presented to win over the southern states: "That Stanton and Anthony welcomed at this time the support of a notorious Democrat, whose program was 'woman first, the negro last,' was an indication that they implicitly assented to Blackwell's racist logic," (Davis 115). Even though the women participated in the liberation of the slaves, the Suffrage Movement adopted racist propaganda to present themselves superior to black citizens and more deserving of the vote. During the first wave of feminism, leaders feared dividing the movement and focused solely on women working towards receiving the right to vote by any means necessary. This caused the movement to exclude black women, causing the adoption of racism, and working class women advocating for workers' rights, adopting classism. Therefore, the first wave of feminism ended up being led by and serving the interests and experiences of white middle class women. Although intersectional thinking began to brew in the first wave, the Suffrage Movement failed intersectionality greatly.

Unlike the first wave of feminism, the second wave, or the Women's Liberation movement, took on a more complex approach to feminism and attempted intersectional ways of thinking. Sparked in the 60s, the climate for social movements was at an all time

high. Spurred by the heavy influences of the Anti-War movement and the Civil Rights movement, the Women's Liberation movement brewed in an intersectional environment. Because of the amount of movements occurring at the time, activists sometimes referred to all of them together as 'the movement.' Individuals worked in conjunction for several different movements and borrowed information as well as volunteers consistently.

Therefore, when the Women's Liberation movement began to brew, the foundational contributors were already steeped in other issues. However, during the early days of the movement, the women did not receive the respect they expected and became motivated to prove the movement's importance in the broader scheme of American society. Unlike the first wave of feminism, the second wave took on a complexity of issues, unafraid, for the most part, to divide the movement because there were already so many different parts to activism during the 60s and 70s. After the publication of *The Feminine Mystique* by Betty Friedan, women became hyperaware of the toxicity of their environments and roles within them. Friedan's book brought to light the personal experiences white middle class women shared but thought was an individual problem. This realization sparked the popularity of consciousness raising groups where women would come together and talk about issues of all kinds. These groups formed all over the United States in several different kinds of communities. Individually, these groups would evolve into organizations performing feminism and then share their experiences through literature. The movement took on a multitude of issues such as: reproductive rights, right in the workforce, women's health, domestic violence, sexual harassment, and abortion. Unlike the first wave of feminism, the Women's Liberation movement attacked several issues and felt a fight on multiple levels of oppression better represented women. Because of the

movement's original foundation in independent parts, bringing the parts together as a whole proved difficult. Mainstream feminism in the second wave began getting heavy media attention, but often centered on white middle class women, many of them radical feminists. Some groups of women felt that mainstream feminism was not representative of their experiences and stayed a separate part of second wave feminism. The Civil Rights movement undervalued women of color and mainstream feminism pushed their experiences to the side, so these women formed their own organizations that would reach out to mainstream feminism. Women of color formed Black Sister's United, Black Women's Liberation Committee, Third World Women's Alliance and several other groups to ensure third world women's experiences were rightfully represented. Along with women of color, conversation in terms of sexuality were not occurring in the beginning of the second wave of feminism and lesbian voices were often quieted to avoid perpetuating the stereotypes media already had of the movement. Refusing to back down, groups such as The Lavender Menace formed and appeared on stage at The Second Congress to Unite Women in 1970. In opposition to the radical feminists, the Women's Liberation movement birthed New Left Socialist Feminism. Socialist feminists recognized that few groups, including multiple radical feminists, saw gender as the only system of oppression women faced, and expanded existing concepts of 'double jeopardy' to expose the tendency to view women as a homogenous group. Linda Gordon explains:

“It was ‘radical feminists’- those who argued that male dominance was the primary form of injustice – who foregrounded sexual and personal abuses, such as rape and harassment, the suppression of female sexuality and the costs of compulsory motherhood. Socialist feminists expanded this analysis to examine

how these forms of oppression affected poor women and women of colour disproportionately,” (Gordon 344).

The Women’s Liberation movement consisted of a variety of individuals refusing to accept their oppression and voicing their experiences, mainstream feminism just falsely represented the attempts of intersectionality in the movement.

Immediately following the immense gains second wave feminism made during the 60s and 70s, a period of backlash encompassed mainstream media in response to the shift in gender roles. Historically, many scholars refer to this period as post-feminism, or “to brush off feminism as a movement that had outlived its usefulness,” (Zeisler 116). Because of the media’s inaccurate representations of professional women during this time as having more equality and power in the workforce than actual women possessed, popular culture lost enthusiasm for feminism. Negative images also emerged of working women as bitter and unhappy, in order to encourage women back into traditional gender roles such as the housewife. Behind the scenes, feminism flourished on college campuses and universities created curriculums dedicated to women’s experiences. Due to the surge of feminism as an academic focus, scholars were able to analyze its history and identify specific terms and foundational concepts. This led to the specification of intersectionality.

Although the second wave of feminism attempted to take on intersectionality, the third wave of feminism identified intersectionality as a term and began incorporating it specifically into feminism. Kimberle Crenshaw coined the term intersectionality from her previous experiences with black feminism and analysis of their experiences from a law background. The concept of intersectionality had been rooted in feminism since the abolitionist movement, but by identifying the concept with a name and rooting it within

scholarship, feminism was able to analyze and utilize intersectionality as a methodology. Many feminist scholars began conversing with each other and setting the foundation for intersectionality during the third wave. Mainstream feminism sometimes simplifies intersectionality to identity politics or the idea that all individuals live at intersections. As more scholars utilized intersectionality as a methodology, aspects of this methodology were refined. A respected intersectional feminist, Patricia Hill Collins, presented the idea that all individuals are equal parts oppressed and the oppressor. In order to understand this concept, Collins states that society needs to understand either/or dichotomous thinking when analyzing identities prevents the ability to understand that individuals suffer from multiple systems of oppression. She further explains: "Applying this premise to discussions of oppression can be quantified, and that some groups are oppressed more than others," (Collins 70). Quantifying oppression perpetuates the idea that certain people's experiences with oppression hold a higher value and place oppression on a hierarchy. Audre Lorde presented her intersectional analysis of feminism through writing about the importance of recognizing differences among women and empathizing with each other's experiences. Throughout history, women have been conditioned to only focus on one system of oppression, gender, which excludes every woman's personal experience with oppression. She states: "Now we must recognize differences among women who are our equals, neither inferior, nor superior, and devise ways to use each other's difference to enrich our visions and our joint struggles," (Lorde 122). By accepting each other's differences as differences, women do not rank their oppression in competition with each other and are able to form empathetic relationships with each other to further the fight towards equity. Women need to respectfully share individual

experiences without fear of categorization and ranking, so that feminism represents all women. As Linda Gordon explains towards the end of her piece, intersectionality: “is now a slogan that represents a widespread understanding that women are not all alike and that subordinated groups will not accept the suppression of their own identities, interests and priorities,” (Gordon 354). Several respected intersectional feminists have produced literature during the third wave of feminism due to its more frequent incorporation in feminist conversations and the increase in accessibility.

Even though intersectionality made significant strides in the third wave of feminism already, an effort to improve always remains imperative and intersectionality requires further progress. Several critiques of intersectionality as a methodology exist due to its ambiguity in definition. Many scholars insist that a specific definition of intersectionality is necessary moving forward, but it is exactly its complexity that reflects the multiple systems of oppressions it created its foundation on. However, now that intersectionality is a popular methodology in mainstream activism, conversation will be had to specify the function of intersectionality as a method. Jennifer Nash presents several ways that intersectionality must adapt for a stronger future in feminism, but one of the most common is the debate surrounding intersectionality and black feminism. Intersectionality grew out of black feminism, but states that it progressed from black feminist studies. However, the similarities between the two argue that intersectionality has not progressed as much as previously considered and that it just renamed black feminism. In order to form a stronger independence as a methodology, intersectionality needs to attribute on top of black feminism and specify its foundations. Another aspect of intersectionality in western feminism that needs to be addressed is that western feminism

does not translate over into all parts of the world the same, specifically third world feminism. *Third World Women and the Politics of Feminism* provides several insightful essays on third world women's relationship with feminism and Ann Russo's piece demonstrates the importance of white women creating empathetic relationships with third world women instead of 'helping them' as if their oppression remains third world women's problems. She insists western feminism must:

“... Move away from responses of denial and guilt, which promote immobilization and passivity, toward responsibility, action, and mutual exchange with women of color is key to disestablishing white supremacy within the context of the women's movement,” (Russo 299).

Moving forward, intersectional feminism needs to work alongside third world women and search to make genuine relationships with them instead of looking to them with pity. Once western feminism identifies their oppression with third world women, intersectional feminism can progress and better represent all women's experiences.

In my thesis, I center the two stories on two white middle class women living in a suburban neighborhood. These women exist in the role of housewife, working domestically while their husbands are the breadwinners. Occurring during the backlash period in the 90s, these women fulfill the emphasis on traditional gender roles popular in mainstream media during that time. I strive to satire the traditional role of the housewife with the extreme representation of Annabelle, who is trapped inside of her house serving her husband. However, Annabelle also suffers from domestic violence and the traumatization and isolation that often accompany it. Her inability to escape her situation and absolute fear of her husband discovering any attempt to escape illustrates that

domestic violence is a complex issue steeped in violent gender roles that has significant psychological and physical damage on an individual. The second wave of feminism directly fought for action against and awareness of domestic violence. By writing Annabelle in the 90s, I emphasize that equity is a constant battle and that no rights are ever guaranteed. Domestic violence remains a significant issue in today's culture resulting from the strong influence of masculinity and its connection to violence. Ava's section represents a more progressive household in the sense that she often serves as the moral figure for her family and runs the show. Representative of women oppressing other women, Ava quickly assumes Annabelle's experience without forming a genuine empathetic relationship with her. Once she talks with Annabelle and becomes insistent upon the fact that the woman is in danger and needs her help, Ava represents the aspect of intersectionality that emphasizes women empowering other women by acknowledging their oppression.

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**BEHIND THE BLUE SHUTTERS**  
Corissa Schrade

## **AVA:**

They had lived in the neighborhood for weeks now and Ava continuously watched for any sense of movement from the blue shuttered house across the street. Any detection of activity and Ava raced to her upstairs window where she hid behind the sheer curtain to spy on the couple behind the shutters. It was rare that the blond bombshell Ava, assumed to be the wife, left the doorframe of their beautiful Cape Cod style home, but during those rare moments Ava's heart danced with excitement. There was something about the woman's flawless physique and perfect beauty pageant smile that made Ava uncomfortable enough to obsess. It didn't help that the husband she kissed goodbye in that very doorframe every morning as he left with a briefcase in hand appeared just as impeccable as her with his slicked back hair and finely pressed suits that clung to his toned physique.

Determined to find a crack in the couple's perfect relationship, Ava became an award winning nosey neighbor. Of course, Ava's kids kept her from catching the couple's every moment and the shades were immediately drawn the minute the husband returned home in the evening, so Ava did what she could.

As is tradition in their quaint suburban town, Ava greeted the couple on their move in day with a casserole in hand. Her husband insisted she leave them to settle in, but Ava's stubbornness brought her across the asphalt and up the landscaped sidewalk to the Cape Cod's beautiful wooden door. As she leaned in to press the doorbell, a loud crash echoed through the interior of the house. In a brief moment of panic, Ava shuffled back and forth deciding whether to leave. Just then, the door flung open and a beautiful blond haired woman stood perfectly silhouetted in the doorframe, a picture that Ava

would analyze for weeks. Initially the woman's face bore a look of disorientation, but when her eyes landed on Ava, her face softened into a mesmerizing smile.

“Hello there,” the woman greeted Ava tilting her head.

The woman's smile captivated Ava for a brief moment. Shaking her head quickly to bring her back to reality, Ava returned the smile: “Hi! Sorry, if this is a bad time I can come by later.” She hinted at the loud noise she had just heard.

Immediately after Ava said this, the woman's eyes widened for just a second before she threw her head back and finger in the air and said, “Oh no, it's fine; we are just moving around some things,” but the woman's nervous laugh inspired a feeling of uneasiness between the two.

After a brief glance inside to try and detect any sign of this statement's truth, Ava reluctantly replied, “Yes, of course. Moving day is always so hectic. Well, on behalf of the neighborhood I just wanted to welcome you guys to the street.” She handed the woman the casserole and faked a genuine smile.

The woman received the glass dish: “How sweet, thank you.”

After a brief moment of silence filled with uneasiness on both sides of the doorframe, Ava placed both her hands on her thighs and leaned in, “Well let me know if you and your husband need help with anything in the moving process; my husband and I would be glad to help.”

As she turned to head back down the stone steps, the woman's face seemed to be pleading, so Ava lingered for just a moment, but ultimately, the woman thanked her for her generosity and turned to go back inside.

Ava walked away from the blue-shuttered Cape Cod feeling entirely apprehensive about the woman's genuineness; she hadn't even caught the woman's name.

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Today pleasantly surprised the residents of Riback Lane, as it was a beautiful eighty degrees in the beginning of October. As she groggily descended down the stairs and into her kitchen to start her morning coffee, Ava yawned at the thought of another brisk fall morning. Sticking to her daily routine, Ava sidestepped to face the window above the kitchen sink after plugging in the coffee pot. As she reached up and turned open the blinds, a beautiful ray of sunshine blinded her. Ava peered out into the trees that lined the back fence to discover a flurry of birds dancing from branch to branch loudly expressing their gratitude for the sunny day.

Quickly turning from the window, Ava unlocked the sliding glass door that led to the deck and their two-year-old Labrador retriever nearly knocked her over, bolting into the fresh air. Expecting a chill to overcome her, Ava instead felt the warmth of sunshine enclose her. Still in disbelief, she stepped onto the deck, closed her eyes, and tilted her face to let the sunshine wake her skin. Maybe it was the sound of birds floating in the light breeze, or the sight of Molly, the lab, rolling around in the green grass, but Ava felt her heart leap up towards her throat and felt the cold weather melancholy lift off her shoulders.

"Someone's in a good mood," her husband returned her cheerful good morning with a wide tooth grin and a peck on the cheek as he carried his coffee to sit at the kitchen table with their littlest.

“You know I think I’m gonna go across the street today and ask that woman if she wants to grab coffee or something,” Ava didn’t dare make eye contact with her husband’s disapproving eyes.

“Ava you gotta let it go, come on. It’s been almost a month now,” he set his paper down on the table and Ava knew he was staring at her so she looked up to challenge him.

“I know, I just... I can’t help but shake this weird feeling about those two,” she turned to grab something out of the fridge.

He just shook his head and took a sip of his coffee, “If you’re not careful they’re going to think you’re a creep.”

But she wasn’t a creep; she had this feeling in the pit of her stomach that no matter how hard she tried, she couldn’t ignore. Ava had always been a great judge of character and the mysteriousness of the couple behind the blue shutters drove her mad.

“Oh well,” Ava shrugged her shoulders with a grin across her face.

Her husband shook his head as he took another sip from his coffee.

Once she helped the kids put their backpacks on and waved from the front porch as they climbed the bus steps, her gaze drifted across the street. The spot in the driveway that usually occupied the black Honda laid empty and Ava knew she had missed the husband’s departure. Even though she still wore her robe, Ava darted back inside, slipped on a pair of shoes and crossed the street.

As she rang the doorbell, she pulled her robe tighter to hide the fact she wore a Mickey Mouse t-shirt underneath. A minute passed by and no sign of movement inside the house. Leaning to her left, Ava attempted to peer in the window. Against her better judgment, Ava rang the doorbell a second time.

Finally, she heard someone unlocking the door, but when the woman opened the door, all Ava could see of her was from the neck up.

“H-Hey...” Ava glanced behind the woman, “Is everything okay?”

Ava watched the woman’s eyes dart to the street behind her.

“Ummm yeah, yeah. Everything’s fine,” the woman pushed back her disheveled hair, “I was just doing some... uh, cleaning.”

“Oh okay... well if you need a break, I was going to head down to Ralph’s to drink some coffee and enjoy this weather.”

The woman glanced to her left towards whatever was hidden behind the door and bit her lip. “Uh, yeah,” she looked down and then back at Ava, “That sounds nice. Can I meet you there in like fifteen minutes?”

Surprised that the woman had agreed to leave her house, much less spend time with her, Ava responded a tad too enthusiastically, “Yeah! Yeah, that’s perfect!”

Ava raced back home and flung her robe onto her bed. Ripping things off hangers and out of her drawers, she dressed quickly and headed into the bathroom. Looking at herself in the mirror, her mind swirled in response to the encounter. Ava watched herself raise her eyebrows in the mirror and covered her mouth as she let out a laugh. She still hadn’t caught the woman’s name, but Ava felt proud of herself for getting her out of the house.

The coffee shop buzzed in the middle of a weekday morning rush. A coffee bean aroma filled the air as Ava opened the door and headed inside. She had gotten there early to ensure the two found a table to sit and talk. Spotting a booth against the back window,

Ava navigated through the crowd quickly to claim it and then started back towards the front counter to order.

Ava leaned against the counter waiting for the barista to call her name when the door swung open to reveal a brilliantly dressed young woman. Recognizing this to be her neighbor, Ava waved.

“Hey!” The woman greeted her with that mesmerizing smile.

“Hey, I-“ Ava began, but got quickly distracted as the barista yelled her name, “I got us a table in the back,” she said pointing in the direction she walked, coffee in hand.

Ava tapped her crossed foot nervously up and down as she stared out the window anxiously ready for this long awaited conversation. When the woman approached the table, Ava uncrossed her legs and leaned closer with an inviting smile across her face. The woman sighed as she sat down and placed her bag next to her.

A moment of silence lingered between them and Ava scrambled for something to break the tension. “So, how do you like the neighborhood so far?”

The woman’s eyes lingered on the top of her coffee for a second too long before she answered, “Well the past few weeks have been so crazy with the move I feel like we are still settling in. I haven’t really gotten to explore the area much.”

“Yeah, I bet everything is still settling down,” Ava nodded understandingly, “Where are you guys from?”

“Ummm north,” the woman’s stare left the coffee shop and focused on something outside, “We’re from north of here.”

Unsure of whether or not to prod the woman for more details, Ava’s head spun with confusion. Finally she settled on moving on from the topic and possibly returning

later. “Well hopefully this’ll be a nice change for you guys. Where in the area have you guys gone so far?”

The woman continued to stare out the window for a little before shaking her head, laughing to herself, and responding, “To be honest, I haven’t really left the house much.”

Immediately, Ava’s mind raced through all of the times she watched this woman stand in the doorframe of that blue shuttered house, had she never left? After a quick analysis, Ava concluded she hadn’t ever seen the woman taking the black SUV that occupied the other side of that driveway anywhere; she knew something was off.

“I’m glad I could introduce you to a little bit of Tafton then,” Ava tried to smile through the relentless amounts of questions racking her brain and begging to leave her mouth.

After another half an hour of small talk, Ava finally managed to discover the woman’s name: Annabelle Davis. She learned the couple had no kids and had no intentions of the sort, her husband originally hailed from Delaware, and Annabelle loved The Food Network. And that was it. Towards the end of their meeting, Annabelle’s answers got shorter and shorter and Ava ran out of generic questions to ask this mysterious woman.

“I should really head out, Michael asked me to finish unpacking the dining room today.” That was the first time Annabelle had mentioned her husband’s name.

“Oh, yes of course! Yeah that’s totally fine!” And with that the two stood to leave.

Just outside the coffee shop's door, Annabelle immediately began to head in the opposite direction, but turned around and said, "Thank you for the invite, this was nice. I'll see you around."

Ava waved back and slowly turned away from Annabelle. After a couple of steps, Ava peered over her shoulder to catch another glimpse of the woman. Shaking her head, Ava told herself, "That was weird."

\* \* \*

"I'm telling you, Sean, something's off. Talking with her today...I don't know... It's something though," Ava told her husband as she shook her head and sifted through the mess making dinner had left in the kitchen.

"Ava, maybe she just doesn't like getting out. Maybe she has that thing where you're scared to go outside," Sean waved his hand to dismiss her assumptions.

Ava stopped what she was doing and put her hands on her hips, "Really? That thing? Sean I'm serious, I don't feel right about them."

Sean rubbed his face with his hands, attempting to grapple his wife's thought process. "Look, why don't you wait a little while, see if anything else seems off, and then we can start figuring things out."

Ava looked out the window, "I don't know, something just doesn't seem right."

In attempt to distract Ava's spiraling thoughts, Sean walked over to her, wrapped his arms around her and buried his face into the top of her hair. "Everything'll be fine Ava."

She placed her arms around his and leaned her head against his shoulder, but internally she was further assessing today's events.

As the two stood intertwined, Sean rocked Ava back and forth. They stayed that way for a while until Sean broke the silence: "I'm going to get the garbage ready for tomorrow," and Ava nodded in approval.

Taking a look at the mess still sprawled out in front of her on the kitchen counter, Ava let out a deep sigh and decided to mess with everything tomorrow.

At the top of the stairs, Ava quickly opened the doors to her kids' bedrooms to check in and then headed down the hall. Greeting her when she walked through the master bedroom's doors was a huge mound of laundry spread across the entire bed.

"Ughhh," Ava expressed her frustration, remembering her intentions to ask Sean to fold these clothes before she realized tomorrow was garbage day.

In the midst of folding clothes, Ava heard the thunderous rumble of Sean bringing the garbage bins down the driveway and glanced outside towards the sound. There he was, but Ava also saw Sean wave in the direction of across the street. It was him, the husband, Michael.

Ava immediately dropped what she was doing and stealthily hid behind her sheer curtain. She could see the two men conversing, but wanted to know what they were saying. If she opened the window, it would creak and her hiding spot would be forever ruined. Deciding it wasn't worth the risk, Ava attempted to analyze their body language to figure out what was going on.

Sean loved being the social butterfly almost as much as Ava. She observed his arms flailing up and down as he talked with their neighbor and laughed a little to herself.

Ava could tell that the other guy was not as thrilled to be having this interaction as he continuously side stepped to head back inside his garage. Just as she grew bored of watching the two men talking, Ava noticed the other man's stance become stiff and uncomfortable and a forceful swallow visibly moved his Adams apple. Ava cocked her head to the side and squinted for a better view. Something Sean said definitely made this man uncomfortable. Sean's body language altered immediately in response; he became frantic pointing towards the house. Their interaction wrapped up and both men walked briskly into their respective houses.

Ava watched the garage door close and awaited the usual sight of Annabelle closing the blinds. Before long, Ava spotted the blond hair in the window and began to turn shut her own blinds. Ava looked at the rod on the blinds for a split second and then glanced back across the street.

There was a flash of movement and the curtains began to move frantically. A figure returned to the window frame, only this time, it was a much bulkier and the blond hair was missing. The husband. He reached up to close the curtains, but his gaze dropped and his eyes landed dead on Ava. The stare locked for a couple seconds. Ava felt panic begin to creep up her throat and fog her vision. His stare paralyzed Ava and tensed every muscle in her body.

“Ava!” Just then Sean came bounding up the stairs after slamming the door.

Ava screamed and she was able to take back control of her body. Just before she fell on the floor panting, she watched the curtains shut quickly and the man disappear.

“AVA!” Sean's calls got louder and she could hear him beginning to panic.

She couldn't speak.

Sean appeared in the doorway with a stone look spread across his face, “Ava!” he shrieked and fell to the ground next to her, scooping her up into his arms. He cupped her face gently, looking her in the eyes and said, “You were right; I think something’s going on behind those blue shutters.”

## **ANNABELLE:**

“Who was that?” Annabelle had just shut the door and was leaning her head against it for support, when the voice startled her.

She whipped around to face him aggressively standing in the hallway. His eyes pierced her skin and a chill traveled from the curve of her back up the length of her spine.

“No one,” her eyes dropped to look at her feet, desperate to break the unnerving stare, “Just the neighbor across the street.”

After a couple of seconds filled with silence, she glanced up towards the area of the hallway he had been standing. It was empty. Annabelle sighed and peered out the window with pleading eyes watching her neighbor leave. She gripped the area below her shoulder that throbbed with pain and swallowed down an urge to cry.

Biting her lip, she took the casserole she placed on the entry table and headed back into the depth of the house. She put the casserole in the fridge and walked into the dining room to clean up the mess with broom and dustpan in hand. As she swept the pieces of ceramic off the floor, she swept up pieces of herself. The vase was a wedding gift and just like everything else, it shattered on account of the outbursts.

When she returned from dumping the remains into the bins in the garage, she glanced into the room he escaped to. He sat in front of the computer, jaw clenched. Annabelle snapped her eyes back to the floor in front of her and quickly moved past the door.

Just like every night, Annabelle went through the house and drew curtains as soon as darkness enclosed her. As she reached up to pull them shut, her eyes landed on the upstairs window across the street. Annabelle thought she saw the sheer curtains quickly

slam together. She kept her eyes on the window, hoping the curtains would show a sign of movement and Annabelle could get the attention of her neighbor. It was hopeless.

There was no getting out.

Annabelle lay awake in her bed feeling her arm throbbing in and out, in and out, in and out. Laying flat on her back was the only way she didn't feel pain. She stared at the ceiling and let her mind drift up and away from her body. As her two parts distanced, she felt as if both, or one, escaped the house. The split second of freedom felt like salvation.

Suddenly, everything fell back into herself and stopped. The pressure built inside her and it felt like it strangled her mind. He was next to her. Annabelle told herself not to move until the snores coming from the other side of the bed indicated he had fallen asleep.

When the steady rumble of throat noises reached her ears a few minutes later, Annabelle's eyes began to well up with heat. She tried not to make a sound as a single tear slid down the side of her cheek. She stared at the darkness above her and prayed to somehow disappear into it.

Everyday seemed to be a monotonous routine driving her slowly mad and spreading her so thin. The white walls of the house gave her the feeling she resided in a mental institution and the lack of human interaction made her think that maybe she would get there. Every second she scoured the surfaces in the house to make sure no fault could be found, no reason for another outburst. She cleaned things already clean for the sake of having something to do.

Occasionally she would sit in the backyard and listen to the sounds of the neighborhood. Sitting in the front yard would draw attention and Annabelle did not need to answer questions. The sounds of children laughing while riding their bikes and running around the yard brought both a smile to her face and pain to her heart. From a young age, Annabelle knew she wanted children. Her lack of siblings growing up and several babysitting jobs throughout the years sparked a desire to nurture.

But that couldn't happen, not with him. It's not as if he didn't try, but she had been secretly taking birth control for years after he started forcing himself onto her. The attraction died when the outbursts started; it was impossible for her to desire a monster. That didn't stop him and resisting caused physical pain instead of just mental. This did not mean consent and she knew that. She knew what was happening. But Annabelle was trapped by fear behind the blue shutters.

Her dream of having a mini-me did not account for him as a father and she had no intentions of putting an innocent child anywhere near that man. So for now she sat and listened to the neighborhood kids' giggles and it was music to her ears.

Annabelle so desperately longed for someone to ring their doorbell and interrupt the dullness of her days. But at the same time, she dreaded the consequences of him finding out; and the voice in the back of her head told her he would somehow always find out.

\* \* \*

Today began the same as any other morning the past few weeks since he dragged her to this place. Annabelle woke up to her alarm set an hour before he had to be up for

work so she could ensure perfection when he came down for judgment. Per usual, Annabelle cooked him breakfast, made his coffee, and then disappeared into the guest bedroom to avoid any interaction until he said it was time to go.

“I’m leaving,” he stood at the bottom of the stairs and called up.

It was time for the show the Davis’s put on every morning. She descended the stairs and followed him to the door. Taking in a deep breath and closing her eyes, Annabelle pretended this wasn’t her reality and left the current situation. He kissed her and turned to head out to the car. When Annabelle heard him start to walk away, she came to and returned inside the house. Annabelle had become so efficient at leaving the present that she hadn’t felt him touch her; a little kiss she could ignore, anymore than that she struggled to escape from.

Once back inside she braced her weight against the beautiful wood door and caught her breath. Usually the kiss was the only time she had to acknowledge his presence, on a good day, but it took everything out of her. Pretending to care and touch someone who continued to chip away at your soul day after day exhausted her.

Annabelle ran her fingers through her hair and let out a huge sigh, breathing out with her entire body.

Just as she pushed off of the door, the doorbell rang through the house. Annabelle immediately leapt back and turned to stare at the back of the door. Someone was on the other side and she didn’t know what to do.

She stood there in the doorway, mouth open and staring at the door for what felt like forever. Annabelle could feel her body become tingly starting in her feet and

working its way up to her neck. Her breathing quickened as she slowly raised her arm to open the door.

Before turning the knob, Annabelle took a deep breath and let it out slowly. She angled her body so that only her head peaked out from behind the wooden door.

The sun streamed in and warmed her pale skin. Annabelle immediately recognized the woman standing in front of her to be the neighbor that unexpectedly showed up the day they moved in to hand her a casserole that probably had freezer burn growing on it by now.

“H-Hey,” Annabelle watched the woman’s eyes move to inside the house, “Is everything okay?”

Annabelle thought about how badly she wanted to fall to the ground, heaving with sobs, and beg this woman to help her. But then that agonizing voice returned and reminded her of how relentless her husband would be in punishing her. She panicked and took a quick glance at the street to see if this was a trap.

“Ummm yeah, yeah. Everything’s fine,” Annabelle struggled to seem completely calm and brushed her hair back to rid the urge of fidgeting, “I was just doing some... uh, cleaning.” Cleaning seemed normal, that’s what a housewife was supposed to do right?

“Oh okay... well if you need a break, I was going to head down to Ralph’s to drink some coffee and enjoy this weather.”

Annabelle’s heart jumped at the thought of leaving the house and getting to interact with someone other than her husband. She could feel warmth in her heart and tried her hardest to fight a smile. But then she remembered her husband’s warnings. Trying her best to not take a suspicious amount of time to answer the woman, she blurted

out from impulse, “Uh, yeah. That sounds nice. Can I meet you there in like fifteen minutes?”

Before Annabelle could realize what she had done, the woman perked up and enthusiastically responded with “Yeah! Yeah, that’s perfect!”

Annabelle faked a grin while her heart raced inside and the woman darted back across the street.

After slamming the door, Annabelle slapped her hands against her face and held her head in disbelief. What had she just done? Annabelle stood motionless for a couple of minutes debating which would prove worse: leaving the house and possibly spilling something to her neighbor, or raising suspicion if she neglected to show.

She wanted so badly to leave; she wanted to leave and never come back, but she knew Michael would track her down somehow.

Gathering herself, Annabelle decided her husband would understand if she went to avoid the neighbors talking. In truth, she knew that the real reason she decided to go to the coffee shop had nothing to do with pleasing him.

\* \* \*

The aroma invigorated her senses as she stepped through the door of the coffee shop and was overwhelmed with the white noise of chatter, steaming and light knocking. Annabelle closed her eyes and smiled to herself; it felt amazing to be surrounded by so many different people living their lives, bustling around. When she opened them, she saw the lady from across the street frantically waving at her.

As Annabelle waited for her coffee, the excitement from getting out of the house wore off and she started realizing what she had done. She rubbed her shoulders as a shiver ran down her body and caused the hairs on her arms to stand up. Annabelle would suffer for this decision and she knew that.

The entire time the two talked at the table, Annabelle kept nervously looking out the window searching for some form of comfort or way to escape. Whenever her eyes would wander back towards the woman's, Annabelle tried her best to look deep into her soul and connect. Surely she could see the pain in Annabelle's eyes. The area around her eyes was noticeable dark and dry when looked at close up and full of wrinkles from years of stress and worry. Annabelle's eyes drooped, but at the same time seemed wide and innocent. Focusing as hard as she could, Annabelle thought of the worst outbursts and focused on relaying this message to the woman sitting across from her; she thought maybe if she didn't say anything out loud she was in less danger. Her arms remained crossed the entirety of the meeting, guarding herself. If only the woman paid attention, she would see Annabelle's cautious and slow movements to avoid shooting pain in the area underneath her shoulder.

But the neighbor kept asking questions, and Annabelle unprepared for a conversation she had never held with anyone before panicked and gave whatever answers she could comprise. Annabelle thought for sure her answers would trigger a warning flag. The further into the conversation, the more Annabelle could tell her silent cries for help were not heard and she started preparing for a different battle, the one that would happen later.

“I should really head out, Michael asked me to finish unpacking the dining room today,” saying his name out loud took Annabelle by surprise and sent her stomach lurching.

“Oh, yes of course! Yeah that’s totally fine!” And with that the two stood to leave.

That was it; Annabelle’s opportunity window slowly cranked shut. Annabelle focused now on getting home and erasing any ounce of evidence she had left the house that afternoon before he returned from work.

Annabelle thanked the woman for the invite and faked a smile as she said goodbye. Turning away, the terror grew on her face as she raced back to her car.

\* \* \*

Annabelle made it through dinner without a hiccup; Michael showed no signs of suspicion. She doted upon him extra carefully for the remainder of the night until he headed outside to put out the garbage bins for tomorrow morning.

After she finished picking up the mess from dinner in the kitchen, Annabelle headed into the living room to start her usual routine. She began closing the curtains on the front windows, when she noticed her husband talking to the neighbor’s husband outside. She froze. With a stone like stare, Annabelle tried to depict what they talked about; no doubt he made a comment about their wives’ meeting today. Her heart raced so wildly in her chest that it traveled up the side of her throat and into her ears. For a split second, Annabelle thought about running, out the back door, away from the blue shutters. Her mind faded fast and before she could make a decision she heard the door slam.

Annabelle moved onto the next curtain and acted as if she had nothing to hide. She heard his footsteps approach her, but it wasn't until she could see him out the corner of her eye that she looked in his direction. Before she could react she felt his sturdy arms grab her roughly by the shoulders. The next thing she knew the room was whirring by and she slammed into the wood floor. Outburst.