

FLASH FICTION

Papanca

by Pamela Smith



"Making plan" by Muyang Li

It's two in the morning, and she's in the bathroom, bleach coats the floor, thick, suffocating. It spreads like a blanket no one ever asked for.

The smell is sharp, like a bite.

She is sitting on her knees, adjusting herself to lessen the pain of their stickiness, a feeling that recalls sugar clinging to her fingers after cotton candy.

She scrubs with the hard brush, arm swinging in a steady rhythm, back and forth, over and over.

The grout between the tiles, once black like a suburban street, turns white, gleaming under the harsh light of a lamp above them.

Back and forth, like a mantra, one, two, three, again.

The sound of bristles scraping against tile becomes a rhythm she clings to.

A sudden noise rips her away from her work.

They brush the glass with a sharp tap, then pause, waiting.

She stares through the pane, the smell of bleach twisting her senses and thoughts.

She hesitates, hand on the window latch, then unlatches it.

The cold night slips in.

A bat darts through the opening, silent. It rises, twisting in the shadows above, disappearing from sight.

She lets it vanish. A persistent memory drapes itself over her mind, of a world she has almost forgotten.

Then she turns back.

The brush moves in her hand, back and forth.

One, two, three.

The mantra goes on, echoing softly in the empty bathroom, a rhythm she cannot let go of.