



EVERY-

THING

TURNS

MICHELLE BERRY

AWAY

**EVERYTHING  
TURNS AWAY**

**ALSO BY MICHELLE BERRY**

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# EVERYTHING TURNS AWAY

*Michelle Berry*



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*For Stu, Abby and Zoe*  
*And especially for my parents, Margaret and Edward Berry*

*- With all my love -*



In Breughel's *Icarus*, for instance: how everything turns away  
Quite leisurely from the disaster.

– W. H. Auden, "Musée des Beaux Arts"





## SEPTEMBER 11, 2001, 4:32 A.M.

When the babysitter wakes she is in a strange kitchen. It is dark. Her neck is stiff and she is bent awkwardly over a table, leaning forward on a hard chair. Her arms are asleep from resting her head on them. The babysitter shakes herself out and groans. Something is wrong with her head. Something hurts. Everything hurts. Where is she? It is pitch-black out. She can hear nothing. No sound. Has she lost her hearing? She looks around frantically, trying to figure out where she is. She isn't at her boyfriend's, at Derek's. She isn't at her house. Or any of her friends' houses. Or even back with the baby waiting for the drunk parents to come home from that dinner party. The time on the microwave is lit up. It says 4:32.

Then the babysitter hears a noise. She leans back down on the table, puts her head in her hands the same way she'd been resting before and closes her eyes. Hiding. She doesn't want to be here. She doesn't want to be seen. A sliding glass door behind her opens. Someone comes into the kitchen in the dark and disappears into

another room. The babysitter can hear the squeak of running shoes on tile. She doesn't open her eyes. She hears footsteps moving around a room off the kitchen.

She can hear. It just occurs to her that her hearing has come back. She stifles a sob. The babysitter wants to go home. She'll never do drugs again. Never, never, never. She'll straighten up her life. Honestly. Please, she thinks. Please don't let anything happen to me.

A strangled cry. A groan. The sound of something ripping. Muffled noises. A struggle? The babysitter stiffens. She suddenly remembers a man and a woman in this kitchen talking to her. Where the hell is she? What is going on?

There are more sounds coming from the room. Quiet sounds. Thumping. Ripping. Like cloth. Or tape. Something ripping. Wet sounds. The babysitter has never heard sounds like this. She doesn't even know how to explain them to herself. How will she tell people later? If she survives. She can't figure out what they could be. Slurping noises. Strangled crying. Oh God, she thinks. Oh help. What if she just got up quickly and rushed out the back door into the night? Maybe she could do that? But her legs are as stiff as her neck. She is not sure they will work. It will be like one of those lame horror movies her friends love to watch where the girl always trips. She always trips when running away from the murderer.

The babysitter hears the footsteps coming into the kitchen. A sigh. Light, airy, feminine. A whimper. She hears breathing. Heavy, as if running. The person stops. She can feel someone looking at her. She can feel the eyes as if they are burning holes into her shoulders. There is nothing like this. Nothing she has ever experienced in her sixteen years has prepared her for this. It's so hard not to begin shaking. Or screaming. The babysitter somehow knows that if she moves, if she shows any indication of being awake, something awful will happen to her. There is a smell in the air suddenly. A rusting

metallic smell. Also the smell of shit. Breath and breathing all around her. Panting. The person stands there breathing. Catching breath. The babysitter stops breathing. And then the person leaves. Out the sliding glass door. Shutting it silently behind them.

Gone.

The babysitter stays there, in the same position. Not daring to move. Then she gulps air again. Panic breaths. In out, in out. She tries not to gag on the smell that is becoming more and more prominent. It is overtaking the kitchen. It's a fishy, rusting smell.

The babysitter raises her head slightly. The clock on the microwave says 5:10. She lowers her head. She hears noises coming from upstairs in the house. Someone walking down the hall. A door shutting. A toilet flushing. Water running. Then the footsteps walking back down the hall. Another door shuts. A bed creaks.

Where am I? The babysitter screams inside her head. Where the fuck am I?

She remembers her math textbook. A fox. A man with rotten teeth. She remembers her boyfriend, Derek, touching her stomach with his soft lips, bending to lick her belly button as she stood outside on the back steps with him and smoked the joint he gave her and drank the Diet Coke, while the baby slept inside. She remembers the mother, whose kid she was babysitting, yelling at her through the door, and Derek disappearing down the side of the house and running away, the mother telling her to walk home right now, alone. She remembers the length of Bloor Street and rushing across the bridge towards somewhere far from home. She aches for Derek. Where is he? Where was he when she was supposed to meet him at the bottom of the street? If he had been there nothing bad would have happened to her. She wouldn't have been in this strange house, hearing strange noises, smelling horrible smells. She would be home in her own bed, with her cat.

Blood, the babysitter, thinks. Suddenly her mind goes red. Blood. That's the smell of blood. Her period. She has smelled this smell once a month for several years now.

She stands up, tests her legs. They work. Her brain pounds, makes thick, slow connections. Blood. The heavy breathing. Was it a man? She isn't sure. There was the sound of someone. The bulk of a person. It's always a man, isn't it? The heat of a man? She assumes a man now but she isn't sure. There was a female sound to the noises, a sigh, a whimper. Running shoes squeaking on the floor. The smell. Shit. Blood. Oh God, she thinks. Before, in the kitchen, were a man and a woman. She remembers that. One is upstairs. Where is the other? Who was that person?

The babysitter turns towards the sliding back door. She turns just a bit, terrified that she will see a face looking back at her from the darkness. Her heart beats wildly. She sees only her reflection. And a black streak smeared on the white handle of the door. She reaches out and touches this streak and pulls her hand back. Smells it. Metal. Blood.

"No," she whispers. The floor is streaked with it.

Later she will regret this, but the babysitter can't help herself from walking towards the room off the kitchen. It sounds to her as if she is walking in tap shoes. Loud, clicking noises. But really she is quiet as a mouse. Towards the back room. There is no door on it. It is becoming dawn and she can see more now. The sun is coming up. She can hear more. Smell more.

She comes straight into the room in her tap-tap-tap, so-god-damn-loud shoes and looks, eyes open, at the sofa bed. On the bed is something. What? Something. The smell is fierce in here. The babysitter moves closer. She sees puddles forming on the floor, puddles of that thick black stuff soaking into the rug. She wonders, later, if she heard drips. Plopping. Thick.

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“No.”

She moves closer still. Why can't her legs move away, turn away, why can't she get out of there quickly? Something is compelling her to see what she needs to see. Something is telling her that if she doesn't see this she will never know what happened in this room and she will wonder for the rest of her life.

There is a body. Wet and oozing. Blood. Everywhere there is blood. And duct tape holding the legs, the arms. His face . . . it's a man. The babysitter turns and runs back into the kitchen. She stops. She turns wildly around.

They will think it was her.

She opens the sliding glass door, using the material from her shirt to grasp the handle, to wipe off that black smear she touched earlier, and disappears into the world. She takes off out into the early morning. Down the back porch and across the grass and down the side of the house and out into the street. She runs faster than she's ever run before. Sprinting. It's a race, she thinks. I'll be the fastest to get away. Around every corner she hears the murderer. Around every corner she hears the breathing. But no one is out. She passes no one. Even on the Danforth there is little traffic and the babysitter manages to cross the street quickly and rush south, down towards the water. She needs to get away, as far away as she can.

The babysitter cries. And she runs.



**BEFORE**





## 1.

Sophie thinks, much later, that a lot of it began with the butter dish.

A Wedgewood butter dish. Blue and round, with a solid silver lid and beautiful creamy Greek goddesses on the sides.

The butter dish is what sets her off. Paul's grandmother's butter dish.

Sophie carries the butter in from the table and thumps it down on the counter beside Paul. His hands are in the sink, up to the elbows in soapy water.

"Jesus, Sophie, you almost broke my grandmother's butter dish."

"What do I care about butter? Or dishes?" she says and walks back into the dining room. He said *his* butter dish. As if it isn't *hers*.

Back into the kitchen again, this time with the salt and pepper in the crystal shakers given to him by his mother. Sophie plops these down heavily on the island in the middle of the kitchen.

"Salt and pepper." She wants to shout, but she'll wake the baby. "I suppose they are yours too? Who cares?"

Another sip of wine. Paul is drinking the leftover wine in all the glasses from the dinner party. Helen had white, dry wine; Sophie had a rich red; Allan had beer. Allan stuck with beer all night. Paul doesn't want to sip Allan's beer. He drinks out of Helen's glass and wonders if this is what it would be like to kiss her. He tastes her lipstick on the edge of the glass.

Sophie brings in the tablecloth. His, his, hers, she thinks.

"Shake it outside."

"What do you know?" she hisses. "Shake it outside." But she goes to the back door and opens it to the chilly night air and shakes the cloth out into the rose bushes off the porch. The light goes on with the motion detector. She watches the crumbs scatter.

Paul has turned the radio on while he washes dishes. The dishwasher is chugging along beside him. He whistles to Mozart. He drinks out of Helen's glass.

Sophie comes back inside and kicks the cat out of the way. She stops and listens to the noise around her. The radio. The dishwasher, Paul's whistling. The swish of water on plates, the cutlery clinking.

"It was a good dinner," Paul says.

"The chicken was too dry."

"Sophie," Paul says. "Lighten up."

Sophie pours herself some of the leftover white wine in a new glass. Paul has washed hers. She notices that Paul is drinking out of Helen's glass. "Figures," she says.

"What?" Paul continues to whistle.

Allan had been drinking beer all night. He didn't even switch to wine for dinner. Sophie was appalled. Beer didn't work with her dinner. Wine did. It made her angry suddenly, as she sat down across from him, to watch him suck on his beer. That's another thing. He didn't pour it in a glass. The glass she offered. Instead he drank from the bottle and Helen laughed and her lipstick stained the rim of her

crystal wineglass. And Paul laughed all night. With all of them. Open-mouthed laughing. They are in their thirties. All of them. It's 2001. Grow up, she thinks. We need to all grow up.

The baby gurgles. She can hear her upstairs through the monitor on the kitchen counter. Gurgling. Rolling over in her sleep. Allan and Helen's baby probably never gurgles in the night. Helen is probably never kept awake by the little sounds that come out of the monitor all night long. In fact, Sophie thinks, Helen probably doesn't even have a monitor, doesn't believe in them. Their damn kid probably sleeps perfectly.

Why is she so angry? Sophie doesn't know.

Paul wonders why Sophie is so angry. His hands are warm and wrinkled in the soapy water. Sophie forgot to run the dishwasher before the dinner party and so the dishwasher is cleaning both the lunch and breakfast dishes. Paul is cleaning the dinner dishes. And Sophie used so many dishes. It seems to Paul as if he's washed sixteen plates for four people.

"Should I check on her?" Sophie asks. "She's gurgling."

"She has a cold. Nothing to worry about."

Paul is always saying no. No, don't check on the baby. No, don't worry about anything. Colds. Flu. SIDS. Nothing to worry about. Don't worry about airplane travel, or public toilet seats, or leaving the oven on. Nothing will happen, thinks Paul. Everything will happen, thinks Sophie.

The house will catch fire from the faulty wiring in the oven; the public toilet seats will give you a rash you can't get rid of. It will spread to your internal organs and then slowly kill you. And airplane travel. My God, Sophie thinks. Airplane travel.

Paul wonders if Sophie will dry the dishes or if she will just stand there, looking at the baby monitor and sipping her wine. A scowl on her face.

Sophie thinks, Why am I always so upset? It's not like she wants to be this way. She used to be happy. Didn't she? As a child. Even as a teenager. Always laughing. And now, Helen's lips are on Paul's wineglass (or the other way around) and Sophie hates Allan for drinking out of his beer bottle.

That's another thing. It was his beer. He brought his own beer. As if their beer wasn't good enough.

"Was it?" Sophie asks out loud. "Was it not good enough?"

"What?"

"Our beer?"

"We don't have any beer," Paul says. "Allan drank it all."

"Oh."

So he moved on from his six-pack to their beer. He wasn't as picky as Sophie thought. But he was a drunk. Good thing he walked home. Staggered home. And Helen staggered along beside him. Although Helen doesn't even look drunk when she is. High heels. Rosy cheeks. And she managed the sidewalk down the front of their house with no problem.

The baby sobs. One quick sob. Then nothing. Paul and Sophie stop and stare at the monitor. They look at each other.

"Dream," Paul says.

"Fucking airplane travel," Sophie says.

Paul looks at her quizzically. But he says nothing. Better, he knows, to say nothing, pretend he isn't listening. Five years of marriage has taught him this. If only this. There are plenty of other mistakes he is always making and knows he is making. It's just that he forgets sometimes, forgets to do the things she has asked him to do.

Sophie begins to dry the dishes. She thinks about Allan and his macho ways, the way he says, "How ya doing?" with a little wink when he comes in the door. She thinks about the way he kisses her on both cheeks when he leaves. Hard kisses. Hard hands that grab her shoulders.

But he smells nice. She'll give him that. It's a smell that comes off of him. A warm, clean smell. Even his strong cologne doesn't mask it.

Paul licks around the rim of Helen's wineglass. He hopes she has a cold. He could use a sick day. Call in to work and lie on the couch watching TV. But with Sophie and the baby at home he would probably end up fixing something or cleaning something or moving something instead.

Helen, Sophie thinks. Sophie has known Helen for years, before they were both married, before they both had kids. They've become better friends now, since they had kids at the same time, but Sophie doesn't think she even knows her. Like what was Helen thinking when she looked at Paul and asked him to tell Allan how easy it was to get fixed. She said "fixed," just like he was a cat. Neutered. Paul was shocked. His vasectomy was a secret – only done because Sophie didn't want any more babies, only done because this pregnancy almost killed her, because the doctors said the next pregnancy would kill her.

"Fixed?" he said, looking at Sophie. "Who said I was fixed?"

And Helen laughed then and said, "Oops." She said, "Was that a secret?" She held her long painted fingernails up to her scarlet lips, her white teeth peeking through.

"Damn her," Sophie says.

That's another thing. She's been talking to herself a lot lately. Swearing to herself. She can't seem to help it. Days alone with the baby. She blurts things out all the time. In the grocery store, at the dentist even. Didn't he have to tell her to stop talking when he filled that cavity last Wednesday?

"Who?" Paul stops washing the dishes. He dries his hands on the towel and then turns to Sophie and says, "Who? Damn who?" Paul knows he should say nothing but he just can't help it.

“No one.” Sophie puts the dishes away. She forgets to dry them and just places them in the shelves wet. Paul watches her.

“You’re drunk,” he says.

“Okay,” Sophie says. She takes a deep breath. “You know that I hate when you say that.”

“Yeah, I know,” Paul says. “But you are.”

“And you are too.”

Paul looks at his wrinkled hands. “I am.” He picks up Helen’s wineglass and swallows the dregs. He wonders if her lipstick has come off on his lips. He wonders what he’d look like with red red lips. He wonders if his teeth would look whiter. Helen’s certainly did. “I am not ashamed of being drunk.”

“You should be,” Sophie says. “And it’s a drunk. Not drunk.”

“So should you.” Paul leaves the kitchen, moves into the dining room, looks at their dining-room table and remembers when they bought it, when they went into that horribly expensive store in Yorkville and handed over a credit card and bought it. Like it was nothing. Like they did that kind of thing every day. Spend five thousand dollars on a table. Not even the chairs. Just the table. That was before they were married. Before they had the baby. Paul imagined dinner parties on that table. Dinner parties like tonight’s. When you would drink and eat and be merry. You would laugh and then clean up, all the while talking about how fun the night was. And then you would go to bed and lie together and continue talking and touching and kissing.

“Ha,” Paul says to himself.

“You’re doing it too.” Sophie is right behind him. He didn’t hear her come into the dining room. She’s holding her wineglass. “You’re talking to yourself too. I’m not the only crazy one in this house.”

Paul looks at her. His wife. He hears the baby sigh on the monitor. He reaches out towards Sophie but she walks quickly past him and

goes into the living room. She plops down on the couch and puts her feet up on the coffee table (another expensive purchase from before they were married). The coffee table has scratches on it from use, from time. Scratches on his heart, Paul thinks, and then snorts.

“Do you think Helen and Allan had a good time tonight?” Sophie calls to Paul in the dining room.

Paul steps back into the kitchen, grabs his wineglass, fills it and then walks into the living room and sits beside Sophie. He puts his feet on the coffee table next to hers. They both face the dead fireplace. Paul sips his wine.

“I don’t know. Helen looked like she was having fun. Allan said something, though. About an argument they had earlier. There was some tension. Once Allan starts into a few beers he gets bossy. Have you noticed? Telling Helen how to eat her food, how to hold her fork. Like she isn’t an adult.”

“And she kept phoning the babysitter. Can’t she go out for one night without checking on every crappy diaper?”

Paul laughs. “Is that what she was doing? Poop count?”

Sophie smiles slyly. “Their baby isn’t perfect if she’s pooping through the night.”

“Yeah,” Paul laughs. “Who shits in the night?” He touches his toe to Sophie’s. A tender moment. She pulls back.

“Did you just notice that?” Sophie says. “About Allan being bossy. You just noticed it tonight?”

“No, I . . .” Paul thinks. Yes, he did just notice that. Usually Allan seems so easygoing.

“He’s always like that. He makes me sick.”

Paul looks at Sophie. Really looks at her. “You don’t like Allan?”

Sophie shrugs.

“Why do we have them over for dinner so much if you don’t like him?”



"I don't really like Helen either," Sophie says.

"Oh." Paul looks at the coffee table. He looks at Sophie's feet. "I like Helen. I think she's nice. She's smart." Why did he say that just now, he thinks.

Sophie hits him. Smacks his leg hard.

"Ouch. What was that for?"

"I'm going to check on Rebecca."

"Don't check on her. You'll wake her and then she'll be up all night."

Sophie rises. "I'm going. There's nothing you can do to stop me." She stumbles a bit, staggers. Almost spills her wine.

"I could hold you here." Paul reaches up and takes her hand.

"Let go."

"Don't check on Rebecca."

"I'm going to check on the baby."

"Helen isn't that great, actually. Now that I think about it."

"She's amazing," Sophie says. She sits back down again. She leans forward and puts her head in her hands. She rocks back and forth. "Things never happen the way you think they will."

Paul nods his head but Sophie doesn't see him. He is thinking about the chicken, about it being dry. Sophie was right. It was dry. Sophie is thinking about life, how it hasn't gone the way she hoped it would. Sophie wonders if she has postpartum depression.

"Do you think I have postpartum depression?" she asks.

"Maybe." The chicken was dry, Paul thinks. The rice was sticky. It wasn't supposed to be sticky. It was basmati, not Japanese.

"Rebecca is three months old. Can I still have it? Am I still postpartum?"

"I think postpartum means any time after you have kids."

"So when she is forty years old I could still have it?"

Paul laughs. And then shrugs. He thinks. "Maybe," he says. "Maybe not."