

Playgirl

fiction



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BIRD HEAD

He said, Hi, I'm Jonas, and held out his hand, which I shook by the fingertips. I'd been bruising my ribs against the bar, dancing along to some stupid crunk. I said, I'm Dulce. He asked if my name meant something, so I rolled my eyes and gulped my drink, grabbing a chunk of ice along with it. I said, I hate that fucking question. Does *Jonas* mean something? He said, Sure does. It means *gift from God* in the Bible, and also *dove* in Swedish. He squeezed a lemon wedge into a shapely glass and took a sip through a smile. I exhaled cold air filtered through ice shards and said, Umm... okay. Dulce means sweet. I shook some ice. It means I'm sweet. And he said, I don't know about that. And then we left the bar, but I wouldn't let him into my apartment because dudes form opinions when they see José, my desiccated, ex-pet newt curled on my bedside table, or my drawing series of hirsute hands and feet on the wall above my bed, so we fucked by my front door, and I flinched from a *whoop!* and a flash from a passing car, but Jonas didn't miss a beat behind me, determined or indifferent, admirable either way. I didn't care because it would be *his* filter-enhanced ass getting comments on some app the next day.

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Six months later, my father wanders around the loft looking at the appliances, wanting to iron a shirt but my iron still sits in a box from three moves ago. My mother is wearing comfortable knits, looking polished despite the five-hour flight from New York to SF. She points to the area above my desk, the gears jutting out of the ceiling of the former freight elevator like an oversized meat grinder and tells me I am going to get killed trying to be cute. My father looks around at the floor-to-ceiling windows, pipes and electrical guts artfully suspended above our heads, X beams bracing exposed brick walls, and asks why anyone would want to live in a place like this—my parents couldn't wait to get out of the factories. I ask them if they want to relax, but they don't even want to hear it. They cannot wait to meet this man of mine, so we decide to meet up with Jonas on his lunch break at a nearby cafe.

My parents and I walk by a former factory that used to make ships, now a restaurant with a few hard-to-get tables arranged around a giant propeller where patrons eat sous vide eggs and burnt rice (which is called con con because that's the sound it makes when you're scraping the pot, but this restaurant calls it *crispy rice* and charges like fifteen dollars even though that shit is burned—and delicious). We pass a few people in the street. Young. Satisfied. Unbothered. We turn a corner to a clear view of the blue sky, fingers of fog creeping over Twin Peaks and Sutro Tower. My mother says the fog looks ominous, and I tell

her that it looks scarier from a distance, that we San Franciscans are used to it, so then she starts in on me: You are not a San Franciscan. And, you have to be very very careful. You get lost in that fog and God knows where you'll end up. Your father's cousin almost drove off a cliff! (She shakes her fist, up, towards the sky.) You don't think an island has such heavy fog but it does! Up in the mountains near Pico Duarte! Not that far from the capital!

We pass an encampment. My father asks, Are people camping in the street?

Homeless.

In fancy tents?

Yeah, that's how it is. We don't have an underground here. Everything is up at the surface. We don't even have basements. I shrug.

My mother says, When I was little, sometimes we patched our shack with cardboard. I say, I know, Mami. I turn to my father. Isn't it beautiful the way the fog drapes over the hills like a luxurious white blanket? I find it inspiring. It's one of the reasons why I moved here. He tells me that I moved to SF to upset my mother, and I roll my eyes and smirk. Then he says that the fog is very dramatic. He points his chin towards her and adds, Like your mother.

True. When I was a kid I made the mistake of asking her to *tell me about when I was a baby*, the way all children everywhere ask their parents. She told me that when I was two years old and we had just moved to the States, she'd had to run out of our burning building with me in her arms, and that we'd had to live there for months with the smell of smoke, and mold so bad that mushrooms grew out of the walls—and that started my lifelong nightmares about unwelcome growths of every kind.

Jonas is not yet at the café. As we walk in my mother informs me that the coffee will be mediocre, not as good as hers, made with the same sock-like filter that had been passed down from my grandmother, and never washed with soap, like a well-seasoned cast iron pan. I don't tell her that she is right.

They make each one at a time? my mother asks as we watch the barista move his arm in a circle above the glass funnel, slowly pouring in the hot water.

Yes, it's called a single pour.

It's very controlled. They take their time like it's their craft.

The café is called *Craft*. I hand her the first finished cup. She takes a careful sip and says, It's not bad, before she hands it to my father. He sips and says, Mmm, and toasts the barista with the cup.

We sit and my father looks off into the distance except when women, girls, walk by; and my mother looks down, traces the wood

grain of the table with her index finger. I check out this month's local artist who uses rough-cut pieces of wood painted with line drawings of round bears, squirrels, and bunnies, each with their own word bubble that say things like *shave me* and *i need a nap*. I take a sketchpad out of my bag, rustle for a pencil and start sketching an idea: "Old Brown People at a Hipster Cafe." I draw eggs for my parents' heads.

Jonas walks in with a big, big smile on his face. The top of his light brown hair moves over like a sail when he turns to close the door behind him. I put my hand up, like at school. My parents stand. Jonas says, Hello, and does something like a half bow. Arms reach out at different angles and handshakes are met with semi hugs like beginners at some martial art. My mother introduces herself with her full name, Caridad Matos, and my father nods fast, bobbing his head like those bobbleheads on car dashes.

I laugh because I must, and say in Spanish: Mami, Papi, this is Jonas.

The man you live with, my mother says.

Oh, yes, Jonas says, like it was news to him, too.

Well you're not married. We don't know what to call him.

Despite the look on her face, I translate: She's so happy for us and can't wait to get to know you.

Jonas shoves my shoulder lightly with his own and tells me he doesn't think that's what she said. He tells them that we must get everyone to meet the next time his parents visit from Sweden. They nod.

We'd been dating a couple of weeks when his parents stopped in SF on their way to vacation in Guatemala. They hike and bike and wear versatile, moisture-wicking clothing. They *travel*. His American mother, fluent in Swedish, recounted her hippie days doing drugs with local, lesser rock stars in SF in the sixties. His Swedish father had walked around the loft in his tight underwear. I endured the small, spherical lumps of his dick and balls at eye level as he served us breakfast one morning.

When Jonas leans in and kisses my ear, I glance up at my parents, embarrassed. Cute. He whispers, You didn't tell me they speak so little English.

Yeah, I didn't.

He whispers back, Must be hard to be here so long and not speak the language.

Jonas is forthright, like my mother. I don't understand how I would've found it an attractive quality, but here we are. I don't have a snappy comeback, so I focus on a guy chaining his bike to a parking meter out front. Luxury, blacked-out, double-decker buses depositing tech workers to and from the peninsula outside the city, drive past behind

him. I lower my head to the cup and move my body away from him as I scoot up to the seat's edge. I take a sip. A lot of things were hard, I say.

He smiles. I didn't mean anything by it. I'm surprised is all.

I nod, he continues. And you know my parents are learning more Spanish now... because of you.

I sip. I text my sister, Teresa: Having cafecito. Jonas says hi.

[Waving hand emoji] or is that a slap. I can't tell.

Going to Alcatraz in the morning. maybe Muir Woods.

nature sux [tree emoji] [poop emoji]

I look up at Jonas and ask, Are you coming with us tomorrow?

No, big earthquake in Italy, he says as he points to his laptop, which he is taking out of his backpack.

I text Teresa back, what are you doing?

watching reality box

[Frog emoji]

She hates frogs. I tell Jonas that Teresa says Hi, but he doesn't react, already lost to the code. My parents stare at him but he is absorbed into the mass of techies around us working on their life-changing apps. He's a software engineer at a tech startup that tracks online spending habits after natural disasters and political instabilities, and I chipped away the creative blob of fine arts into the sharp edges of jobs, teaching myself graphic design and hustling and hustling, until I talked the tech-speak like I belonged in meetings. In conversations with co-workers I sometimes pretended I went to summer camp in my youth or backpacked through Europe—Eastern to make it sound cooler.

My mother leans in as my father leafs through my sketchbook. I show them my new series, sketches of the gray skeleton of the partly dismantled eastern span of the Bay Bridge, the span that collapsed in the Loma Prieta earthquake, now being replaced by a soaring sail-like white structure. We ride our bikes on the new section, where Jonas takes photographs and I sketch.

Isn't it dangerous to ride a bike on that bridge? she asks.

I feel a surge. I want to lunge at her but shake my head instead. She is about to tell me to be afraid of something else even though she doesn't know about the faulty rods on the new span that have been in the news lately. I glance over at Jonas typing away on his laptop. I can't tell if he is deliberately ignoring us.

That's something your sister would love to see, my father says.

Teresa had always wanted to build things, playing with erector sets throughout our childhood, wanting to become an engineer. She had joined the Army for the G.I. Bill when she turned eighteen and left for Iraq shortly after boot camp where she won a sharpshooting medal

and could take apart and assemble an M16 in thirty seconds. She returned anxious and solemn, never venturing out of the apartment past the garbage chute down the hall. When we were teenagers my mother had my father install a latch on the outside of our bedroom door because she didn't want us out there hanging with the riff raff. I was there when the super had been doing a building inspection and told her to remove it because, *you can't do that*, with a horrified look on his face. My mother is happy Teresa is inside now, out of harm's way. I suppose my father feels the same.

My mother puts her finger down on the sketchpad and taps it a few times. That's the one that fell in the earthquake. I'm not going on that.

Woman! My father yells. The bridge is fine! You can stay home, and we'll go out.

I don't understand why we need to go on this bridge. We don't need to see everything.

I scream, Oh my God, Mami! Let's just stay home! We won't go anywhere!

Jonas looks up from his laptop. He's never heard me scream in Spanish before. He's requested it during sex, but it's the one thing I won't do. We've played with each other's assholes, but I will not use the language I reserve for my parents while I do so.

That's okay. You can both yell at me. This is a wonderful vacation.

I had hoped to make it longer than this. I say, I'm sorry, Mami. My father shrugs and closes the sketchbook.

She looks down and runs her finger along the seam of her inner sleeve.

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Later that night, my parents gather themselves neatly as they get ready for bed. They are careful with their movements. They whisper to each other. My mother molds a hairnet over her head and my father folds each article of clothing, unfurls the corner of a collar on his shirt and presses it down with his thumb. I look away and look again. They are apparitions. They walk so cautiously on the sturdy industrial floor.

I had slammed every drawer and yanked every knob and splayed my ass on every surface, but Jonas kept telling me to stay. He'd said, You can go on my health insurance after a while, so I gave up my apartment that I couldn't really afford. He said things like that. Kind little things, here and there. I wasn't sure what I wanted but I found it fascinating that he just kept saying them. I always responded with silence or with something like: You're a nice guy and you have a nice penis, and then I would bite his earlobes.

My mother slips two tiny slippers out of a plastic bag, then two more out of another. She snaps off the tags and puts them in her pocket. New slippers. As soon as they fall asleep, I tell Jonas that I'm not feeling well and need to go out for some air and he says he understands, although I'm not sure what he understands.

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Margarita #3. I sway on my stool. After a few unanswered texts I look down to see Jonas' face illuminating the screen as he resorts to calling. The picture of him on the caller ID is a glorious one I took of him, his big smile beaming out, his hair pushed forward in the wind. I let it go to voicemail. This guy leans in trying to determine how long it will take to get into me, but I save him the trouble. I take the little plastic monkey out of my margarita, a drink I only order to show off how I lick the salt from the rim. I bite the monkey's tail as I move my knee next to his.

I eat beige fish out of a tube for him, I find myself saying a few minutes later.

He makes you eat fish out of a tube?

Yes, it's some horrible Swedish thing he gets at Ikea, but I eat it because I love him.

He laughs and shakes his head.

The guy moves in closer as he tells me I'm funny and presses his shoulder against mine. He is tan with premature crow's feet, probably from spending too much time outside biking or climbing. Sea kayaking, maybe. I stare into his eyes, trying to figure out the color. Maybe gray, like Jonas. Who has gray eyes? Gray eyes aren't really gray. They are slender flecks of beige and yellow and brown radiating out of the pupil. I find them hard to paint. I take the monkey out of my mouth and put it behind my ear, curling the tail around my earlobe.

I am in tights and a short skirt, my perennial outfit in SF; summer, winter—the uni-season. I press my jacket on my lap to obscure my hand under my skirt, and then stick a finger into the tights and poke and stretch my way into a hole in the fabric at the crotch. I slide the guy's hand from my knee to my inner thigh. He finds the rest of the way as delight spreads over his face. I am well-groomed but hairs get caught in the elastic of my panties as he picks his way under them. I shift my weight on the stool to make it easier for him to get at me. Everyone waxes or lasers these days, but I think having some hair makes me nastier than the other girls. I feel his knuckles against my inner thigh as he twists his hand to get in a second finger, greedy fucker, but I clamp my legs closed and he pulls out. He rests his hand on my knee

waiting for another invitation. I look around at the paintings on the wall of wide-eyed underage-looking girls in see-through panties and tiny, perky nipples. This art is everywhere in SF, and for a moment, I am not sure where I am. I am nowhere, neither tethered, nor single; neither child, nor adult; in SF or out; I am alone and bereft of place and expectations. I feel ecstatic.

I whisper in his ear, Lick me off your finger...then...maybe...you get more.

Whoa, he says, and laughs. He leans in, sniffs his finger and says, Mmm... smells like summer. I laugh. If only it ever felt like summer here. He dips his finger in his margarita, then into his mouth, and says, Tastes refreshing, then he drinks the rest of it like a shot, salt from the rim clumping in the corners of his mouth as he gulps. I look at his other hand resting on top of the bar to see if his fingernails are clean, but it is hard to tell. I take his hand and lead him outside.

His front seat is spacious, all screens and buttons so there's no gear shift stuck up my ass. There's a baby car seat behind me and suspended above it is a black and white striped thing that looks like a snake with rainbow-colored plastic rings coming out of it. The margaritas are hitting me hard, making me slightly nauseous, and I want to be home in bed. It seems cozier back there. As he's kissing my neck I say, Let's go in the back.

No. That feels... weird.

Why? Because you have a kid? I don't care.

He moves down to my tits and as he glides his mouth from my left nipple to my right he says, I don't wanna talk about my kid, and puts my hand on his dick. He feels huge. Jackpot!

I laugh, and say, C'mon! I push him off and reach back for the snake. I recognize the rainbow-colored plastic rings as teethingers because I have bought these things for children I know. The snake has bells in it, so I jangle it in front of his face.

Don't touch his things!

It's a boy! I scream, laughing. I go towards his crotch again, but he shoves me off as he snatches the snake out of my hand, so I punch him in the Adam's apple. He screams, says that attacking him is unnecessary, and that he doesn't want any trouble. I tuck my tits back into my bra. He asks me to leave his car. He begs.

As I walk away, I look back at him gripping his steering wheel with both hands as he hit his head against it. The cold sneaks its way up my thighs to the rip in my crotch.

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My mother is sitting at the foot of the sofa bed in her slippers when I get home around 2 a.m. She asks me if I am okay and I say, Yes, as I walk past her straight into the bathroom to throw up and take a shower.

I hear a knock at the door and tell her that I am almost done, but Jonas walks in instead. It's me, he says, and I say, one sec. He can't see me behind the half wall of the shower, throwing up over the drain, pressing my big toe down into the small holes, forcing through the bigger pieces of regurgitated burrito from dinner. I poke my head out and Jonas is shirtless, wearing the thin, gray drawstring pants that hang on those hip protrusions prominent in classic Greek statues called the inguinal ligament, or cum gutters as my gay friend calls them. Jonas is beautiful.

Are you okay?

Yes, of course. I'm just warming myself.

I was worried. You didn't answer my texts.

Sorry.

You look like something bad happened.

Don't I always look like that?

What should I tell your parents if they ask what's wrong?

It doesn't matter. They won't understand you.

Okay, don't tell me anything, he says, and I let him walk out without telling him anything. The sound of foghorns travels the distance from the fog in the bay through the thick steam in the bathroom.

I walk out to find my mother still sitting on the sofa bed and all I hear is Christ, Christ, Christ into a rosary around her hands. My father is lying in bed with his eyes open towards the raw ceiling.

In the bedroom, Jonas slides away as I slide into bed. I consider sending an exploratory foot over to his side, but I don't. In the morning, I listen to the sounds of him preparing for the new day while I hide under the darkness of the blanket. All night I had thought about how we were the most fun either of us had ever had—the most sex, the most laughs—every day, all the time, except now, this isn't so fun. He had texted me on Thanksgiving, the night after we met, and I went to his loft and never really left. We had sex for four days, staying in bed while ordering Chinese at one point, and Indian at another. We gave thanks and talked and fucked and slept and giggled and drank straight out of wine bottles. I marveled at his stories about Sweden, that every pizzeria has a cabbage station (pizza salad!) and *fiskelyckan* (a whole word for fishing luck!). I skimmed the surface of my early years, leaving out the studio apartment my family had lived in until I was a teenager, and that I hated cheese because I had only known the government kind, and I didn't mention all the things I had to figure out to help my parents navigate the customs of the country they had gifted me.

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The day is one of those rare summer days when the fog rolls in under the Golden Gate Bridge so the bases are obscured, but its burnt orange towers and sloping suspension cables are clear against a bright blue sky. I point towards the Bay Bridge farther away to the East with its gleaming white tower of the new span and the remains of the old span behind it and my father shakes his head. My mother asks if Jonas is good to me, and I nod. She waits for more, but I turn away from her, against the wind, so that it pushes against my face, makes it hard to open my mouth, so I can't talk. They've travelled a long way for this and sometimes I miss them and New York, but really, all I can think is that I've never seen the Brooklyn Bridge floating on clouds.

The fog swarms the city, skims the tops of the hills, basks in the valleys. My mother wears a sweater she packed for the day, my father a long-sleeved button-down shirt. Other tourists mill around in newly bought *I Survived Summer in San Francisco* sweatshirts over their shorts and tank tops. We get off the ferry on Alcatraz Island and are shepherded up a hill towards the former prison, walking with hundreds of tourists, but they look happier, excited, while my parents and I look like we've just been sentenced to stay here back in its heyday when it housed the "worst of the worst." I usher them into a prison cell for the best part of the tour—taking pictures of them behind steel bars. My father hams it up, grabbing the bars and gritting his teeth—a caricature of an inmate. My mother looks convincingly guilty as she stands there, clutching her handbag to her chest with both hands, looking straight at the camera. I text Jonas the pictures, but he doesn't text back.

The symmetry of the cell bars along the corridors named Broadway and Park Avenue feels inviting, and I imagine running along the corridors screaming and hearing my own echoes answering back to me. We walk into a large dining hall. A sign explains everyone ate together at mealtime—prisoners (those not in solitary), wardens, guards, and the prison staff. In this room, everyone had to get along enough to not kill each other, or just enough to plan their escapes.

This looks like your apartment, my mother says.

We skip the special exhibits then leave Alcatraz amongst another throng on the ferry back to SF. At Pier 39, I instinctively recoil at my mother's touch when she pats down my wind-blown hair from behind, and I head straight for an ice cream cart a few feet ahead of me even though my mother had said I was gaining weight, and maybe I have, but thinking of her warning propels me towards the ice cream like an eager toddler. I ask the guy for chocolate, my favorite, and he hands

me a cone. After a triumphant turn towards my mother, but before I can take the first bite, I feel something heavy fall on my head. It is sharp and pointy, and then feathers fall around me like confetti at a surprise party, and I am so surprised. I feel slapping on my ears as the thing moves its feet back and forth on my head, shuffling, then stabilizing its foothold. Its landing is brief, and it is already gone when I attempt to shake it off. I look down at the one-inch high, ice cream-less cone I am still holding in my hand—the ice cream hadn't melted down into the tip.

People gather. They ask if I am all right. My scalp hurts. Some people laugh, some are concerned. The bird stole her ice cream! they say.

My mother is screaming: Virgen de la Altagracia! Virgen de la Altagracia! over and over. My father is patting her back, telling her to calm down, that I am okay. Then she descends on me, brushes me off, takes feathers out of my hair and says, It's a sign from God.

The ice cream guy says he's never seen anything like that in the ten years he's been working at the pier. He says that the seagulls are aggressive but not *that* aggressive. I want to tell him to shut the fuck up, but instead I say, Thanks, that's helpful, then I turn to look at my mother and say, You see, Mami? You can be as cautious as you want but then a crazy bird steals your ice cream.

You talk to me like I'm stupid. I have lived a life and I know you can't prepare for everything. She pulls out a white cap emblazoned with *Queen of Queens* in gold script and presses it down on her head.

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When we get home from Alcatraz I collapse onto the couch and the remote control slides towards my thigh. We spend the next few hours watching TV, then my parents call my sister. They hand me the phone when they're done. I tell her about the bird.

She says, Dang, Dul. It probably picked your 'fro out of the crowd, and laughs. Have you combed that shit yet?

Whatever. Everybody is mad at me.

What did you do?

Nothing.

Yeah, okay. Same ol'. I don't know what you did but remember that everything will be alright if you stop acting white.

Gotta go.

My father asks, How do you think she sounds?

I say, The same, numb, even though she seemed to perk up at my misfortune.

I get up at the sound of keys opening the front door. Jonas walks in past me and says hello to my parents. They stand up from the couch and shake his hand like it's the first time they are meeting him. He motions for them to sit back down and asks if they need anything. My father responds in English, No, no. Good, good. My father laughs. Why is he laughing? I hate that he is laughing. I hate that Jonas smiles at him. I follow Jonas into the kitchen area. He usually would've kissed me by now.

How was your day? I ask.

How was your night? he asks.

A bird mugged me for my dessert today. Dude landed right on my head.

Really? Wow. That's pretty crazy.

Hey, I say. I'm going to start drawing an evil seagull holding an ice cream around town. Maybe I can make a stencil and spray paint it on sidewalks. I can't be the only one that fucker's attacked. Maybe I'll start a movement—San Franciscans Against Evil Seagulls! I'll Tweet as the seagull: *Wingspan is not the measure of a man, or Your palm is the same size as your face*. Maybe I'll add like a hand and a face emoji.

Jonas folds his arms and stares at me. I mirror his stance.

He says, Maybe a narwhal.

A narwhal?

Yes, it's more ironic than a seagull.

I want to humor him. I can draw a narwhal holding an ice cream with its flipper, or balancing it on its tusk, either way. I should keep the good times going. Fun. That's our thing, but, what comes out is: What the fuck is ironic about a narwhal?

Oh, you're cursing at me now. Whatever. I don't even know what we're doing. He puts his hands up and says, Look, I know we made a mistake moving so fast. But, it doesn't have to be like this. I know parents are crazy. Can you just talk to me?

I can smell the aftershave I bought him made of Moroccan oil and sage, with a drawing of a lumberjack on the label.

No, I can't. You and your parents talk about the latest Aki Kaurismäki film and bake cheddar dill scones together. I walk away from him and hear my father saying to my mother, I understood *narwhal* but that doesn't make any sense, and my mother explaining, They live in the arctic.

Jonas walks into the bathroom and shuts the door behind him. I sit next to my parents on the couch. My father turns off the muted TV and says, We're going for a walk. Which one is a flat street?

I picture my parents' bloody legs sticking out from under a cable

car. I tell them to wait, that I'll go with them.

No, no, no. We'll stay on one street and walk back on the same one.

Okay. This is a good one, the one we're on now. Harrison Street. Here, take my cell phone. You can call Jonas' phone and I'll come get you if you get lost. He grabs the phone and asks if it flips up. He touches the screen and a picture of Jonas and me on top of Mount Tam, with SF in the distance behind us, illuminates the screen. This button? Jonas' phone rings from his bag on the kitchen counter. He opens the bathroom door, but I yell, It's okay, testing the phone, and he shuts the door.

My mother grabs my arm and pulls me towards her. She brushes her hand across my forehead, then my cheek, as if she's brushing away tears but there are none. It feels like she's making a sculpture of me, or rather, sculpting a daughter out of me. I resist, but she tightens her grip and pulls me towards her, whispers in my ear: Listen to me. Admit nothing.

My mouth drops open and my bottom lip brushes against a straightened curl on her nape. I feel an overwhelming longing for her, almost as if our whole lives haven't happened. I wonder what my mother hasn't admitted to my father, but that doesn't seem right. Everyone knows my father is the one with things he has not admitted.

She looks back at me as they tiptoe out the door. I sit down on the couch. I want to figure out this new creature, my mother. I picture her like Jonas' mother twirling around Golden Gate Park in her *summer of love* youth, her hair sticking to sweat on her face and moist teeth as she laughs. I want to stay in the daydream of this ridiculous image, but then I see my mother running down Pico Duarte, soldiers in pursuit, her figure cutting through the island fog. My aunt told me that story, the one about a girl destroyed.

I take a few steps back, move my hands behind me, hold on to a beam and get a flash of Jonas and I having sex against it a few nights ago before my parents arrived. We had been to a bar with old-fashioned pinball machines and played some games together as he pushed and pulled the buttons, pressing behind me. When we got home, I straddled him as we ran to each of the beams in the loft, screaming *plink!* as we hit each beam. We laughed and moaned as I held on tight with my legs around his waist, his hands clawing into my ass cheeks, my arms above my head holding on to the beam behind me, feeling the pain on my back as he slammed into me.

I hug myself around my waist and reach around to my back and press into the faded pain of the bruises. That night, when I came it felt like lights lit up inside my head like *plink plink plink*.