

Slipstream

by Aline Carriere

She gripped the bars of the wrought iron fence feeling the cold against her palms. She believed if she could hold on, if she did not move, or breathe, she could stop time and he would not hurt her. But he took her wrist and when she did not let go, he punched her in the face with his closed fist. Moments before they had been holding hands, but when they turned the corner and she told him she did not want to go down the dark path he had turned also, into someone she did not recognize and could not understand.

The sense of detachment swept through her like fire making her hands sensitive so that when she grabbed the fence to stop him from dragging her into the woods all she could feel was the cold. Only the fence made her real and when he pulled her away she did not exist, she was nothing.

He held her close as they walked. "If you scream, I'll hit you again," he said. She was bleeding from the first blow.

They walked in silence until they reached a cleared space of ground. He threw her down and got on top of her to pin her body. She moved to get up but he tightened the scarf around her neck and said, "do I have to hit you again?" and that was the end of her resistance.

She heard the stream running in the distance, the water moving with time, and her mind seized on the thought that he would drown her. The idea consumed her so that she thought of nothing else. She did not feel the earth beneath her, or the night air on her thighs, or his body pressed against her and inside her, though she remained aware. She wanted to faint, to lose consciousness to avoid the moment, but she believed he would drown her, and struggled to stay alert and alive. She watched her breath vapor above her in rhythm with his thrusts as though her soul escaped wanting nothing more to do with her. She knew her thoughts of the stream were irrational, but she could find no sense in her reality, so that the two converged. She moved outside herself. Her mind, unable to

comprehend what was happening, abandoned her, betrayed her, yet still she heard the stream — the sound of the water twisting over rocks and through fallen branches; the droning sound of life askew, repeating, combining with his grunts.

He left her on the ground and the cold air swallowed her. She did not know he had gone. She listened to the water. The sound of the stream continued. The water would not stop.

