

Blemish in the Blood

by Cherise Wolas

Some of what I write here is verifiably true: When I was ten I invented masturbation, or at least I thought I had, thought I was the brilliant one to have figured out an ancillary but dominant use for my lengthening penis. I have since learned I was simply following human instinct. I am now thirteen and in my spare time I have honed what wasn't my invention into an exercise of excellence. My room is large, with tall windows on two sides from which I see our grass sea rolling down to soaring beeches and dwarfed willows, the lichen-encrusted pond, the home of ancient koi, shimmering with the skin of algae the gardener has failed to scrape off, and Hercules racing around until he skids to a stop and finds me, standing at my window, staring down at him. He is white furred, lemon meringue-patched, and belongs to me though he's only allowed in my room when his nails are freshly cut down to the quick. Far beyond our oceanic backyard, past the speckled stone fence that perimeters our property, there is a wide street lined with houses much smaller in scale than our own, a row of identical houses with punched windows and front doors that from my vantage point look like eyes and noses. Sometimes there are people strolling along that street, their happiness captured in swinging arms, in clasped hands, and sometimes their electrifying anger stands their hair on end, crackles lightening above their heads. When the street is empty and I see no one for hours and hours, and when there is no sound from below, when I can't hear my sisters' voices rising up from downstairs, or my mother calling out about one thing or other, or the slamming of the front door when my father comes home, it feels like I am alone in the world, imprisoned in my bedroom, alert to the fear that haunts those that love me; that a fatal cut might slay me, the drip drip drip of my blood falling to the floor, unstaunched, until I am emptied and blue. I must be careful when I turn the pages of my books, or press into the soft cavern of my cheek, the pen cap I have chewed into a

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small jagged peak. This room is my physical universe most of the time and I have made it mine. Some of what I write here is also true in the sense that creation makes things true. I believe in that; in my power to build alternate worlds from history and leftover Scrabble tiles that arrange themselves like forgotten memories—

