

BOLT-TOGETHER

by Elizabeth J. Colen

You were in your red sweater, white hat. Breath held close, but we couldn't keep anything in. You were his girl once. I was his, but I was never his girl. Corn Pops or Apple Jacks pressed into your hair. We were *so* young. You didn't know about the night in his car drinking 99 Bananas and Boone's Farm. Wet roach smelled like spoiled fruit and his hands were everywhere. But I loved you, arms pressed to your side, back against the door. Mah-jongg paused on the screen because you couldn't find a match. Building a life out of distance. Building a life out of post cards, email, fax machines, voicemail messages. We were afraid of what our voices would say if we talked live. How they'd get away from us. Building what we knew wouldn't work. I've got to have something to do with my hands, so they're in your mouth, wandering teeth like mile markers, white hot sharp in the wet, green reflective lightning like mercy, those twelve hundred miles. Something in the house breaks in the night. The kitchen stove, cabinet door, flashlight, bedframe, doorjamb, ceiling slats above the bed, something in the eaves, and the floorboards, skylight, everything glass, everything shatters. It's the everything we bolted together. A home is not the sum of its parts. A girl is not the sum of my everything. This crack, slam; this is what losing sounds like when you run too hard with too much wanting to win. We don't fight, there's never enough time. Not with your teeth in my neck, not with the stop, watch. Not with your heavy fist bruising my arm. In the morning again the airport will find us, the plane will take you under its wing. And I will watch your teeth measure the highway all the way home.

