

RINSE AND OXIDATION

by Elizabeth J. Colen

I heard a story once about a man who can only tell his wife by her dentist. He schedules the appointment every year; she drives the car. White coat checks incisors and decides it's her, the right wife; they go on for another year, tucked into a ranch-style with no horses, no cowboy anything, just handfuls of brief stairs and long spans of shag carpet.

As a child, head tipped back, I stared at the alphabet or whale on the ceiling, depending on the chair. Red letters mocking the copper taste in my mouth. And for a while my mouth belonged to someone else.

There was machinery and I was lost to its buzzing and mint smell. I was lost to the courtship of gloved fingernails snaking towards the back of my throat.

Questions with no answers.

Gloved fist shaking in front of her face.

When I was five, mother monster stopped holding my hand. She was like this in everything. At eight, church became choice and we never heard bells again, became agents of the devil. What the doctor said was good for us was never questioned. The tumors grew and we around them, licking at dust on grandmother's Bible and listening to the ache of errs our mouths had become.

