

Sway

by Elizabeth J. Colen

For the first fifteen minutes I stand and look at your things. I once thought crying would make me lighter. Until the bellsound stroke of the hour I put my hand in some of the most likely places you might rest yours. Your brother, born without tear ducts, had them stenciled in. I am searching for heat there. Age three. There. Or four. And *there*. It is said that lovers find lips in the dark through secret brain circuitry. When your brother slipped off the boardwalk into the trees, you panicked even before the skin split. Lips, I find the juice carton, your favorite teacup, cool to the touch. You told me the story of when your mother discovered your secret room. Hand flayed like fishermen removing scales. And scream, the light fades. Out behind the house, shed, the heavy branch of a tree scrapes against it, an upside-down U or half circle. Arc like the light on your brother's bare ankle, like the fat stretch of blue you can just make out on his neck.

But what did you do there? I was trying to understand. Though the floor was just dirt covered in leaves blowing through a crack in the wall, though the floor was just timber rotted to wet ground, cold through the back of your pants, cold through your socks. You took your socks off too not to stain them. The neighborhood boys played along. History of webs, toes splayed in pull back pattern, shoes stacked at the door.

They called your brother monk for his high forehead. He didn't know that evolution made this a compliment. This is how you understood everything. Every slap, every belt stripe. "God gave me feeling for nothing," you said. "I didn't have to pay a thing."

You got dirt under your fingernails because it felt more like something than *that* did. You thrashed for effect, but only got your jacket dirty. There was no more noise than rodents tunneling.

Whatever boy laughed when he was done, forgot the towel, wiped his hands clean on your socks, sometimes on your shirt.

Your mother found you there. Hanging, leg-sway, creak of the beam, draft of the open door. Eyes adjusted rapidly to light, but the boy was done. You grabbed what you could of him, his foot, then both. There's no mistaking the sound of a zip. The sound of a body fighting for air. To keep from being naked, to keep from showing the "real" parts, you never took your pants off, you always kept your shirt. Where the beam split, scissor of wood there. White fabric snapped. You stood on a tractor, held him, pulled rope against crevice. The old rope tore and you let go, let the weight tear him down. This wasn't about him. In the last light he cried. He didn't make a sound.

