

THE PERFECT KIND OF HAPPY

by Elizabeth J. Colen

From one window I can see the water and from the other I can see the mountains. These are not real mountains, this is not real water, these are not real windows. I hold your hand or I strike you or you strike me or light up a cigarette and our upstairs disappears. But what if we're in it? I think of particles exploding, coming back together like some physics experiment I don't know the name for. "Large Hadron Collider," you say. But that's not what I mean.

For a long time when you were a child you thought you didn't exist if your mother wasn't with you. What was *this* called? You were invisible and no one spoke to you and the silence supported the theory, except for the bells. "But did you pass through walls?" I ask and you say this has nothing to do with *perte de vue*. You lay under chairs while weight creaked the springs. Your father's hand came into the frame and you were real again, visible, whole.

"Child abuse is a metaphor," you say. Your father never hit you. It was the neighborhood kids who put pieces of themselves into your hair, it was them who made you bleed. Bullets of blood on your forehead, oh how the scalp will leech into a collar, red circle of love around your neck. But then this, too, is no longer true.

It's an active volcano, the mountain, the big one: Shuksan. We live in an earthquake zone, calm north on the ring of fire. The house is on stilts for the waves, and rats eat tea biscuits and leave on suggestion. "We will live forever," you say, meaning them. And the water looks brilliant from here. Silver, pellucid, much like the sky.

