

Love

by Ginnah Howard

Her letter ends with her best words: *No one will ever love you like I do.* Beneath, she draws a heart, sad eyes, two jewel tears. *Yours forever, Dawn.* Hole by hole, not to wake her sister, she pulls the paper free, creases, folds again, then cuts away the messy edge.

Debbie Ray. That little whore. She could rip her face off.

But she has to get him back and when he sees her coming, she's going to look pretty: her hair floating in the air. Her lavender sweater. And round her neck, the chain he gave her. She'll wait behind the bowling alley. On his way for varsity practice, she'll appear from nowhere. Hey, Robbie, she'll say, and before he can speak, she'll put her lips on his lips. She'll push up against him; he'll smell her perfume. Then she'll hand him the letter.

She eyes her sister Deena's high tops. But Deena would kill her. She turns her mirror toward the light. The sun just beginning to reach across their room. A little gloss. Blush. The thinnest line of black to show her eyes. Is this really her face? Dawn? What Dawn may have to do.

But maybe the letter. Read this before you do anything, she'll say and he'll read how if she can forgive him, he should forgive her. How they've both made mistakes, how they can start over, how she just did that to make him jealous, to get even, how she's never going to do it again.

She sticks the letter in her earth science book, down the front pouch of her bag, ready. She's got to hurry for soon her whole crazy family will be up being crazy. She doesn't need that; her stomach aches already.

He can't do this to her; she won't let him.

She'd like to call Lynn, pour what she may have to do down into the phone. If she can't have him... Oh, you're just talking, Lynn would say.

From the kitchen drawer, she chooses the best knife, the one her father cuts his steak with. She squeezes the dark handle, its strange weight; its steel moons burn cold in her palm. She pushes it down in her bag, right behind the letter.

The street's still quiet. She's got to hurry so she can come from nowhere. She hopes he likes her letter, hopes he says, You know I'll always love you.

