

Always / Never

by Glynnis Eldridge

I stop smelling like a moldy pumpkin and crawl out of the shower. I wash off three days and stand naked in front of the trifold mirror. If I think about one of the only Mariah Carey songs I think I have memorized but can't remember if she sings "you'll always" or "you'll never be my baby" what does that say about me, today? Can we make the archway? Will it hold itself together better than I can? In 1967 a man sitting next to my mom at a bar in DC fell backwards off his stool and died before hitting the floor. At a family friend's dinner a set of vertebrae disintegrates and a woman falls face first into her dinner plate.

When you hit me, I expected the sound to be different. Your fist landed with a thud, but I expected something bigger, louder, an aftershock, a crack in a window's gradual spread, my face crumbling in on itself. When I gave you your Christmas presents I didn't expect you to cry. I expected to see the kaleidoscope flying through the air and crashing, exploding on the white wall, or to suddenly see a hole in a window and to then hear your voice loud, not expecting to untangle the sounds into distinct words. It was fermented cider in my mind: you at age nine or ten shaking the gallon and the amber juice spraying all over someone else's dining room. The night after, I roused myself from sleep to list things I now must learn: judo, or karate, or kickboxing, or futility's false existence: like cutting the grass with scissors, or trying to turn off the sun, or duct-taping nature back together.

