

Cure

by Kathy Fish

The girl pretends she's already in New York. The thought gives her a shimmery, golden feeling behind her collarbone. Lately, everything and everyone injures her. She's become lugubrious and she's only twenty-two. She has gained the approval of the landlady who takes note of her freshly pressed uniform. It is the way I am, too, says the landlady. As if that's reason enough. The landlady, at least, will be sorry to see her go.

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The customers are demanding. One man writes Poor Service, Very Disappointing on the back of his receipt and the manager pins it up on the bulletin board in the kitchen. The manager's a slow, peevish man with a patch of white hair on the back of his head. I am tired, she signs, for she's mute, but not deaf mute. She will work at The Filling Station for six months, saving until she has enough for a plane ticket and one month's deposit.

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The boyfriend handles rattlesnakes. It's his religion to handle rattlesnakes. Or maybe there's more to it than that. This girl doesn't believe in God, but she likes the baleful gaze of the snakes, their smooth skin. The boyfriend doesn't want her to move. He thinks she bamboozled him into loving her.

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The rattlesnakes are brought to the church in a sort of carrier. The church is located in a strip mall and is only a church by reason of being a gathering place of the faithful and not by reason of being a structure like a church at all. In fact, it used to be a realtor's

office. One of the church men tells the girl he likes the cut of her jib. It sounds kind of dirty. The cut of her jib.

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The landlady hauls up an old typewriter and looms over this girl's shoulder as she works on her resume. Instead of Cedar Falls, her place of birth, the girl types Cheddar Falls, but she doesn't notice. What she does notice is the way the floor rises, then falls under her feet when she gets up to make tea, as if she were walking on an under-inflated balloon.

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She starts falling down — at work, on the street, in the shower — and wonders, what now?

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It's as if there are little men inside her head, wielding hammers. The people from the church say they can deliver her from her affliction. They all but guarantee it. And she lets them mess around one night. They make her lie still on a fold up buffet table. It alarms her to realize that she once ate ham and beans at this table. They dance around and chant with the snakes on their shoulders. She closes her eyes and waits, but her skull bulges with pressure. She raises her hand and the people halt in contorted positions like freeze tag.

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No problemo, I appreciate the effort, she gestures, knowing not everyone understands sign language. In fact, hardly anyone does. She'll go to New York anyway, on a gurney if she has to. And she

tells the boyfriend he will live to love and fuck somebody else. He watches her hands. She says, *give it three months*.

