

Lip

by Kathy Fish

Tom Brace stands naked in front of a mirror doing something resembling the Twist. He watches his paralyzed left arm arc across his body, then swivel around and disappear behind his back. He does this over and over again. He's very high and it makes him laugh.

He's alone in his motel room, casting glances at the cable rerun of Get Smart, and laughing at that, too.

"I'm a parlor trick now," he says to his reflection. "A parlor trick that needs to diet." He sighs. The Cone of Silence descends upon Maxwell Smart and his boss, that bald guy.

Last night Tom'd been beaten up by a guy with pointy teeth. He'd yanked Tom's arm high up behind his back. Luckily, the arm had two years before been paralyzed by a stroke, so he felt no pain, only a strange airy feeling when the shoulder joint had been forced out of its socket, as if a hole had been drilled through his skin.

"You have dust on your shoes," he said to his attacker before passing out.

Now his shoulder hangs halfway down his ribcage. He swigs some wine. "Fruit of the vine and work of human hands," he says, archly.

When he was ten, he'd fished for crappie in the Shell Rock River with his father. His father taught him how to cast his line and crank it back in slowly. He caught five, learning to render them motionless by grasping and lifting them up by the lower lip. His father told him he was a natural and took him out for pancakes so big they drooped over the sides of the plate.

Tom leans into the mirror and points to himself. "Not once did he have to tell me to watch my mouth."

Tom applies eye shadow with his working hand. He wants to look like Agent 99. He thinks about the Venus de Milo, how perfectly presented she is in the Louvre. He's going for an Agent 99 version of that.

The room's dark except for the sunset coming in where the drapes fail to meet the windowsill, and it's silent except for Maxwell Smart and his boss shouting at each other under the Cone of Silence. Tom's legs buckle, but he locks his knees and stands tall. Tonight, he will be magnificent. He will pretend he has no arms at all.

#####

