

When Alone

by Katrina Denza

She'd sit out on the back deck and dig into the skin around her toenails with a paring knife until it bled. He'd listen to a single aria of Opera's Greatest Hits, number 10, until the cusp of some feeling, either despair or rage, would build and fade. Then he'd start it again. She'd make a list of things she most wanted and after, she'd go back to the top and slash lines through each one. He'd stand in the garage and sort through his dead father's cans of nails, picking through for the rusted ones, resting his tongue on the metallic crust. She'd sit naked in an empty tub, stare at the top of her chapped knees, and cup her breasts in her hands, comforted by the weight. He'd walk down the cellar stairs, to the stash of Lego blocks hidden in a hole in the wall, behind the cat carrier, and build the dump truck, the same one the boy would build, and hold it up and say to the cat carrier, Here's to you, Babe. She'd sit at the computer, print out the same picture, the one of him in a fireman costume two sizes too big, and kiss it before flushing the pieces down the toilet. On the way to work, he'd figure out, based on a certain percentage, how much of his earnings that day would go to the hospital. She'd mix habanera sauce and lemonade and drink it until her esophagus spasmed. He'd sneak a Matchbox into his pocket. There were forty-nine on his desk at the dealership. On the way home from the chicken plant, she'd stop at the drugstore and buy a new Matchbox.

