

Zero

by Katrina Gray

I follow my father outside and bum a Pal Mal. He doesn't ask questions. He lights it from his own.

I look for the moon, but it is gone. My mother used to sing, *I see the moon and the moon sees me*. But I do not see the moon.

"You know," he says, "Your mom had that happen too. Before you." He means to warm me. A budding sibling, erased. I feel like I've done something wrong.

Dishes are still on the table. Michael is downstairs drywalling the new room. For what, I don't know. Earlier, my father patted Michael's back like he was trying to stop him from choking. I saw this from the kitchen, the sad looks on their faces. When I came in the room, they jumped up and said the Cardinals were winning.

The air is heavy tonight, the weight of July. There's something rising in my throat. The cigarette nauseates me, and I stamp it into the ground after a couple of drags.

My round belly is deflating. I disappear a little more by the day. It's been weeks. Soon, I may not even be here. If I were new, like the moon is now, I could be veiled, hiding, invisible. I briefly think it's possible that my baby is hiding somewhere, new and illuminated, behind a shadow. That it's impossible that she's just gone.

I was full of her, Olive. Olive, after Michael's dead mother.

It may take months, the doctor told me. The hormones will trick me, like she's still here. My body absorbs her. Eats her. I ordered a drink last night and stripped the plastic sword of its olive with my tongue. I asked the bartender for another. *Martini?* he asked, eyeing my full glass. *No, olive*. My stomach churned, searching for something to chew on.

My muscles are soft, relaxed in preparation for something big. My father drives away and I am on the verge of tears, now—*always*—my eyes floating and dipping like fishing bobbers. The arches of my feet flatten on the steps up to the kitchen. The screen door slams shut behind me.

I unwrap the last test in the house and squat over the toilet. My piss creeps up the stick, turning the first line pink, then the next, only lighter. *There, still.*

Human chorionic gonadotropin. The thing that makes the pee stick work. It's what hangs around, long after. *Your levels will return to zero soon,* the doctor said.

It feels impossible: becoming new. I swallow my breath. More impossible, still: becoming full again.

The new moon is when the moon is gone, my first boyfriend told me. *No, not gone,* I thought. *Just dark from where we see it.* We drank Zimas in the bed of his pickup, mosquitoes ambushing our wet ankles. I felt empty then, too.

