

Brother

by Laurie Stone

My brother was the catcher, and we were having sex. I was waiting to be scared. In our act, he would swing upside down from the bar, hanging by his knees, his arms extended, and I would fly into his chalky grip. We would sway together while I shimmied up his body for our extension tricks. Sometimes he became hard and called me goddess. I laughed and called him punk. He was wearing his hair in a Mohawk in those days. We were 7 and 9 the first time we explored, 13 and 15 the first time we went inside each other's bodies. Now we were 20 and 22, and each time the circus moved to another city I wondered if I should take off. As soon as we were separated, I wanted to return. At the kitchen table, eating buckwheat pancakes with raisins, he said, I don't see other women. I said, You are just lazy, feeling the nauseating dizziness of trapeze. Other kids noticed the odd way we would split off. Jed was always lingering somewhere nearby. We would hear soft laughter behind us when we left a room. It was almost romantic. Whatever people thought they knew, they didn't know. At the table, I licked a dab of mayonnaise off his nose, left from making tuna sandwiches. He was bare-chested in tights, and I looked at the shadowy contours of his belly and ass. His legs were pillars. We had the same coppery hair, the same broad hands. I said, No one will measure up, but some day we will have to leave home. He took my braid in his mouth and bit down. I still feel the tug at the back of my neck. When I close my eyes, I see him on a bench before an unglamorous stretch of river, his hair flying, his face quizzical and refusing to suffer. Each morning when I wake up, I wonder if this is the day the fear will start.

