

# Just Before the Funeral

*by* Mark Waldrop

We had been on the way to the church when we found them.

The handkerchief in my breast pocket was folded just so  
and I'd tried to recreate the perfect ribbon in Ashley's  
hair, the way her mother used to do it, off to the right.

The case of hot peach flavored sodas were  
like grenades in the trunk of my Honda I had to get  
out so I could replace them with casserole. Ashley toyed with the  
foil, brushing her thumbs against the edges. She leaned  
down to smell it.

Fingers curled gently under the cardboard case I lifted evenly  
but fumbled all twenty four cans, some seemed to hop themselves  
out of the flat shallow pallet and all explode, spraying our  
shoes and pants with cotton peach fizz.  
Some others bounced once before shooting white streams  
Skyward.

I was yelling, "God, fuck, Goddamn, motherfuck."  
I felt like the Phoenix heat would turn  
me inside out.

Ashley though, tilted her head back, ribbons dancing between  
her shoulder blades -- and tried to catch candy sparkling peach  
droplets  
on her tongue. Mouth wide open and eyes squeezed shut like she  
was screaming prayers at Jesus.

