

# 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.

