

Chinese Jacks

by Meg Worden

"Carl, do you think we can fit all of our furniture into that red house?" Jeanne asks.

She wonders how easily you could burn a red house down, if a claw foot tub will melt or be left standing in a field of black grass.

He reaches for her hair, the dizzy smell of tobacco on his fingers.

"You are living in the land of trying to please everyone," he tells her. "You are the cosmic tangent in the conversation and shouldn't forget that one must have both a center of gravity as well as a sense of direction."

Later, when she packs her clothes and shoes, she wants to ask them why they don't hide her better. She remembers being eight, how they all went out for pizzas and she and that girl tossed jacks made from twisted telephone wire.

She reminds Carl that it was raining the day they got married.

Jeanne remembers exactly how she pressed her little ear to the wall and heard them over the sound of running water. She wanted to march in there and pull him off of her mother. But mostly, how she wanted to smash her mother's face into the mirror to try and make her see, hold it there until she did. But she didn't do any of those things. Instead, Jeanne practiced her dance routine. Step, one, two. Shuffle, ball, change.

She is thinking of beauty and it's consequences, beetle wings and the satisfying crack of breaking wax.

Jeanne notices that Carl craves her less and less all the time. His face drifts and falls heavy when she says that she loves the way her eyes feel after she cries, that she hates the way her body feels after she eats, and that when she dies, what she will miss the most is subway trains and her own impending death.

