

bathing suit

by Melissa Corliss DeLorenzo

Katy silently watches her mother play with her small children.

It may be as difficult in its own way to have a good childhood, the kind others think of as *lucky*, as a terrible one. The good childhood, like the bad, provides lesions and gashes, though fewer and less severe. But if you have a good childhood, a lucky one, then when you are an adult you and your parents are friends and you must balance out the gratitude and love with the anger and hurt. You must navigate the wounds.

And picking at scabs, little by little, is not painless.

She watches her mother play with her small children. A boy and a girl. The boy is five and the girl is two. Her mother plays with them on the floor, they run around, they wrestle. These are games Katy herself never plays with her kids — she is more of a reader of books, crafty and quiet. She cooks with her kids. The closest she comes to this kind of thing is tickling. But, she thinks, all parents tickle their kids.

Today, her mother brings a catalog with her. She tells Katy to take a look at the bathing suits for the kids. Her mother likes to buy the kids' bathing suits. She does this every spring as an Easter present.

Katy picks it up and flips through.

Truth is a visceral thing. When a truth becomes evident, it is a force you feel like a blow. The longer you have failed to perceive the truth, the more strenuous it will be when finally you do.

When Katy finally spoke the truth aloud she realized with the strongest intensity that what she said was absolute truth.

For Katy it was along the lines of a panic attack. She felt as though she could not breathe. This is how she knew it was true.

You just know.

Katy chooses the bathing suit she wants for her little girl. It is little bottoms and a tank top. Her mother makes a face.

"The one-piece is a lot cuter, don't you think?"

"Well, she'll be in the throes of potty training and a two-piece will be a lot easier."

"The summer we trained Hannah she had all one-pieces." Hannah is Katy's sister's daughter.

"I don't know, Mom. The two-piece is really cute and I just think it would be a lot easier."

"Well, I'd just have to see how much of a gap there is between the top and bottom. There's not picture in here of a little girl wearing it, which is pretty stupid."

She would have to see.

Katy says nothing. She will figure out a way to tell her mother she prefers the two-piece. Later.

There are truths for which there is no space. Certain things cannot be aired. Or, Katy thinks, could be now but not then. And she can't help think, *but that's when I needed it*. Then, she means. Not now.

And then there are the things that will never see the light of day, as they say. Even if you know it will fester like a slow, buried cancer.

The bathing suits are like Christmas dresses.

Katy's mother is rigidly insistent about Christmas clothes, especially for the girls. She attempts to behave casually, but it is plain to see the equilibrium is a mask for a raw undercurrent of urgency. When Katy and her sisters were children, it flowed along the lines of firm control. Now, with the granddaughters it is more like panic - she must get it in order before anyone notices what she is up to. She starts looking in the stores early, before Halloween, where the same urgency of retail ideology obliges her, and she orchestrates the entire holiday wardrobe for all eight grandchildren.

Every year, the photos are flawless.

Next time Katy's mom comes over, she has a brown shipping bag folded in the crook of her arm.

"Look, Katy - the baby's bathing suit came in! It looks a little big, but that'll give some room to grow into it." She pulls it out of the bag and holds it up for Katy to see. The one-piece.

Katy picks up her little girl, peels off her clothes and tugs the bathing suit on.

"Perfect!" her mother declares.

Katy smiles and nods. Swallows it down.

She didn't find a way to tell her mother she preferred the two-piece.

