

# Small Talk

by Shelagh Power-Chopra

"Little words, now, use your little words." Carmen made a vicious bear face at her mother. "The tangible immediacy of my precocity conjures displaced animosity from your antediluvian being, Mother. I despise you and your waspish waddle throughout these halls."

Yale at twelve had been difficult but the rigor of residency now and having to live under mother's wing as she performed stereotactic craniotomys, decompressed and debulked tissue with her skillful, tiny fingers, was far too much.

Oh, how she longed to stroll the glossy hospitals halls with Arthur and go over the day's operations; his deft penetration into the subarachnoid space, his extraction of the waxing hipotomix, his keen observation of the puerility of the cerebellopontine angle. It hardly mattered that he was 58 and she was 16. She loved his liver spots and his raspy voice—I am sure you have a spectacular neocortex, he would say, and your collateral vessels are probably lovely, just lovely—no, he was no poet but she was and she would conquer all—her mother's docile brain and their dim suburban homestead.

Her mother lay dinner on the table; meat, boiled and lukewarm. Her fingers scampered over the table, practicing the deft stitching of the basilar artery. "Too much meat damages the perennial valve, mother, lipids situate gracefully along the tactile cerium wall. It's much like Dante's stumbling into the copse of hell."

"Little words, now, little words. No desert for you now, can't gain an ounce of fat round those hips, especially if you want to interest that Gerald boy." Gerald lived down the street and mowed their lawn. She'd spoken to him once, "Weather's a bitch." was all he said as he looked up into the hot sun.

