

TERRIBLE BEAUTIES

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Through an upstairs window, Martha watches her mother hang laundry. Her back is to her daughter and Martha sees the flare of her hips and long bend of neck, the vertebrae a path into a tangle of pinned hair. Soon, her mother will turn, and present either the beautiful side of her face, or the other. The sheet she raises from her wicker basket billows and snaps in a sudden breeze, transforming into a canvas where Martha reassembles the pieces of what happened earlier that day:

During Martha's last class of the afternoon—Studio Art—Miss Alvarez walked between the students' easels. She held a magazine showing a strange, splintery painting done in shades of gray—a horse with a dagger tongue, a ceiling bulb like an eye shattering, limbs of the dead cluttering the floor. A baby. The caption read '*Guernica*.'

"This great artist—Picasso—has shown the world the horror of war in Spain." Usually the teacher wore lacy, low-cut blouses, her dark hair piled high with mother-of-pearl combs. But today, her hair hung lank, and her sweater, pillled and full of static, stuck to her oddly.

"My tío sent me this magazine from Barcelona. He's fighting the fascists in the Basque country. This summer, I'm going to help him drive ambulances." She spoke with a Brooklyn accent, and when she brought tapas to class, the boys, in love with the way her blouse dipped, would take bites of salted cod and suck on white asparagus.

Miss Alvarez thumped the magazine before carefully placing it on her desk. She opened a book, showing another picture. "This painting, *Les Femmes d'Alger*, paved the way for the brilliance of *Guernica*."

The art room turned airless. There was laughter, and Martha's face grew hot. Five peach colored ladies crowded into the picture, their naked bodies all triangles and edges, upraised elbows sharp as axes. But it was the faces. They were cartoon versions of her mother's. The ones in the middle showed the beautiful side, calm as an eggshell, with a shy rise of cheekbone, and almond-shaped eyes. Two on the far right showed the other side, gorilla forehead, cheekbones bulging upwards, trying to escape the face, and the eye, carved in paint, lodged between the bony ledges.

"When you first witness something so terrible that it creates a new kind of beauty," Miss Alvarez's eyes lit on Martha and Peter, the boy next to her, "you encounter something truly magnificent." Her hands splayed like starfish, and passing Martha, she smoothed a curl behind the girl's ear, marking a line along her skin that soothed, then itched.

After class, by her locker, Martha wished she'd imagined the laughter, hoping her classmates reacted to the strangeness of the painting, not because the faces resembled her mother's. It wasn't her mother's fault— she'd been born this way. Behind her, the sound of oxfords scuffing the floor. She turned as one boy shoved Peter towards her. He stumbled, his face reddening.

"Bet you like that crackpot art," the boy behind Peter said. "You already got a piece of it at home."

"Yeah," the other boy said. "You could sell her. Maybe Picasso would buy. Or Alvarez." The two boys laughed and made sounds like they were sucking asparagus. "There's always the circus."

They fell against each other, swatting, punching. In a couple of years, they would go to war with their fathers. Their mothers would work in the factory where Martha's father was a manager. By then, he, too, would be overseas. Not all the boys would come back.

Martha clicked shut her locker. When she turned, all three were gone. She walked back to the art room. Miss Alvarez was not there. WPA funds the principal had won through a lottery brought her from Brooklyn to their small town upstate. She'd been with them a year and was supposed to teach the juniors and seniors drafting and architectural design. Instead, she taught them how to gesso canvas, scumble paint to make a

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brooding cloud, how to look at the naked bodies of statues—female and male—with a straight face.

The magazine and the book lay open on Miss Alvarez's desk, the Picasso paintings exposed.

Now, from her window, Martha fingers the torn pages, small as confetti, in her skirt pocket. "Ma," she calls, releasing the paper bits. They drift to her mother like ash.

At dinner, Martha watches her mother put a tin of beaten biscuits on the table, her profile compact and lovely, cheekbone gently curving. She retreats to the kitchen and returns with meatloaf more breadcrumb than beef. When she sets the platter in front of Martha's father, the other side of her face thrusts into the room like insult: the apish overhang of brow, a craggy scarp of cheekbone, and trapped between, a triangular-shaped eye. Martha sees again the warped faces of the *Demoiselles*. When she was little, the other kids gawked. She knew her mother looked different, but to Martha, her face was as familiar as the kitchen table. Now that they're teenagers, the girls look away, but some of the boys are still cruel.

Her father kisses her mother's cheek. They grew up as neighbors, inseparable since toddlers. Tonight, he looks exhausted. No longer able to afford a car, most mornings he walks three miles to the airplane parts factory and layers his shoes with cardboard—Roosevelt leather is the bitter joke. Sometimes, if the timing is right, he hops the rails and rides to work alongside the hobos passing through.

"Stop staring," her mother tells Martha. She sits and takes a bite of meatloaf, dabs her mouth with a checkered cloth. "I think she's lost her mind," she says to her husband.

Her voice has a lilting quality, a way of turning the usual into the amusing, sometimes making Martha the butt of a joke. Lately, her words bite like gravel into Martha's ears.

"She threw pieces of paper down on me this afternoon. Out of the blue. What *normal* girl does that? I was hanging laundry. I looked up and thought it was snowing. In June!"

Her husband looks blankly at her, and says, "War's coming," as if this has some connection to the torn paper.

Her mother tilts her head, eyes narrowing, and Martha shares her confusion.

"Talk around the factory is that it's coming," he says.

"What's that got to do with us?"

His mouth droops, his knife squeaking against the plate as he cuts into his meat. "Why do you think we're still in business? War's coming and we're getting into it."

Martha thinks of Miss Alvarez, of Spain, of the terrible painting.

"Hogwash," her mother says, and leans towards Martha. "What does Miss High and Mighty think?"

Martha wants to rub her eyes as if that might erase her mother's face. The boys are right. Her mother *does* belong in a circus. Or in a Spanish painter's nightmare. Instead, she stays home and *behaves*: bakes bread, cans, cleans, throws meal to chickens then wrings their necks, strings up pole beans and wet sheets. Like every other mother in town. But her face looks like something mad or evil is erupting inside and pressing against the bones of her face, the way something now presses inside Martha. She runs her fingertips hard along her own cheekbones until her skin stretches, wanting to feel reassured by her symmetry.

"Get an operation's what I think," she says. "Or wear a mask."

The wedge-shaped eye glints; her mother's hand raises to slap Martha. Her father's mouth opens, but before he can say anything, Martha flees.

"It was the boys. Gregg and John"—Martha hesitates, throat tight—"and Peter." In her mind they rip the images to bits even as what's left of the picture clings to the inside of her pocket.

"Peter?" Miss Alvarez asks. It's the next morning and her pilled sweater looks as if she slept in it. Ruby-drop earrings weight her earlobes but do nothing to brighten her look, and Martha wonders if this is how fighters of fascists dress.

"Yes, Peter." Martha says. He's Miss Alvarez's favorite, the best artist. His father, gone to look for work last year, hasn't returned. One

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of the poorest boys, he's in school only because there are no jobs for a seventeen-year old. Now he hangs around the hobo camps by the river, drawing the men. The figures spring from the page, but the raw strength of his line ropes them back to the center, imprisoning the men. Martha overheard him tell Miss Alvarez the drawings were a way of looking for his father. She didn't know what he meant, but Miss Alvarez's face radiated understanding, and Martha wished *she* had the power to make her teacher glow.

"Are you sure?" Miss Alvarez sits, one knee knocking against the other.

Martha hears again the boys' laughter as they stood by her locker. "I saw them from the hallway."

"I don't understand." Against the dark fabric of her sweater, Miss Alvarez's complexion is wan, her eyes too blue in the pale skin. The bell rings and students file into the classroom. Martha walks to her easel, peeking around it as Peter and the other two enter. Abruptly, Miss Alvarez scoots her chair back. The legs squawk against the linoleum. She calls their names, tells the class to get to work, as she and the boys leave.

The buzz of speculation fills the room. Martha feels sick, as if the paper bits are bloating inside her like seeds. On the canvas, her hand works independently from her mind, her eye, and helps to empty her. Soon, Miss Alvarez returns without the boys and circles the room. Behind Martha, she speaks her name with such intensity that Martha's eyes focus on what she's drawn. Jagged angles spear inward, a large squiggle chased off the page as if the eye could follow its path across the room and out the door.

"Strange," Miss Alvarez murmurs. "And magical. I know you listen, Martha. I know you see."

See *what*? She wants to understand the terrible beauty of *Guernica*, of *Les Demoiselles*, but sometimes she wishes Miss Alvarez would stick to the practical skills she was hired to teach.

After class, the lie still makes Martha queasy. She did this to the boys, to Peter. Later she'll learn they were banned from art class for the remaining weeks of school.

Once the last student is gone, Martha approaches her teacher. "Will it be dangerous? In Spain?"

Miss Alvarez frowns. As if her student's new way of creating art has made her more adult, sophisticated, she says, "Yes. But I'll have the protection of my tío and his hijos."

"Can you paint when you're over there?"

Miss Alvarez's work is modest—bright, lyrical landscapes—art Martha imitates. But the Spaniard's paintings have inflamed her.

"I'll draw when I can." She looks beyond Martha, into her future, it seems, and Martha looks too, and sees her teacher in the back of an ambulance, rendering war in horrific, Picasso-like scenes.

"Don't worry." She reaches for Martha's hand. "When school starts in September, I'll have amazing stories to tell. Maybe I'll even meet Picasso."

The last day of school, Miss Alvarez hands Martha a framed postcard.

"Look carefully and learn," she says. All five ladies crowd onto the postcard, the cramped space making them more restless, more potent. "Work hard this summer. I want you to surprise me."

She looks fragile, brave, and Martha wants to touch the pulse at the base of her teacher's throat. Tonight, the school's principal will drive her to Buffalo to catch the train for the long ride to her family's home in Brooklyn. From there, she'll leave for Spain.

Walking home, Martha wants to smash the frame, rip up the *Demoiselles*. But she's already done that and here they are again. Tossing the postcard from hand to hand, she doesn't see the two boys leaning against the rear wall of the pharmacy until she's almost alongside them. The back of the pharmacy edges the alley she uses as a shortcut. She walks faster. Gregg and John spring from the building, each grabbing an elbow and ushering her into the alleyway. Gregg knocks her shoulder, and the postcard flies to the ground. He wrenches her arm, pinning her against the building.

"Admit it was you." He tightens his grip. She struggles, shaking

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her head until her vision blurs, and her laughter, like breaking glass, cuts through her. She laughs the way she imagines the *Demoiselles* might, the way her mother would if her madness were unleashed. Startled, Gregg eases his grip. She kicks him, tries to bite his hand, and he slaps her. The blow makes her fierce. Yes, she wants to scream. Her voice would shatter him. Do what her pinned body can't. He fumbles with her skirt. His fingernails scratch her thigh and fear crowds out defiance. He claps a hand over her mouth. Suddenly Peter is there, grabbing Gregg's collar. The boys tussle and break apart.

Gregg wipes his nose. "She's not getting away with this."

"Get out of here," Peter says to him. "Go on."

"It's her." Gregg's hands ball into fists. "Cunt," he says.

John grabs Gregg's shoulder. "Forget it," he says, and they disappear down the alley.

Hunched over, shaking, Martha tries to even her breathing.

"You okay?" Peter asks.

She's grateful, yet ashamed, for his protection. From the weeds, the *Demoiselles* glare at them. For a moment Martha thinks he might stomp on the picture, break the glass. *Do it*, she silently urges.

Peter picks it up, brushing away dirt. "She give you this?"

Does he, too, suspect her? "Keep it," she says.

He tosses her the picture and turns toward the alleyway. Catching it, she wonders why she didn't let it fall to the ground.

Pebbles clack her bedroom window at midnight. In the yard, moonlight turns Peter ghostly, his skin the cool alabaster of a statue, and Martha wants to run her hands hard along his edges. She dresses and meets him in the driveway.

"How'd you know which window mine was?"

"Came by earlier. To make sure you were all right." He nods toward her window. "I saw you."

Their shadows merge, moonlight casting them long and fuzzy. She feels twitchy, her body disconnected. If she takes a step she might shatter into the night. Only the solidness of Peter's form holds her together,

the span of his shoulders and rooted legs, his cheekbones, starkly visible even in the dim light. When the war is over, she'll come to love a man much like him, one of her professors.

Walking down the street, she doesn't ask where they're going.

"She's not in love with him, old man Taylor," he says, like they're in the middle of a conversation.

Miss Alvarez rooms for free in the home of their principal's sister. There are rumors. But Martha knows her teacher could never love a man like Mr. Taylor, mild and squint-eyed through smeary spectacles.

"He's in love with her, though," she says.

"Chump," Peter says.

"Do you think she's in love with anyone?"

He looks at Martha as if she's said something silly. He grabs her hand and squeezes, as if this will stop her foolishness. The warmth of his grip spreads through her arm, along her collarbones, and colors her cheeks.

"Think she'll be back?" she asks.

He drops her hand. "How could she?"

Martha searches his face. Does he mean there won't be money for her? WPA funds are scarce, she's heard, and their principal's love and free boarding at his sister's home might not be enough.

"She said she'd be back," Martha says.

"Why do you think she left?"

"To fight with her uncle." She pauses, for emphasis. "Her *Tío*."

He makes a sound in his throat, grabbing her hand again. "We're almost there."

She hears the river before she sees it—the gurgle and smack of shallow water over rock. On the bank, a couple of small bonfires, men standing and sitting. The sound of a harmonica, the smell of cooking and unwashed bodies. The flare of a match. Laughter. The rumble of an argument and clank of fork against tin plate. She knows about the camps by the river. Jungles, they're called. Places where men congregate to sleep, talk, drink if they can, and wait for the early morning train to come through, the track a stone's throw from the riverbank. Not just

men. Around the fires, a few boys, some younger than Peter, warm their hands.

Peter puts a finger to his lips and pulls her behind a bush. They squat, looking through the branches, and Martha wonders if any of these men have come to her house. On the fence that separates her yard from the sidewalk, someone scratched a circle with an X through it: *good place for a handout*. Everyone knows the symbols of the desperate. Her family is fortunate, her father still a manager at the factory, his smaller paycheck enough for the basics. Another sign had been scratched onto the fence as well, a figure eight and three tiny triangles: *kind woman*. From their back porch, most evenings her mother hands out food to men like the ones now around the campfire—a little bread, some cooked beans or pudding, apples from the orchard. Sometimes a slice of meat. Martha usually hides behind a curtain in the pantry and watches. There's something glorious about being homeless, on the move, pulled by hunger, stripped of family. The men come up the steps, eyes averted, hats doffed and clutched in dirty fingers, pants swaying around skinny legs. Sometimes women come dressed as men. They keep their hats on and meet her mother's gaze. In their eyes, Martha sees defiance and humiliation, surprise and pity when they look into her mother's face.

"She came with me once," Peter says. "She wanted to see."

Martha turns sharply. *Miss Alvarez?* "I don't believe you." But jealousy burns through her and she's sure it's true. What did they talk about? The men? Art? She sees again Peter's drawings, feels the loss that fueled them.

"Do you think your father will come back?"

Peter holds her gaze, then drops his head. He touches her thigh, slowly slides his hand beneath her skirt. Her breath catches as sensation, warm and prickly, moves through her. She puts her hand on his, not knowing whether to stop it or guide it further. His nails dig into her skin, and when he looks up, she sees he's angry.

"Ever paint your mother?" he asks.

She presses his hand hard before knocking it away. "No," she says, rising from the ground.

He pulls her back. "Miss Alvarez thought I tore her pictures. Thought I could do that. To *her*."

Martha stares through the bushes as if her focus could erase what she's heard.

"She left town thinking I'd done it."

"She said I accused you?" Martha feels dizzy.

"She believed you. Didn't matter what I said."

From the riverbank comes the sound of a guitar. Some of the men dance together, a slow shuffle in the firelight. One man places a hand on another's neck, pulls him in until his head rests on his shoulder.

"Think you could get your mother to pose for me?"

So this is it. Blackmail for her lie. She wants to run into the circle of men, disappear with them on the next train.

"Maybe your father's with those bums." She nods toward the men. "Having such a good time, he'll never be back." She stands and walks quickly toward the road, unafraid to be seen.

The problem with *Les Demoiselles d'Avignon* is there's no way to enter, no way to disappear inside and learn as she can with other paintings. It has no depth. Only sharp flatness. The painting slices into you, makes you feel about to explode. The way Peter is now drawing her mother, making her face explosive.

Her mother sits by the living room window in profile, framed by a blur of sky and pink hydrangea. Her legs crossed at the ankle, hands folded demurely in her lap, but Martha sees the slight, practiced contortion of her body to hide her deformity, and feels a catch in her side, a small ache. She imagines her mother believes this would be the composition: the pleasant view through the window, a picture of Roosevelt framed on the wall, her pretty profile showing. Instead, only her face fills the newsprint, smashed flat and shattered.

Peter arrived in the morning with an air of inevitability. In sunlight, he looked shabby, his clothes frayed. She wanted to shut the door on him, but his beauty despite the raggedness, the planes and hollows of his face left her weak. She owed him. Her penance. But now his charcoal

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lines cause her to shrink until she feels as cold and hard as a bullet.

"You're not Picasso," she says, breaking his concentration.

"Let me see." Her mother leans forward. It wasn't easy to convince her to sit for Peter. Martha told her he had a chance of being chosen by the WPA to create murals in public places. He needed to put together a portfolio. His family was depending on him.

"I know you're going to be famous, Peter," her mother says. "My picture in all the great post-offices of the world." She winks at Martha. "My daughter, the other great artist, never draws me."

Peter laughs, and Martha almost grabs the drawing. Her mother is so ignorant. "Go on," Martha says. "Show her."

"No, Ma'am, not yet. Not until it's finished."

Her mother stamps her foot in mock anger. "I better feed the starving artist then, so he can finish his masterpiece."

In the kitchen, Martha's mother feeds them cheese sandwiches and apple slices. When he gobbles the first, she makes another, her back to him as she slices bread. Martha pours a glass of cider and when she turns, catches him sliding bread and cheese into his pocket. Like a hobo. A bum. Like his father. She wants to push down on his stomach to feel the urgency of his emptiness, the sharp ridges of backbone pressing through belly, and feels her own hunger, an urge to move her hands further down and make him come alive.

"Don't steal," she says.

As her mother turns, Peter feigns surprise.

"Ma, he's stealing." She points to his bulging pocket.

Her mother's hands land on Martha's shoulders and push her onto the back porch. "What's wrong with you?" The two sides of her face are in sudden, disappointed agreement. "Why are you humiliating him?"

"*Me* humiliate *him*?" Martha shakes her head, trying to shake away a lurch of pity for her mother. She has to run down the steps, through the yard before she can rid herself of it.

When Peter returns the next day, Martha won't speak to him. He's brought pastels, which he can't afford, and Martha suspects came from Miss Alvarez. The face in the drawing is now green and yellow, streaked

with purple tears. The open mouth and sharp teeth turn the image aggressor and victim at once. She thinks of *Guernica*, of war, of her father's certainty America will become involved. Looking at the picture, war feels already here, edges and angles flying off the newsprint, embedding in her like shrapnel.

Her mother, innocent to what she's ignited, stirs and flexes her feet, pressing a hand to her neck.

"Take a break," Peter says. She stands and stretches, then leaves the room to make lunch.

He puts the drawings on the floor and bends to study them. There are three now, in various stages.

"How many more?" Martha asks.

"I can't get it right." He frowns. "I can't make the space both flat and deep, the way Picasso did."

"You can't keep coming over here. She'll die if she sees these."

"Your mother's face is a whole new kind of beauty, of reality – she's forcing me to be true to the picture plane." In his excited, ridiculous words, Martha hears their teacher's voice. "The truth of its flatness," he says. "After Picasso, we can't ever make art the way we used to."

"What are you going to do with them? Show the whole world and get a good laugh? Go over the 'truth' of every ugly line with Miss Alvarez? Why don't you just lay them on the floor and the two of you roll all over them and fuck each other." This sounds so good Martha says it again. "Fuck her."

Bright blotches appear on Peter's cheeks. His mouth opens and Martha takes in his flushed face, the way his eyes glitter. They stare at each other until Peter kneels and rolls the drawings, tying them with string. He starts toward the door. Brushing past her, he grabs her arm, his face close. She imagines his mouth pressed so hard against hers that her teeth would cut his lips. Then he's gone. From the window she watches him walk down the driveway. Reaching the road, he sprints. She leans her forehead hard against the glass, and stares at the empty road until it pulses and blurs.

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He doesn't come the next day, or the day after, and her mother questions if he's given up on the WPA, maybe found other work. She sounds disappointed. When Martha first moves to Manhattan, she'll think she sees Peter's art in the Fifth Avenue library, on the walls of City Hospital's cafeteria, in the Lexington Avenue post office. But the murals are never signed.

In her room, Martha draws. *Look carefully and learn*, her teacher said. But her teacher is gone. Martha holds the postcard and sees the pink and peachy tones of the ladies, the two serenely curved faces, the shade of blue showing between the bodies like strange, powder-blue diamonds—and from the corners and edges come the invaders, ruining the beauty, transforming it.

She wills her mind to empty into her hand. Her hand recreates the lines of her drawing Miss Alvarez liked so much. She exaggerates the angles of her mother's face, flattening the features, smearing them around like putty. Frustrated, she can't get the jolt Peter created, and scribbles across the newsprint. His drawings are so powerful. But they have nothing to do with her mother, the truth of her mother, what Martha has always known: her mother is an ordinary woman born with an extraordinary face. A mother with a wretched daughter deeply ashamed of her. A daughter who looks in the mirror each morning, afraid her own turmoil will erupt, and she'll see her mother's face glaring back.

Martha begins a new drawing. She creates depth in the face, outlining and shading the contours. Her pencil is a knife; it flays the skin to reveal bone. Could her mother's face have been fixed? Could it *be* fixed? She looks at the bones she's drawn, wondering how her mother's face could be reconstructed. At some point, wouldn't the brain need to be exposed while the forehead was being cracked, the cheekbone fractured and flattened? She starts another drawing, and another, correcting the face, adding flesh and skin. She draws symmetry, as if in apology. Art can make real what isn't there. Is this what her teacher tried to show her?

When she's done, her mother is fine and fixed, how she should be. Martha envisions her mother downstairs going on and on in her ordinary way about the laundry, the chickens, her daughter's meanness. How she *should* be. But if her mother could see these drawings, would she feel

betrayed? And if she could see Peter's, would his feel the truer vision? Martha flicks her pencil; it twirls across the desk and teeters on the edge.

The full moon emits a cool, white light, bright enough to create shadows, when Martha goes to the river after dark. In a cloth bag, she carries a penknife, some pencils and paper, a bottle of ink and small brushes. She wears a pair of her father's trousers, suspenders, an old shirt, her hair shoved inside a worn fedora. Still, she fears she looks like a girl. Squatting behind a bush, she peers through the branches. Fewer men stand around the fire now, some likely hopped the afternoon train. She stares into the bonfire, squeezing her eyes tight against the image of Peter on the train. Flames spike inside her lids. When she opens her eyes, Peter leans close to the fire, the light playing across his face. Warmth radiates through her. He wanders away from the men, toward the river, ambling along the bank. Martha follows, careful to skirt the men and keep in the cover of the trees. They walk parallel, Martha in the shadows.

When they're far from the men, Peter drops his satchel. He removes his shoes and pants, his shirt, and makes a neat pile before entering the river. Waist deep, he plunges beneath the surface. Martha holds her breath until he rises, farther out than she would've thought. He takes a couple long strokes before turning on his back to float. A hazy line separates sky from water. Trees on either side contain the river, their bark sleek and solid like sealskin. The riverbank, a darker line, frames the water and makes it seem calm and as smooth as one of Miss Alvarez's landscapes.

She leaves the cover of trees and crosses the grassy beach to the bank. Peter, far from shore, turns and dives. He ruptures the surface, making jagged shapes of water. Small white waves look like scattershot. He's creating something new of the river, and Martha thinks of her own drawings, her new drawings, how they settled her mother's face.

Peter bobs on river swells. He faces her but doesn't see her. She waves, but he flips over, and swims toward the opposite bank. On the ground, a roll of newsprint bulges from his satchel. She pulls it out and unscrolls it, expecting to see drawings of his father, or her mother, but hoping for a secret portrait of herself. In the bright moonlight, she sees

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instead her teacher, breasts barely larger than her own, hips boyishly slim. Her face tilts toward the viewer. Her hair is piled high, caught in combs. Another drawing of her teacher sleeping. And another, of the private space between her legs. Sparks like embers burn through Martha, but she can't let go of the drawings. They are tender, harsh, full of longing. The art he made of her mother and her own new drawings explode through her mind, but these are the most terrible. She rummages through her bag until she feels the penknife. Her thumb traces the closed blade.

The knife hesitates against her teacher's sleeping face before the blade cuts through. She drops the drawing and the knife. It will be a while before she's able to calm the turbulence. In medical school she'll know art has helped her, has trained her eye to envision the beauty trapped in the deformity, the scalpel in her hand like the pencil she once held. Still far out in the river, Peter is swimming back to shore. She shivers, knowing their teacher will always be between them, and wants to leave before he sees her. But the moon glistens Peter's skin and she can almost feel him slippery against her, his hand sliding up her thigh. If she swam to meet him, would he want her? Not just in this moment, but on the train, on the road, disappearing with him. He is moving towards her. Stepping forward, she breaks the surface of the river.