

A Glimpse

by Jen Knox

Today is my thirty-fifth birthday, and I want to wear my hair curly. I want to look natural, the way my grandmother does in the photograph above my couch. I want to recreate this image exactly.

In the picture, she is holding my six-month-old mother, which presents a problem because I have no child. Not that I really want one. I don't like most of my family, so if I had a child, the odds are good that I wouldn't like it; but my lack of child creates a problem if I want to recreate this image.

We're drunk at noon, thanks to a great little concoction called a mimosa that, though not strong enough to suit a thirty-fifth birthday, is served with brunch at Edward's on King Avenue. Trish and I walked here through snow and traffic, through grit and dirt. It's February in Cleveland.

I will never marry Trish, no matter how legal it gets, because I love her too much for that shit. Trish brought an expensive camera, and I can tell she's eager to use it. I will take her shot.

I look divinely outdated: costume jewelry, no makeup, and soft, natural curls. Our waiter laughs quietly at our request but allows us to use the tearoom for our photography session. He walks fast, our waiter, as I wobble on skinny heels.

The tearoom is horrifically prim. There are little cloth dolls with big ceramic heads lined up along the windows. I grab one at random. It slips, head-heavy as it is, into the cradle of my arms.

"I'm ready," I say.

"Sit in the chair and nurse it," Trish says. We laugh.

I sit up in a wicker chair. I am the proper lady my mother wanted before she gave up and left. Right now, I am crossed legs, chest out; I am wearing a soft white dress—lacy and completely inappropriate to the Midwest, to 2012, to anything about my existence.

“Capture my essence,” I say.

Trish clicks, readjusts her view, and instructs me to shift. I look down at the doll I chose: its scary, wide-smiled ceramic face. The irony of life is sometimes kind, and I savor the comedy. Trish clicks, moving around me, capturing the moment. I smile down at the scary little prospect, thinking, maybe things do change.

