

A New Tattoo

by Tina Barry

I'm shoveling the driveway while my boys throw snowballs nearby. "Asshole," the little one says, as the wet mound, flung softly, hits him on the chest. We're okay, my sons and me, until my wife appears. I swear I can smell her perfume—roses and burnt candy--before I see her coming. Ice crunches beneath the wheels of my car she "borrowed," and there's something loose and rattling in back. She's waving, Hey, I'm home! Like nothing's happened. Like weeks haven't passed since she left. We stand there, frozen in our spots. She pulls up to the curb and lowers the window. With a big, fake pout she asks the boys, "Aren't you happy to see your mom?" They look at me like they're asking, Can we dad? I shrug. What am I supposed to do? Tell them not to love her? The door opens and she steps out. As she bends to grab her coat off the seat, I see a new tattoo, I think it's an eagle, above her ass. Out come the gifts—her disappearing acts always end with gifts: a Game Boy and a fancy science kit wrapped in plastic with their price tags still on. The kids take a few steps toward her; they'd run if I wasn't watching. She pulls them closer. One has his head against her shoulder; the younger one's arms are wrapped around her hips. I hate myself for wanting to be where he is. My hand right on that eagle where it's warm.

