

Through the Window – Molly, Year 11, NSW

She watches him through the window.

It strikes her, the strangeness of the moment. Time hangs in a balance, edging towards clean fracture, splintering into the thousand shards of a broken mirror. The broken mirror, which lies in pieces on the cold tiles of her bathroom floor, self-reflection ending in tears and adrenaline, pulsing,

pulsing.

She *loves* him.

She admires the infantile curve of his cheek, the way the light folds around his browned skin. The way his hair covers his left eye, making him look bashful, younger than he is. He needs it cut, she thinks.

His scarred right hand, pockmarked with playground adventures and garden conquests, claws a flaking pencil. He writes on grid paper, his childish hand forming numbers and letters in winding, unwinding chains. She wants to take the page into her hands and press it against her cheek, feel the indents of the graphite tip in the soft, fragile paper. So breakable.

She presses her fingertips against the lamppost she leans against, feeling her protruding spine against cold, unrelenting metal. She feels old. She doesn't need to reach a hand to her face to feel the wrinkles piling there, skin pillowing and caving to age. She wishes for his kiss on her face, that it might make her young again, his cupid bow lips an elixir of life.

They don't know that she comes here. She doubts she would be allowed to, if they did. Even though she's not speaking to him - he doesn't even know she's there - they might still think it's wrong. That it's unlawful. Shameful.

She exists halfway between seeing him and imagining him, balancing unsteadily. In her mind he is an infant still, a crawling, screaming creature of redness and noise. In her mind he is a miracle still, a figment of her lonely, desperate imagination,

famished,

feeding itself on false promises.

In her mind he is an empty sonogram. In her mind he is fear and compulsion and heart pulsing,

pulsing,

and fury making her eyes blur when they tell her that

“There's nothing there.”

She thinks of those words, unbending and unforgiving, words like a dagger to her ribs. As she looks at her son they make her laugh, a short, sharp bark. Because they were all wrong - because there he is, alive and growing and *hers*.

He chews on his pencil end, rabbit-like teeth gnawing at the stub, and she remembers The Afternoon. She remembers pale light and polished wood beneath her palms. She remembers rows of small desks and chairs, double-glazed windows thicker at the bottom and thin at the top, melting, collapsing in the summer heat. She remembers chalk dust under her fingernails and perspiration nudging at her hairline. She remembers the tremble of his breaking voice, seeing his face and *realising*. Realising that he was the child she had always longed for.

Because what was a woman for if not to be a mother? Her body had always yearned for the completeness, the wholeness of nurturing another person. Before she met her son, her visions had been vivid and sensory. She had smelt the sweetness of a baby's skin in her nose, cloying and white. She had felt the grip of a small hand around her finger, relished in the compression, the feeling of being needed. She had felt the baby feeding from her, taking from her what she so generously gave.

Her baby wouldn't be like the others.

Her baby would be *hers*.

But her son, almost grown, was better than a baby. He could talk, for one, elegant words and eloquent sentences tumbling from his mouth, vocabulary cards in one hand and a sticker sheet in the other, fingers adhesive with glue. He could smile and laugh and notice things, his eyes constantly wandering, absorbing. She looked at him and she forgot to breathe, forgot to eat, forgot to sleep. He was sustaining. He was all she had ever needed.

She tries to tell them these things. They have never understood. They look at her like she is a leper, like she has some catching disease that they need to protect themselves from, that means they need to always be on their guard.

A disease that makes them mean, cold and indestructible. It makes them unapproachable, and when they tell her they are *always there if she needs* she gets the feeling that they are lying. It makes them clutch their children tighter when she walks past, as though she is the monster beneath their beds, only it is they who are the monsters - they want to deprive a mother of her son, and the son of his mother.

A disease that makes them close-minded. A disease that makes them shake their heads and look at her like *she* is a child, that her incurable affliction has spread to her mind and her heart so that she is no longer human,

no longer real,

no longer

pulsing.

They tell her that she is sick,

very, very sick,

and that he is not her son, that he is someone else's son. They tell her that some other woman has womed him, some other woman has fed him and weaned him, borne him from her body. It makes her want to cry.

She looks at him again, her son, standing on the sloping avenue that hugs his house

(but never his *home*),

her hair sticky from the rain and her slippers and robe browned by the dirt, and knows that they are wrong. She knows that the woman in the house is not his mother. She knows that the family he has been taught to love has never been enough.

How could they keep him from her? She feels their callous abandonment, scabbing wounds on her back and across her chest, digging into her breastbone. Her yearning to be close to him, to hold him to her breast and cry into his hair, is dizzying. She reaches out to him, stands on her tiptoes, but still she cannot reach him.

And he is unaware. So beautiful in his oblivion. Cheek turns from her, pencil stub laid down, grid paper slid into plastic sheet, light switched off and body stumbling into bed.

They could tell her all they wanted that she was crazy, that they had *proof* that he wasn't hers,

that they had *evidence* —

but the same blood pulsed,

pulsed,

through their veins.

And she *loved* him.

Wasn't that proof enough?