

and the steady whoosh of waves driving in,  
drumming insistently like the undeniable data  
of the cancer in your breast.

We walk back to the car  
and take the top down for the ride home  
through the early mist.

No matter what else is happening,  
this is California. You'll have your cancer  
at freeway speeds. I'll drive and park

and drive at park. The hospital  
when I arrive to visit will be catching  
the last rays of the sun, glinting

like an architectural miracle realized.  
I realize a miracle is what you need—  
a grain of sand, a perfect world

where you live beyond the facts  
of what your body has given you  
as the first taste of death.

## BAD GIRL ON THE CURB

Lisa Glatt

THERE is a bad girl on the curb. It is two in the morning and I, like a good girl, have been sleeping since midnight. My husband has been awake on the couch, reading a book on ghosts, sipping whiskey from a short glass, and it is he who comes into the bedroom to wake me up and let me know about the bad girl. But I know about her already, having been awakened by her crazy brakes and screeching tires. "What happened?" I say, pulling the sheet up over my nightgown, covering the thick scar I haven't yet let him see.

"There's a bad girl on the curb," he says.

"Where?"

"She hit a parked truck, and now she's sitting down surrounded by cops. Come see."

I think about taking the sheet with me onto the balcony, but instead say, "Give me a minute."

He shakes his head, insulted, and walks out of the bedroom. He tips the glass this way and that in the hall, and I hear ice cubes knocking against one another. There were hurtful things I said to him just days after my diagnosis, perhaps as a test, and I think of them now, cranky words falling from my lips, and the expression on his face, a forty-year-old man pouting on a waiting room couch.

I hear the sliding glass door open and know he's standing outside in the wind and cold in just his cotton pajamas. I think of bringing him a sweater, going to the closet and pulling out one of the knits my mother made him

six months before she died, the blue one or the brown one, but decide against them both. There are gestures I talk myself out of these days, ones I'm afraid will inspire him to come too close. More than once, he has sat at the breakfast table with half a bagel and a cup of coffee, and I have stood behind him and stopped my own hand midair as it went for his shoulder. There are positions I avoid in sleep; spooning him would mean my one good breast against his back, and him spooning me might mean his palm searching for what's no longer there. I am careful where my feet go. I fold myself into something small and wake with my elbow or shoulder half off the mattress.

I put on my robe and join him. On the dark balcony, I reach for his hand. He pulls it away. "Sure," he says. "Now that we're not in bed."

The bad girl looks bad all right, sitting on the curb in her black dress, her long hair down, pieces of it hanging in her face. The street lights glow orange, and the girl sits with her back against the post directly across from us. We live on the third floor and even from up here, at this hour, there's a lot you can make out. Not quite the look on her face, but the way her thin knees meet, and the high heel shoes she holds with one hand, and her bare feet.

"I bet she's freezing," I say.

"She needs a sweater."

"You need a sweater too." I touch his sleeve. "Let me get you one."

One of the cops is placing flares in the street and another one keeps a watchful eye on the bad girl. Every few minutes, the girl tries to stand or move or escape and the cop comes and steers her back down. I don't know what he says to her, if he calls her Dear or Missy or uses her first name. I don't know the tone of his voice or how hard he grabs her arm. The truck is smashed, bumper thrown off onto the grass, taillight torn and hanging like an earring.

There are things about me my husband does not know: how many nights I was drunk too, running into cars and men I didn't know were there. How I've imagined my own tumors every day for years, fat cherries or plums, how I believe my own worry was the first foul cell. "She must be damn drunk," I say, stating the obvious.

"She was wobbling before you got here."

"I bet her heart is broken," I say. "I bet someone broke her heart tonight."

"Maybe."

"I bet she doesn't care what happens next."

"In the morning she will."

"Yes," I say. "When she's sober."

Then the girl is up, arms out like wings, trying to touch her nose. She is walking a line, tipping left and right. I imagine she wants her bed or mother, a glass of water or one more beer. The cops are big in their dark clothes, towers pointing flashlights at the girl's unsteady feet. Halfway down the block, neighbors have gathered, little groups under trees, a young man and woman leaning against a fence. An old man with a big poodle stands by a fire hydrant.

My husband leans over the ledge to get a better look, and my first impulse is to stop him, to pull him back up where he's safe, but he looks bold and brave bent like that, a human question mark. He stares down at the bad girl and makes sympathetic sounds, tongue hitting the roof of his mouth. "She's in trouble," he says. The cops point the girl toward the police car. The back door is open, a waiting cave. She shakes her head frantically, says no so loud that we hear. "She's feisty," my husband says, just as she's being helped inside by the two officers—one with his hand protecting her head as she dips into the backseat.

The girl's palm is pressed flat against the window as the car pulls away from the curb. She looks anything but feisty now.

"Her hand," my husband says. "Did you see her hand?"

"Yes," I say, leaning over the ledge too, joining him. The groups of people are breaking up. They've seen enough. The poodle lifts his leg to pee. The young couple steps away from the fence. They're holding hands, walking into the apartment building across the street. My husband looks up at me and as he does, his eyes freeze on my chest. My robe has slipped open, revealing what they left me. I stay there with him, looking also. It is ours. Whatever happens next happens to us.