

Honey

They took me away from Honey, they said she was unfit. That was the end of the us being on the Jupiter Circuit together, orbiting between Tacoma and Portland, Seattle and Spokane. All the rooms above the bars where Honey danced her golden self before men hungry for something sweet beyond their reach. "We' re troupers," she'd say each time we unpacked our old things, spread them around to make every place like home. *Live Girls!* stuttered various neon letters I learned to read at six. For eight years I listened to some dangerous heart beat below, *boom boom*, while waiting in the musty bed for Honey to finish her last show. Then she would float upstairs with Diamond Lil, an aging star, huffing at her heels. There was always ice down the hall for sticky drinks, there was Lil becoming blurred and calling me her Little Ladykiller as I fought to stay awake. No life for a boy, they said; it was all the life I knew. Or sometimes late a man would trail Honey's sweetness into the room. She was always a little breathless then, fixing me a bathtub bed until the man quit making noise and the door clicked goodbye, so long. "He's gone," Honey breathed above me in fresh perfume, in her silver robe. That was when we would curl before the window and watch drunks fall to prayerful knees in the street below, see colored lights shake scared when it rained. "This isn't so bad," Honey might say between a sigh and a yawn, a blue pill and a red. Tomorrow we could sleep all day, tomorrow we could sip thick milkshakes in cafes. Lil stitching a million sequins onto costumes, Honey swaying before the speckled mirror, being sad on Sunday: all these things I would first try to remember, then try to forget. How at the Greyhound station Honey wrapped her smooth scent around me one last time. "I could never change enough to please them," she said, flicking yellow hair from the messed make up around her eyes, taking one step back to look at me once more. She held my arms so tight, she left red marks that would fade too soon. "You'll run away

from Ruth like I did," she promised quickly; then her heels tapped away, my bus started north. *Miss you like crazy*, read the first postcard I received at the trailer on the outskirts of Brale where I came to stay with Ruth. "Out of sight, out of mind," muttered the old woman when I asked why there was no second or third card from her daughter, my mother. Ruth scrubbed the trailer some more, it was always too small, she could never get it clean, boys were dirty. So she gave up again, fixed herself another drink during the commercials, told me to go play out. Behind the trailer spread a field dotted with stumps, weeds, rusted machinery. On blonde afternoons bees buzzed there, nothing better to do; later Jupiter would rise from darkness, float beyond my reach. One stump was hollow, bees flew in and out of its secret space. Honey was inside. I reached to take some for myself, the stinging started, welts rose like a red constellation upon my skin. It hurt until the world turned once. In September school would start; then other things would happen.