

## **Replenished**

by Joshua Kraus

The boy with one arm threw a handful of tulip petals off the bridge and the river made room for me as I dove in. I sunk way down until pondweed ran across the tops of my feet and wax flushed from my ears. I thought about the infinitesimal change in sea level my sudden displacement had brought on. Perhaps the water would rise by just a smidge on some faraway bank and drown a mayfly as it clung to the base of a bulrush.

“Hurry hurry!” I imagined the boy with one arm calling. I smacked my feet off the sandy bottom and climbed until my head broke the surface and there I floated, straddling two worlds, while we laughed as the petals fell on my face like descending butterflies.

“You did it!” he shouted.

“You next!” I said.

“I wish,” he laughed.

*Me too*, I thought.

That evening the boy cooked me shish kebabs on a dinky kettle grill in his parents’ backyard. The peppers were burnt and tasteless and the meat was too tough, but I ate everything and nodded as I chewed. He asked me questions like “Have you ever been afraid you’d forget something beautiful?” and “When was the last time you wished a moment could last forever?” I turned the horrid meat over in my mouth and acted as if every question stirred me into intense,

revelatory self-reflection. He put another kebab on the grill and the empty sleeve of his faded blue t-shirt fluttered in the breeze, seeming sorry for itself.

When he'd fed me enough the boy took me into the enclosed patio and offered me the sofa with the flower print cushions while he sat on a creaky wicker chair. My skin tingled at the sound. I leaned forward and made myself small so I could look up at him with big eyes that held secrets he'd die to know. He itched his stump and fixed his gaze on a spot above my nose. He seemed uncomfortable. One thick strand of blond hair hung from his head like an old gym rope. I could tell he hated himself for wanting to look at all of me.

"I have bad news Laura."

"Oh?"

He told me his parents weren't down with us sleeping in the same room, so I'd have to stay in his bed while he slept out here. I patted his one arm and sighed. He blew me a kiss and said, "Thanks for being cool. You're so awesome."

"That's what they tell me," I said.

During the night I tip-toed to the bathroom and sampled pills from his parents' orange prescription bottles hidden behind the mirror. On my way back I stopped outside the patio door and watched the boy sleep. He was curled on the couch, his stump poking out from beneath a checkered afghan.

I pushed open the patio door and went to him. The tall oaks behind the house cut the moon to pieces and the night air left a cool gloss on my skin. I bent over the boy and gently peeled back the afghan until it bunched at his ankles. Underneath he was bare-chested, his ribs like a swarm of eels trying to surface. I climbed on top of him and rubbed myself on his leg. His breath halted. His eyes opened.

"Wait," he whispered.

"For what?" I asked.

He seemed to consider something. Then: “Will you be my girlfriend?”

“Sure,” I whispered.

“Say it. You have to say it.” His pupils strained to take in as much light as the night would allow. I could see him gathering all his senses, preparing to commit as much of this moment to memory as he could manage.

“I’ll be your girlfriend,” I relented.

He smiled so big it was all I could see and when he reached down to fumble with his boxers I kissed his stump and shivered violently. For a while the boy lost himself and I was everywhere. Later, after, I flipped over the flower print cushions while he sat on the wicker chair and looked at me instead of the stars.

He said, “Remember when I asked if you’d ever been afraid you’d forget something beautiful?”

I made a meaningless noise I knew he’d interpret well.

“That won’t happen with this,” he assured me. “Not with you. No way Jose.”

I thought about the pills in the bathroom and how many more I’d need to last the weekend. A hangnail caught on a loose strand dangling from the cushion and tugged a quick pain out of me. When I turned to him I said he’d overcooked the kebabs. His face changed. I returned to my room. In the morning I saw him in the kitchen and thought he had two arms, but it was just the way he was standing.