

# The Vapor

Maura Weber

We linger in the air above the dirty laundry and the stripped mattress. My lips are still burning from where you kissed me, my cheek still stinging from the slap that came before. My chin is raw from your stubble and stings as I cry salty tears that bead and slip, bead and slip, bead and slip. There are traces of you in my hair, sticky on the back of my neck. I'm not a person, and neither are you. We are vapor, gasps of hot air and choked curses. We are sweat, sticky and cooling on clammy skin. We are knots, tangling in our bellies.

Strands of my hair are loose from where you pulled my ponytail until I fell for you. Now, the whisps snake around my neck like a collar. Your hand finds its way to my throat and slams me down, spitting in my face and growling *don't you ever do that again*. I've disobeyed you, a cardinal sin.

An egg is cracked over the top of my head, cold wobbly yolk running over my hot brain and down my back. Your teeth are gnashing and my spit is flying as white-hot confusion takes over the wheel. Like a fox in a trap, I beg. I gnaw at the frail tendons in my leg, *I'm sorry, I'm sorry, I'm sorry. I am stupid. I am ugly. I deserve this. Please, please, let me make it up to you. I'm sorry. I'm nothing.*

Finally, you let go of my neck. You morph from a monster back into a man, leaving me bent over the mattress and shaking as I come back to myself. I stare at the ceiling while you put your shirt back on and try not to think about how my body feels like a live wire in the snow. My mouth tastes like a battery, sour and metallic. I close my eyes and take three deep breaths, hoping I come back to myself before you start crying like a child who's broken his favorite toy.

I slip off the bed and onto the floor, rooting around the filthy carpet for my socks. Selfishly, I hope you keep me under your bed with the rest of your dirty laundry. I hope you hang me in the closet with the rest of your skeletons. I hope you never display me like the other notches in your bedpost. I hope this makes me special.