

LUCY CORIN

FOUR SMALL APOCALYPSES

HALF

For half of the year, when her father was working, it was as if she weren't half made of him. But during the summer, he worked on the car in the garage, and she'd play near his feet with bolts, stubby screwdrivers, the ratchet and its sockets, and the wrench that looked like a dinosaur. He cursed a lot, headless and heartless, but not at her. She knew all the tools and when he called, she handed each into the dark, grit from the garage floor pressing into her legs. The holes in her father's jeans, her father's sandals, the hair on his toes, the all-around blankness of his feet, his voice, bouncing and metallic, distant and safe, the general quiet mess all there beyond her eyes.

When she comes home from school on the day of the apocalypse she's fifteen. The garage door has closed on her father. Waist down he is in the driveway. The rest of him is in the garage. The garage is suddenly a mouth but has shut already. She thinks of the mysterious fall of the dinosaurs. She thinks of the movie of *Captain's Courageous*, which they watched together, she and her father, on late night TV, and she remembers the pleasure of being included in his insomnia, this new other half of sleep, looking at the side of his face in the television light, like watching someone sleep, like being a ghost. Spencer Tracy bobbed among sharks, truncated in the water. They'd been reading "Ozymandias" in school, and she was still thinking about the word *trunk*. They'd been talking about Persephone, the pomegranate, and the two ways people tended to pronounce her name. In grammar, they were going back to tenses because nobody seemed to really understand. "You're slipping!" said the teacher. Her father lay far

away in a new way, and finally something was coming together. But what had she forgotten and where exactly was the rest?

AIRPORT HILTON

In the front lobby was a choice of two restaurants: Buddy's or Chang's. In my room, I turned off the television because I heard a violin. I listened, and then I slipped into the hall and followed it. The hallway was pink and yellow and I had no sense of where I was in relation to the lobby, and the whole hotel felt like a glowing geometry in space. It was the feeling of the communal jet lag of so many people behind closed doors, their weak smells puffing from under their doors like in *Batman* when someone floods a room with poison gas.

But the violin articulated the feeling in a way I never could: a way that was not silly. The violin made it both odd and beautiful, both alien and heart-filled. The violin had no irony. The violin was practicing. It was a world-class violin, as fine as any violin I've heard recorded, as fine as what I've heard at the Met or anywhere, stopping and starting anywhere in any number of pieces.

I like the test at the eye doctor's where you put your head in a white globe with a cross made of black pinholes and press a button with your thumb when you see a white light in your peripheral vision and after a few minutes your thumb no longer feels like your own and the response between the light and your thumb gets automatic. I like the intimacy and the anonymity. I think of a game I play with the lovers who let me: I close my eyes, and then I like them to touch me with one finger here and then there, just so I don't know some things, but not so I don't know *anything*. I like the long hall of doors and the garish light and my ear near the cool door, how any moment any door might open, and any person might appear in front of a bed or around a corner, my heart beating as it beat when I was a child hidden for hide and seek, although here I am exposed, although here I am still secret. I sit, on the carpet in the hall, because I want to be stiller than I

can be when I am teetering on two feet. I sit with my ear to the wall in the face of danger.

<i>Hide and Seek</i>	<i>Hallway with Violin</i>
Hidden	Exposed
People searching	Only accidental “discovery” possible
Among children I am afraid don’t love me	Anonymous
Sound of children: pretty annoying	Violin: my favorite thing
Round shape of hilly neighborhood	Angles of hotel in space
Not doing anything wrong	Eavesdropping
Fantasy of: sharp quick terror of being found; slow realistic agony of not being found, this being what might constitute winning; but instead of everyone calling “You win! Come out! We can’t bear it without you!” they forget what they were looking for and roast marshmallows.	Fantasy of: I go to the concierge and the concierge agrees to pass my expertly phrased note to the famous violinist. The concierge and I agree with our eyes that there is a famous violinist in the hotel but with our voices we agree that there is not and it must be a very talented amateur, no one the hotel would know about. Then, the violinist crosses the hall in the night in a black gown. She is Japanese and I am still me. She is melancholic. Suddenly, we drink some scotch and watch some television, lying on the

	<p>bed on our stomachs like twins except I'm blond and not one iota Japanese. I don't know what I'm wearing. Never mind the blond, I'm invisible, it doesn't matter what I am. I'm my eyes and voice, my elbows on the bedspread, my hands circling my glass like it's a doll's waist. We turn off the television. The space that surrounds the hotel swoops into the room. The room fills with stars. Everything is inside out, we've turned the corner at the far end of the big bang, and we are returning to the center of everything, with the best view, and a really great soundtrack.</p>
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FREEZE BOX (MAMA'S GOT A)

Now, in the near future, we'd already perfected the cryogenic freeze box for some time. We used it for everything, and for animal and vegetable, but best was we could crawl in there for grieving. Let the psychotic teen shoot our mother, let the caped man rape us. We crawled into our machine to work through it all in distant dreams. Over time the teen used her own cryogenic box to wait through madness, and over time the caped man slept this rage away. Those of us awake on earth walked peacefully, and when we couldn't walk we slept until we awoke to the clean air of past sadness. Freeze boxes lined the hills and followed us like wagons, but still came the end of the world. We saw it coming, and towards

us it crept, over time, a horizon. We kept our cryogenic chambers near. We were getting so sad, watching it approach like soldiers. We gazed across our freeze boxes, into the eyes of one another, waiting for the right moment. We didn't want to leave because finally it was all so beautiful.

GHOST/S

She draws her blue bath, and from the bedroom, we, the ghost of everyone who loved her, feel its terrible salt fumes. We watch from the bedroom, squirming among the folds of the comforter, ghost like smoke, like the coils of a brain, like fleshy roots pale from never having seen the sun, worms, massed and white—ghosts are always pale, significantly *blanched*. She covers her limbs with soap; she stands to do it, lathering every port and gulley. How can she rinse in such blue water? And then how can it be so invisible against her skin when the smells roll under the door and surf the hallway? When she comes out and it's clear from her face that she knows we're here she challenges us, with her silence, to say something. But we have no mouths and she knows it, so what sort of challenge is that? She's wearing nothing but her towel turban. She's pale and strong, but not yet dead. Her eyelashes are dark because they're still wet. She puts her palm flat on her dressing table and leans hard, toward the mirror. We have no weight, and we are afraid of mirrors, which are our equals in transparency. This mirror is oval and swivels on mahogany pegs as all good mirrors should. She drinks from a small glass of scotch and doesn't bother about the ring it leaves. It's not our business anymore, what she does to the furniture. We want to shoot her. She takes a tiny brush from a tiny drawer and uses it on her eyebrows. We scurry around her ankles, catching the last of the wet heat. Then there's no more wet heat, only some drops of water jiggling on her calves. We wiggle and wait for the clothes to come out. Then they do. We want to pounce but we wait through all the possible

outfits and finally of all the tee shirts and jeans she has chosen the right ones.

Excellent, as we cling best to cotton.

We grin with our whole body. She'll feel wisps of us all night, fingers in her ears, peripheral ticks in the atmosphere. Sooner or later she'll strip, and there'll be nothing we can do but hunch in a wad in the corner as she coils around this new person who fucks and fucks, making the sounds of life. But we don't stop grinning yet.