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Concussion

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RUTH JOFFRE

CONCUSSION

- *Runner-Up: Big Sky, Small Prose Flash Contest* -

HE ALWAYS APPEARS in the corner of my eye: a pale figure with a long black overcoat and a bloodless face. My doctor says this is common—that after a traumatic brain injury it is normal to experience symptoms like mine (auditory and visual hallucinations, sensitivity to bright light and loud noises, and an overwhelming desire to sleep—which, she says, is the brain’s way of healing itself and restoring equilibrium). I’m standing at the kitchen sink when he appears, his black eyes and sunken cheekbones hovering in the doorway, as if requesting access to my mundane life, but I refuse to look up at him. There are bubbles in the sink, and my wife is tottering in the backyard, her graceful limbs weaving between chairs and flowers as she picks up after our party, collecting cigarette butts in the shallow of a wine glass. She’s giggling about something, either the table she nearly tripped over or the diamond bracelet she pulls out of the stone birdbath, when the glitter of the jewels in the porch light reminds me of that moment just hours before when our friend tossed the diamond bracelet over her shoulder and said, “Fuck him,” of her soon-to-be-ex-husband. “It’s over. It’s in the past,” she said with the confidence of a woman who has never once walked down to the beach in the middle of the night and decided to shrug off her life—to

throw herself into the waters and let the current carry her where it may— only to return in the morning, shamefaced and sober, and ask of the clothes folded tidily on top of a rock, “Are these mine?” I wonder every day if this is indeed my life, if there isn’t something I’ve forgotten about my wife and my love for her that my brain is trying to draw up from the murky waters where I hit my head against the rock. In the corner of my eye, I see that pale specter shaking with fury, mouthing the words I know I need to hear, but I cannot bear to listen to him. When my wife comes back inside, she puts the bracelet in a drawer, “In case she comes back for it,” she says, though we both know the bracelet will stay there, untouched, for years, until one of us opens the drawer and I, at long last, remember.