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AS IT TURNS OUT

Lauren Korn

The girl who loved you a short time ago gave you a book you keep on the top shelf of your tallest bookcase. Inside the book's cover, written as though never intended to be seen or read or looked at again, is the name Jane Melrose and the numbers 9, 8, and 5. What comes next? You will never know, because the girl who loved you tore it away from her mother when she—her mother—was writing her name on the inside cover: an attempt to keep the book in her distant possession. The girl who loved you thought this a ridiculous gesture; she gave the book to you. On the cover, there is an illustration of a lion, and later—much later—when you come across the book (during your move in and out of that small studio apartment with that narrow, winding staircase, and again during your move in and out of your best friend's basement, home to spiders and spiders and spiders), you will be reminded of a lion and a leaky faucet in a desert marketplace.

You think of Jane Melrose, and not the girl who loved you, as you sit at a desk you call yours for three hours every Wednesday. The walls you stare at are white and turquoise—a turquoise that reminds you of the bandana that covered your eyes first when you wept for your sister, and then again when you smeared your face with red paint for three days, because it was the only thing you could think of to do, alone, by a river in Montana.

You weren't actually in Montana, of course. You were dreaming for the first time since Julie Ryder told you bending spoons was an act of the mind, and not (as it turns out) of someone strong enough to bend metal. The river was flowing just as quickly as you remember it when you were there last summer, drunk and naked, when you jumped in, not bothering to think of a disastrous end—that, when they found your body torn apart by rocks, you would be naked and unable to hide the birthmark on your ass or the single dark hair next to your belly button.

Dreaming, however, you didn't get naked, and you didn't jump in. You stayed on the beach, on the shore, on the sand, on the rocks, and found in the sun's waves a warmth you'd been afraid to feel since the blazing bastard gave you second degree burns two summers ago in your father's green canoe. When you glanced at your bare feet, you noticed, instead of something you can't quite remember, a single rock. You picked it up. You held it in the palm of your hand and pressed your fingers into it. They sank into its

surface—touched a starched liquid—and when you brought them to your face, they were red. They were covered in paint. Your face was red and wet with the paint for three days. But it wasn't, really. You were only dreaming.