GET A GRIP

You hit 40. You quite literally hit it, when your knee gives out and you lunge across the kitchen—flinging a handful of Ikea cutlery and then placing your hand squarely into the green frosting numbers on your birthday cake.

Marilyn, your best friend, appears in the doorway. "What was that?" She's the one who bought the cake, one of those perfectly rectangular jobbies from the supermarket—Marilyn never bakes, or cooks at all, actually, as it would ruin her nails. This particular cake had had an image of a semi-nude man on a bear skin rug. The lettering had said: "Have a Mantastic Birthday, Lisa!" You are like a female version of a confirmed bachelor, the neighborhood's Hugh Hefner-ette, and everyone views you this way. Even your dad, who placed a novelty inflatable boyfriend outside the front door of your garage apartment this morning. When you walked out, you hit it with the storm door and sent it flying across the yard, toward the big house out front, where you could see your dad in his bedroom window waving and smiling. A novelty boyfriend from your dad is exactly the kind of karmic price you pay sometimes for living rent free. The hot June wind pinned the thing to a tree trunk, where he

developed a slow leak—the six-pack abs and Hawaiian shorts atrophying before your eyes. It was then that you noticed the handwritten sign taped to his chest: *Lisa, You might be 40, but you're always #1!!*

Now, Marilyn looks at you there on your knees, your hand wrist-deep in cake and she says, in a lilting voice better suited for talking to a four year old, "Lisa, you're going to ruin that fabulous dress. What are you doing?" She's the inquisitive type, that Marilyn, ever the psychologist.

"Oh, not much," you reply. "Just wanted to make sure it was all right." Marilyn usually folds her arms across her chest and frowns when you are sarcastic; she says you use sarcasm the way skunks use their stench, as a defense mechanism, as a way to stay alone. "You're spraying," she likes to say. But this time, she actually laughs.

"And is it?" she says. "Cooked?"

"Hmmm," you say, massaging the cake with your hand, trying to conceal any sign of the throbbing pain in your knee. "Yeah, feels good. Just about right."

"Listen, don't worry," she says, bending down to pick tufts of your cat's hair off her cuffs. "I'll just run down and get another one."

Before you can protest, or even get up, she's grabbed her keys and run out the door in one smooth, lithe motion, everything silvery and sparkling—watch, rings, eye shadow, body glitter. You wonder why you can't accessorize like that or solve problems like that and if it is some kind of genetic defect. Maybe this is why Marilyn has a new boyfriend now while you're still hanging out with your ex, as if the two of you are in a rock band together and have no choice or something.

Are you still in love with each other like Marilyn always says? Well, that would be ridiculous. Thirty-one year-old Jake is your friend, sure, but he is too young to get your jokes about Tony Orlando & Dawn or tube socks. And besides, he already has a new girlfriend named Keira, who's twenty-two and works

as a mascot for the local single-A baseball team. Keira is a nice girl. She often brings you banana bread when she comes looking for Jake. Truthfully, the bread is a little dry and eating it makes you think about poor Keira's situation, how sad it is that a young girl like that has to go through life being so plain, with small black eyes and a long face like a donkey or like whatever that animal is that she impersonates at work—a dog or whatever. You don't want to be uncharitable, but you aren't sure what Jake has gotten so excited about. But he says he's happy, and that's all that matters. Right?

You've washed and dried your hands and now you are standing by the sink, looking out the kitchen window at the beautiful birdbath your mother bought years ago, which does not have any whimsical characters decorating its base, and does not have a stone cardinal or cherub protruding from its center—it's just plain granite with sharp, sensuous lines, unapologetic for its functional strength, its elegant simplicity, so like her that you always struggle to take your eyes off it. You close them for a moment and count to three. Then, you turn back to the deflated, concave cake on the counter, picking at the remains, which look like some ruined city. The dark sink hole in the white sugary surface looks angry and deep and is a little like the feeling you have in your chest—you are 40. In 40 years you have never been in a relationship for a whole year, nor have you ever felt anything like tenderness when you have been confronted by blond-haired babies on TV rolling around in reams of toilet paper. You have never had a calling to something greater than yourself—never had a deep urge to provide sanitized water to barefoot people over in West Virginia or to entertain folks with thought-provoking illusions involving playing cards and walnut shells or, like your dad, to divine people's futures from their sweaty, cheese-smelling hands. And this is how you have ended up staying in Catonsville, just outside

Baltimore, and managing your father's statuary business, Big Pat's Granite Ranch, and living in the garage apartment behind your father's house, which in turn, sits behind the half-acre gravel display yard, that legion of white stone creatures—gnomes, deer, squirrels, fairies, dolphins, Jesuses, hedgehogs, gladiators, Alice in Wonderlands, lambs, camels, urinating cherubs, Elvises, frogs, Indian chiefs, gods on the half shell, and a little replica of Jimmy Carter.

Both working and living at the Big Pat's compound, combination house/statuary/palmistry center—tallying the best-sellers (always gnomes), selling leprechauns to undiscerning customers when you've sold out of gnomes, flirting with kind, paunchy married men because they always have single brother-in-laws that sleep on their sofas a little too often—it is all just stuff to do until the real you arrives, the real you that lives deep inside and will emerge one day when a hurricane visits or when your cat gets run over or (and the college-educated part of you hates to admit it) when the right man comes along. You wish you felt called to someplace very far away, like Tibet, where you would experience the bliss of absorption, too busy pursuing enlightenment or panting behind a Sherpa to concern yourself with recording *American Idol* when it conflicts with your dad's other favorite, *It's Me or the Dog.* Oh, the throbbing in your knee is nothing; your chest feels like that sink hole in the cake.

By the time Jake arrives, letting himself in without knocking, you have eaten at least half of the thick gritty icing with a serving spoon, gasping it down almost as if you had no choice, as if you were clearing away rubble, looking for survivors.

"Hey hon, what's the trouble?" Jake says, and you hardly hear him. You are still staring at the cake. He stands beside you, takes your face in his hands, and makes you look at him, but you have trouble processing anything except the fact that the

skin under his eyes has no fine papery lines, that there are no pits etched beneath his eye sockets like thumbprints, because he is still, of course, too young for all of that. What the *hell* is he hanging around with you for?

Part of you knows you are as good-looking as guys always tell you, even in spite of the lines and pits. You have something of what made your mother the beauty that she was. But this is not reassuring. This is horrible. Because it is still not enough, and it is fleeting, and you will wake up one morning the dumpy round person that you were as a kid and a lonely teenager, before you discovered aerobics, bouncing and jumping your way into a bathing beauty's body and bad knees at age twenty-seven.

"Lisa," Jake says and snaps his fingers. When you finally see him, really see him, you gasp and grab the front of his shirt and kiss him deeply—in a way you never did even when the two of you were together those six months. Jake works as a youth minister at Shepherd of the Hills Lutheran Church. And all those kids tell him their problems. And he fills the rafters each Sunday with haunting acoustic-guitar renditions of "Holy, Holy, Holy" or "I Come to the Garden Alone." And all of the moms touch his arm when they seek advice on matters they have probably fabricated, their fingers so light, like whispers. Why did you ever let him go?

You collect ex-boyfriends the way some women collect shoes. At first, when you start dating someone, you are breathless with the possibility of the woman you might become. You imagine how you will shape yourself around his contours—which are nobler, wiser, more transcendent than your own. Over the first wine spritzer with a guy, at the O'Charlie's Happy Hour or the Holiday Inn Lounge, you know how it will be—the size and shape of the house you will share with him, the kinds of nights out you will have with his friends, the sort of old couple you will become.

You have, from an imaginary perspective, been the wives of many people, including an architect who took you to live in a converted French farmhouse; a sports reporter who brought you to every game he covered for thirty years, smiling at you and waving during the half-time show, as if those half-clad girls weren't even there; and a fireman for whom you cooked casseroles and learned to like canned corn and mourned after his early and heroic death.

The reality never quite matches up, though. You are more than disappointed, almost annoyed, when you discover on the second date that the architect hates Europe, that the sports reporter quite enjoys those half-clad girls, that the fireman is going to criticize your cooking from the start and took the job he has because he rarely has to attend a fire. It never comes back, that initial excitement.

But is it back now? you wonder as you are kissing Jake. Are you excited about him or are you excited about the prospect of being excited? You savor the taste of the Miller High Life he has been drinking in front of the Orioles game at Phil's apartment—Phil, another ex, through whom you met Jake, this man whose lips now feel so right, whose chest, which you raise your hand to touch, is narrow but firm, with a heart beating strong enough to feel in your fingers.

Jake suddenly realizes what's happening and he drops the gift bag in his hand and he clutches your hips, your back, and he starts kissing you for all he's worth. When Marilyn comes back, you and Jake are on the kitchen table beside the cake. Jake's jeans are around his knees, and your legs are nearly behind your head; your bad left knee is at a strange angle.

"Oh Jesus," you hear Marilyn mutter, and then she fumbles the new cake and drops it. She leaves it there, retreats to the kitchen doorway. "Call me later?" she says. "Don't worry," she adds. "I'll intercept your dad." Count on Marilyn to think of that.

A few minutes later—the two of you have

recovered from the interruption and are moving together with even greater vigor—you're studying Jake's face, sweat trickling down his considerable nose, and you think how there's nothing special about this. It's like brushing your teeth, driving your car, something people do everyday, something that in and of itself has no significance, no matter how long it's been since you last did it. You wrap your legs around Jake's back and match his rhythm. "Oh," he says, looking at you with awe and admiration.

Breathless, you focus your eyes on his, run your finger down the side of his angular jaw and then smooth his dark eyebrows, one and then the other. Bright afternoon light streams through your gauzy kitchen curtains, dust floating in the air over Jake's shoulder. The wet tips of his longish hair are curling, like some 70's heart throb from a poster. He is beautiful, which is more than an observation; it's a feeling. The feeling is in that same place in your chest where the hole is. It's like an air bubble, swelling against your breast bone, swelling like it might burst. This is good. This must be good. "Talk to me," you say. "Tell me something you've never told me before."

"Okay," he says and stops for a moment, looks right into your eyes. There is a long pause. "I think I'm going to marry Keira," he says.

You know that if Marilyn is right and you are secretly in love with Jake, you should feel devastated. But you don't. And the fact that you are not devastated is what you find most devastating of all. Maybe, you tell yourself, your feelings are like the chocolate coins in your mother's dresser drawer, which she denied existed, even when you held them in your palm in front of her eyes. "Nice girls don't eat sweets. And they don't snoop," she had said, tilting your hand so that the coins slid into the waste basket one by one.

You are tempted to let your father read your

palm, something you have never done in spite of his borderline begging. Your dad is in the back office of the statuary now with a big hulking farmer from the Eastern Shore, the blinds drawn, their voices barely whispers. You can picture them in there—the farmer's huge calloused hand laid open on the desk like a butchered animal and your father studying it through his magnifying glass, making surprised noises, glancing every now and then at the farmer's face as if to gauge something. Your dad doesn't charge money for palmistry, despite the fact that you and everyone else have told him he should. Even your late mother, who was the book keeper for the statuary before you, infinitely practical, used to admit he had a talent. Her little pink lips pursed like a French person, she would shake her head and say, "You could just be lucky with these predictions, but I don't believe in luck. So where does that leave things?" Your mother had a teacher's square below her index finger, something that had never made sense to your dad, as your mother wasn't a teacher and didn't have innately teacher-ish, nurturing tendencies. Then, when you were twelve, she had an aneurysm. And, boy, that taught you and your dad a thing or two. "I should have checked her mouse," he always said, even now, even these days. "Why didn't I check it? Why didn't I?" The mouse—as near as you can tell, some fleshy bit of the hand that appears when a person makes a fist—is a sign of health. Whenever you absently clench and catch your dad staring longingly, you release and clamp your open palms to your pant leg. "I'm putting down my dukes, Pops," you say. "I'm a lover, not a fighter."

When the two men come out of the office, the farmer looks pale. Is he swaying a little? Your dad refuses to whitewash bad news like Venus the psychic, who lives out on Route 40. Your dad pats the farmer's shoulder, but the farmer doesn't seem to notice. He moves toward the sunlight with his mouth open, looking a little like a toddler.

"Dad," you say after the farmer has gone.

Your dad is thumbing through his appointment book behind the counter and doesn't look up. "Hmm?"

You are staring at him very hard, trying to will him to pay attention. "One of these days, you're going to get done with a session and someone's going to have a car accident."

"Not that I'm aware of."

"Oh, forget it," you mutter.

"What's that, sweetie?"

"*Nothing*." This exchange pretty much sums up your relationship with him. You are like characters living on opposite sides of a split screen, like in TV shows when they want to show you what two people are doing at the same time, but in different locations.

Your stomach is a little icy. What if you did let him read your palm? He couldn't really tell you anything shocking, could he? He will tell you that you'll have a long life and that you will be feisty when you're old. It doesn't take a palm reader to tell you that your cat will be the central figure in your activities for the next several years. Could you take your cat if you moved to Tibet? You try to picture her, that little orange face peeking out the top of an orange Buddhist's robe as she prays for the end of suffering. But let's face it. If the cat features prominently, you're not really going anywhere.

You sit on a stool behind the counter and watch your dad open a statuary wholesale catalogue and flip through it. You open your mouth to talk to him, unsure how you will ask. "They have some cute new cowgirls," you comment.

He turns his head and looks at you, raising his glasses and placing them on top of his bald head. His eyes are so white and clear, and the brown irises stare into your own, right into the deepest part of your head. You're his means of clearing his conscience. He is about to tell you what he saw in that man's future: the death of a child, maybe, or the loss of a limb.

Or maybe just a downturn in the price of poultry, the breakdown of a new refrigerator, the tendency to alienate loved ones. He clears his throat. Your stomach now feels like it is full of snow.

You sit on your hands.

It's your idea for everyone to be there at the ballpark on the night Jake pops the question. It's humid, heavy, even at 7:30 p.m., when the first batter is struck out by Cassidy Chesnut, the pitcher for the Greater Baltimore Badgers. The sky is low and gray and it makes the Badgers' uniforms look the super shade of white that your mother used to yell at the television was impossible to achieve. "Tide can't make that happen. The whole space program couldn't make that happen," she would say to the man holding up the blinding T-shirt. You would laugh and she would glance at you sidelong, just the hint of a wry smile on her beautiful lips. She almost never laughed, but this quality didn't make her seem cold. Instead, she was alluring, magnetic.

And now here you are looking at that very shade of white. Magic, it seems, is possible. Marilyn watches you break open peanuts. She occasionally pushes the growing pile of shells closer to you with her black pointy high-heeled shoe. "I can't believe he's doing the scoreboard thing," she whispers. "It's such a cliché."

"It's not going to be the scoreboard," you inform her. "Keira can't see very well through the eye holes of her costume."

"Well, whatever. It's a *baseball game*."

You see someone waving at you. It's Luke McIntosh, a strapping gym teacher you went on a few dates with last year. His entire apartment was filled with Winnie the Pooh paraphernalia—stuffed animals, figurines, dishes, waste baskets, curtains. You feel as though you should have found it endearing. You didn't. You still feel guilty, and you wave as if he's

just come back from the war. "Hey Luke!" you call, and he blows you a kiss.

Marilyn sighs. "The only reason your old boyfriends still like you is that you never give them a chance to get attached."

Jake, who is sitting in front of you with your dad, turns around and looks at Marilyn. "That's not true," he says. "What about me?"

"Don't get me started," she says and rolls her eyes.

You punch Jake's shoulder. "You don't like me," you say. "You're just using me because I'm so handy around the house."

"Move over," says Marilyn. "Here comes Stewart." She raises her hand, fingertips wiggling. Stewart, Marilyn's lawyer boyfriend, marches up the bleachers with a cardboard tray of draft beers. You scoot down one row and park yourself on the other side of your father. Stewart distributes the beers and you take a long swill. Your nose tingles.

Keira is doing a handstand on top of the dugout. She walks the length of the roof on her hands, and then she pops up and takes a bow.

You fish from your purse the giant ring that Jake plans to put on the badger's big cartoon finger during the seventh inning—a concept that was all your idea. You made it for him last night out of yellow pipe cleaners, and the diamond is an ornate sparkly button you found in your father's junk drawer. How long had it been there?

Just then you can sense your father's probing eyes studying your hands. You gasp and fumble the ring. It falls underneath the bleachers. "What are you doing?" you say. "Stop looking."

He looks hurt, like you've slapped him, and you regret the harsh tone you've used.

"I was looking at the button," he says. The two of you have not had a moment like this since the time he backed your car into a statue of Chief

Geronimo that you had already sold, breaking him off at the feet. "Well, don't worry," he says, his lips a tight white line. "As far as I'm concerned, you don't have any hands."

Underneath the bleachers, you wade through empty popcorn boxes and coke cups. They are literally up to your ankles, and you wonder about the likelihood of rats. It's very still, and gnats buzz around your ears and eyes. You swat at them, scanning the ground for any glimpse of yellow, kicking litter as you trudge along.

"Find it?" You spin around to see Jake there.

"Oh," you say. "I was hoping you didn't notice."

"I see all," he says in a spooky voice, imitating a gypsy in a bad 60's horror film the two of you watched the other night.

You smile, but only a little. "Don't worry. I'll find it," you say, resuming your search.

"What are you doing after the game?" he says.

"Look," you say. "There it is." You bend down and snatch the ring from the litter, brushing it off. "Good thing it's so gigantic."

You turn around and walk over to give it to him, and you realize, from his expectant look, that he is still waiting to hear what you're doing after the game. The raised eyebrows, the wrinkle of his forehead. It matters to him. And that is when you understand that the reason his impending engagement doesn't bother you is that you know he is in love with you, not with Keira. You stand in front of him, and it occurs to you that if you hand him this ring, it will be like a proposal. You could get down on one knee with the cartoon ring and say the words in a Porky Pig voice. This actually appeals to you. You think of your parents' marriage and its surprising end—the way your father found your mother at her desk with one hand on her coffee cup and her forehead on the calculator, the way he leaned on you at the hospital with all of his weight.

You extend your hand toward Jake with the ring,

and then when he reaches out to take it, you fumble and drop it. Maybe on purpose this time.

"Frick on a stick," he says. "You are one clumsy mo fo."

You watch him bend down and pick it up. There is a pain behind your eyes, and you wonder what an aneurysm feels like.

"You bought an open-ended round-trip ticket to where?" Jake says, fumbling with a croquet set. The two of you are cleaning out your dad's carport in preparation for the yard sale Jake is having next weekend to help finance his wedding to Keira. He's taken the day off from his job, which seems counter-intuitive.

"Nepal," you say.

"But you're not . . . " he says, laughing. "You're not a traveller." Jake has taken the kids in his group camping all over the Allegheny Mountains, and he used to try, without success, to get you to come along.

He puts the croquet set in the back of his Nissan pickup truck. Then he comes back and stands behind you, giggling to himself in a way that seems a little too meaningful. His teeth are so white, like paint. You want to go someplace where nobody whitens or has mutual funds—not that you think Jake has mutual funds. He probably doesn't, as this would require him to save money instead of spending the whole entire sum of his free time and salary pretending to be a surfer, when there is no surf this side of the Bay Bridge. Windsurfing on ponds in rural Maryland is not the same as surfing. You keep trying to tell him that. That shark-tooth necklace and the arm-band tattoo—they are so misguided.

"I could be a traveller, though," you say now, with more than a hint of irritation. If he can bleach his hair every summer, you can apply for a passport. You are trying to free a length of vacuum cleaner hose

from underneath some boxes of photo albums. “Why couldn’t I?”

“Well, because you’ve got more hair products in your bathroom than they sell in the hair salon. Where are you going to find room for all that in your carry-on luggage? And when you get there, what are you going to do, rent a yak?”

Keira bounces up the drive just then. She’s wearing very short cut-offs and sparkly green flip flops. In the sun, there are hints of gold in her chestnut hair, which is loosely pulled back in a barrette. You suspect she doesn’t use any hair products. Jake doesn’t know she’s there yet; she is standing near the back of his pickup truck, looking around for him.

“When are you going?” he says to you.

“July 3rd,” you grunt, finally pulling the vacuum cleaner hose free and stumbling backwards. The top box falls over onto its side and a few photo albums spill out onto the concrete floor. You hurry to pick them up, but Jake gets there first.

“You’ll miss the wedding.” He stands, hugs the albums to his chest.

“Huh.” You struggle to your feet, mop your brow. “Will I?” He is just the kind of person who might open a photo album that isn’t his. You do not want to see your mother’s face. You do not want to see that she is the same age that you are now. “What a shame.” You smile. You put your hands out, nod for him to give them over. He just stares into your eyes in the same unwavering, ancient way the cat does sometimes, as if he understands things about fear and fire that you never will.

It isn’t quiet. A car whooshes past. A leaf blower drones in the distance. His gaze almost emits a sizzle, and your mouth drops open like you might say something.

“Jake?” Keira finally calls.

He turns and smiles, this whole other face. He

deposits the albums with you, and he goes up the driveway, and she slides her arm around him and he dips her and kisses her and it looks so easy. This affection is like high school geometry—there are shapes and angles that you recognize but somehow cannot comprehend or control.

You hurry to put the photo albums back, scooping some dirt and maybe some ants into the box. Then, you run out to the backyard and you drag your mother's birdbath into the carport, where Keira is waiting to give you a bottle of water. "What can I do?" She smiles a little nervously, as she always does around you, something Jake doesn't seem to notice.

"Oh, hi, Keira. You got here just in time. Why don't you take this for me?"

You organize your own going away party. Marilyn gives you a card in which she assures you that your cat will love her more than you by the time you return next month. There is a smiley face that's meant to indicate she's joking, but she is probably right.

Everyone gets pretty drunk on champagne your dad was given by one of his palmistry clients, a guy who won a little money in the lottery on a day your dad said he should play. Your dad takes your wrist, promising not to touch your palm, and closes the clasp of a charm bracelet with little travel icons on it—a camera, the Eiffel Tower, an airplane, a sandal. Marilyn winks, and you understand that she helped him pick it out. Still, his eyes are wet, and you understand what it means, you going away.

While everyone is playing Scrabble in your little living room, triple points for travel words, you sneak into the kitchen and have a long look out the window over the sink. Out there, even though it isn't there anymore, you can see your mother's birdbath in its spot under the oak tree. The birdbath looks different on different days, depending on the weather and the

season, the angle of the sun: sometimes the stone is white, sometimes silvery, sometimes gray with sparkly speckles. You feel as though you are the birdbath sometimes, as if the space between you and it has become amorphous, a part of you, just by virtue of the force and frequency of your gaze out this window, year after year. The realization that maybe you will miss the imaginary birdbath more than the people in the other room makes you feel truly sad, for the first time since the day with the cake. You laugh a little, at yourself.

"What are you doing?" Jake says, coming to the refrigerator for a beer, the bottles clanking. You don't turn around. You hear him take the top off and have a swig.

You think maybe what you are doing at this moment is trying your best not to love him. Him or anyone else. Because to select a path would be to reject every other path. Or worse yet, you might select a path only to find it wasn't the one you thought you'd picked, like it went through an industrial complex or became overgrown with poison ivy and sticker bushes and venus flytraps. And then what if it disappeared entirely, like your mother? Not that she was a path. You sigh. It is a bad analogy, but you are beginning to see your own point. Maybe all this time you have thought that it's better to hold your breath and freeze, with your feet motionless in the air above whatever path you're on, lest you make the wrong guess. But this, of course, is impossible, a self-deception.

You turn around to face Jake. "Do you ever think about what happened on my birthday?"

"Man," he says very quietly, shaking his head. He develops a faraway look. "That was pretty crazy, huh?"

"What would happen if I told Keira?"

"She already knows."

"She does? And it's okay?"

"Mostly. I guess." He grins. "There was frosting

all in my hair." The two of you are quiet for a moment. "Man, I wish *I* was going to Nepal," he says.

You are not anxious, like you should be, about the trekking maps you haven't yet bought, or the knee brace, or the Gore-Tex pants. Your suitcase is open on your bed, empty.

You reach over and take a swig of his beer. "That's funny," you say, "because I wish I was marrying you."

You can see the words sink into Jake's brain mid-laugh. They surprise him far more than your birthday kiss did. His face goes slack. His good-for-nothing, too-young-for-you, surfer face. The floor has dropped out of your stomach.

"What about it?" you say. "What if I gave Keira my plane ticket, and you married me instead?"

"Stop fucking with me," Jake whispers, and there is a flash of anger. His nostrils flare.

"God," you say, louder. "That's the best advice I've had in ages." You are aware that your attempts at honesty sound like sarcasm and that you are trapped inside the box of yourself even now that you actually want to get out. You feel the tug of your whole body toward the window, toward the view of the birdbath; you start to turn away.

Jake slides his arm around your waist and stops you. You gasp at the potency of it—there's more feeling in him now, you think, than you've ever felt before. And then in a moment that you will think about for a long time to come, you do something that signals, to him anyway, your final, cutting refusal.

What happens is this: You show him your palm. You raise it right in front of his eyes, fingers toward the sky just the way your father taught you, so that it is upright, so that he can see its pinkness, the fragile braided lines that reveal your life, its tender center. You hold it there, still and strong, so that he can see the heart line that, like Geronimo, breaks in half.