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"YOU ARE MEANT TO ESCAPE, YES, BUT NOT TO SUR-
VIVE," SAYS THE OLD TESTAMENT GOD WHO IS JESUS
(SEE MORMONISM (SEE NON-TRINITARIAN CHRISTIAN

LEONORA DESAR

Don't

Don't blow out the candles at your 15th birthday party. Or at least don't make it look like fun. Instead, make a long thin line out of your mouth, the kind the girls by the freeway wear, the ones outside Odessa's XXX. Don't show the red and blue rubber bands between your teeth. Hide the metal that glints like something from last year, something you no longer want to be.

Don't laugh at that dumb face your dad is making behind your head in the mirror—the one that mimics you with your slash of mouth, but with chocolate and cherry frosting caked over his orange beard. Catch his eye but swallow your real grin, your rubber bands stained a rainbow inside your mouth.

Don't tell Mom about Marlina, your ex-best friend. If she asks why Marlina isn't there, tell her she got sick. Tell her she's in bed with strep. Don't tell her what she already knows—that everyone hates the both of you. Marlina and Maggie don't take showers, they say. Marlina and Maggie sleep naked in the same bed, they say. Marlina and Maggie will never get fucked, they say.

Don't tell her what they say about Marlina's father—that he's in his sixties and wears gray underwear around the house, his hairy matchstick legs bobbing between rows and rows of old *Playboys* spread out like a Mayan ruin, the girls all redheads just like Marlina, the girls all looking like they could be Marlina's dead older sister, Beth. Don't tell Mom about Vera, Marlina's mother. How she talks to Marlina's dead sister at slumber parties held every other Sunday. That you've been to these parties, painted the

ghost of the dead sister's nails a cerulean blue.

Don't tell when you make a new best friend. Just her name would be enough to set Mom on edge—Sasha Sugar Clearly. That sounds like the name of a porn star, Mom would say. Who the hell would name their kid that? Mom says things like this all the time, which is why you kind of like her, even though she doesn't make funny faces like your dad. Mom is the one who named you Margaret after her dead grandma. When you go to the freeway with Sasha, call yourself something else.

When Marlina calls, don't answer. At school, laugh at her neck caked with dirt, her green mock turtleneck from Goodwill, her pervy father in his stained gray underpants. Don't turn and watch her cry. Don't wish you could go to her.

Go to the freeway—the cars that turn your blood to neon, the music that bruises the inside of your ribs. Sit in the backseat with your slashed mouth, your rainbow tucked inside. Watch Sasha's black ponytail swishing like a cat's tail up front, the way it disappears inside a man's leather pants, her spine lip-synching to you in another language.

Sit next to the quiet fat friend of that man. Let him hold your hand because he wears a T-shirt with a band you heard was cool and worked as a roadie once for the singer Karen Black. Laugh with him and the leather lap man when Sasha's ponytail swishes up again. When she wipes her own slash mouth and spits.

Don't go to school. Don't go to choir. Don't say no to the way cocaine makes you feel—like you are all teeth, your organs a chocolate-frosted grin.

Say yes when Sasha asks if you want to ride up front this

time. Ignore how the driver has a beard like your father's, the hair a darker salt and pepper beneath his chin, on the freckled skin below his navel where his Ramones T-shirt rides above his jeans. Don't think about how this man's beard is wet with beer and snot. How it itches the inside of your thighs.

Lie with your thighs spread into this man, but don't think of him. Think of something else: how it's the second Sunday of the month. Feel your bare feet walking through the Mayan temple of centerfolds at Marlina's, a hundred naked women watching from the covers. Carry a bottle of blue polish into the dead sister's room and paint the air. Watch Vera light candles, calling *Beth*. Feel Marlina grip your fingers, calling *Beth*. In the front seat, lie with your bare foot on the dashboard, listen for your name.