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Playing House

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Playing House

You look happy, all lavender,
pearly teeth, and crinkled eyes
as if you were born smiling,
a charmed child, and I sit
next to you, always the less radiant.
We pose, baby dolls on our laps,
running combs through plastic gold
with one hand, holding identical
toy hair dryers in the other, sitting
knee to knee and shoulder to shoulder,
in matching purple sweatsuits.
It was your birthday,
a party hat on your head,
and we could now play
house together, teach
our sturdy children
reading, writing, and arithmetic.

Twelve years later, holding
our cousin, you're still beautiful,
still smiling. And I would say
you look happy, except
that I can see
the picture's captured
the smallest of salt tears
just emerging from the corner
of your hazel eye.
I know what our parents will never
know. You often think
of your own little girl, discarded
like an unwanted gift.
And you can't help
but wonder *What if?*
You cannot hide it from me;
we were mothers together once.

Rachel Wise, '06