

1992

Pear Colored

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Pear-Colored

My apartment was too hot. Although the clock next to my bed said 3:52 a.m., it felt like midday in the city. I sat up, smearing another layer of sweat into my face, wiping it into the sheets as if I wouldn't have to do it again in a minute. The thought of what 9:30 that morning meant made me light a cigarette. I really love to smoke. At four in the morning it's almost like having a meal.

I love to watch myself smoke so I slid off of my bed onto the floor and sat there in front of the full length mirror. The light from the street below always gives my bedroom a queer greenish-yellow cast, and I was only wearing underwear. I tasted the balls of sweat above my lip. Salty.

Across the room I could see the envelope on my dresser. Inside there were a few pieces of paper, typed on, folded in thirds, and sent to my apartment this morning while I was at work. The letter was keeping me awake. I looked in the mirror at my body. A clump of hair stuck to my neck like a gash.

I never exercise. I laughed out loud at my crosstraining Nike's slumped in the corner as if they've been used properly. I wanted a cold beer just then so I got up, stretched, and grabbed my cigarettes.

Opening the refrigerator, I held my head in the frosty air until the moisture on my face and neck was cold. I pulled out a beer and shut the door. A plastic smiley face magnet stuck my mother and father to the Frigidaire. Below them hung an expired coupon for the Scandanavian Health Club. My two warm fingers reminded me to put out my cigarette. I looked back at the magnet and then reached for the ashtray.

I was thirsty. I opened the beer and gulped, rinsing off my dry pipes and replacing my salty taste with alcohol. I listened as the dull hum of the refrigerator stopped, leaving only the ticking kitchen clock for company. I sat down and quickly drank the beer. My thighs were sticking to the stool I was on, but it was cold and stable.

I lit another Merit and knew that I was going to be up for the remainder of the morning. I chewed on the loose skin around my thumbnail and spit it out onto the counter. I felt naked. Since my beer emptied itself so quickly, I opened a new one. The sound of the clock disappeared into the silence. The refrigerator clicked back on. I burped loudly and laughed.

Walking around my kitchen, I stood in front of the microwave to watch myself drinking and smoking for a minute. I turned away slowly, continuing to walk. In front of the sink, I leaned over, staring down into the reddish-orange soap bubbles floating from my pasta dinner. The smell of the sponge made me wish I had thrown it away a week ago. The bubbles popped without a sound. I think I was on my third beer. I could feel its weight in my stomach.

I grabbed another pack of cigarettes from the cabinet and packed them against my palm. Smack. Smack. Violently. It stung my hand. I lit one and sat on the linoleum floor for a while. Nine-thirty loomed and the smoke hung in the air above me.

Do you solemnly swear to tell the truth, the whole truth and nothing but the truth, as God is your witness?

I do.

Please be seated...

And I sat there on the floor. Sitting and waiting.

I finished four beers and got up to find a bottle. My belly was swollen with beer, and as I poured the Vodka into my glass I knew I didn't want it. I stood there in my underwear and cried. I cried because that letter was in my room scaring me. My nose was running. I was drunk and I needed to urinate. I walked into the bathroom and turned on the light. Everything was silent. My feet squashed into the shaggy white throw rug. My white body and red face stood there staring at me. The bruises around my neck had started to turn pear-colored. I felt like vomiting so I did. I sat on the floor afterwards with my back against the cold bathtub. I could feel the coldness and the hardness all the way through to my stomach.

It was just a form letter from the District Attorney's office. Honorable Judge so-and-so will be presiding. Please meet outside Court Room 12 at 9:30...but I wondered if he got a form letter. I wondered if he had just thrown up. I was crying again, like a child with a brush burn. I was so tired.

I stood up, chewing on my thumbnail and biting the hard skin with my front teeth. My cheeks were hot but the tears still burned as they fell. The mirror was in front of me. My neck bones were a big wooden hanger wrapped around my shoulders, my underwear hung above my hip bones, my breasts disappeared into my ribcage as if they were hiding. I reached for the lightswitch to stop the view.

Shaking, I moved back down the hall and into bed. I curled up on the wrinkled sheets, pulling my knees under my chin. The sweat started all over again.

His violent presence hung in my room like thick red velvet draperies. Thoughts of that night—his thick wrists, the smell of my body after he left, the scream that never found its way from my lips—were crawling from the envelope like roaches.

8:14 a.m. unfolded my body. I showered and got a cab to the court house.

—Erin Dempsey '93