

Scar

At the supermarket, the checker's hands are quick as birds darting in and out of a bath as I load groceries on the conveyor belt—a jug of milk, dozen eggs, the great green lettuce rose landing with a thump as I glance up, my gaze stopping short of two blue eyes. I look away, my embarrassment bright as the netted sack of oranges I yank from a rack under my cart. It is as though someone had laid a hot poker across her left cheek, and I think of my glamorous grandmother hospitalized when a garage door spring unhooked, broke her nose, and left its diagonal mark on her face.

She is beautiful,
dark hair past her waist—and young—as I was that day I flew over bicycle handlebars and blacked out, my only proof now a blue scar snaking by my left eye. Raised, her scar seems a worm inching, alive. I reach for a brick of cheese, and the beeping scanner stops. Quietly, she tells me of seepage from a basket of strawberries, and I can barely hear her over the prattling bagger, his tongue wagging incessantly like the tail of a dog happy to see everyone. I start toward the produce aisle, but he offers to help, and I trust him though I sense his pick will be worse than mine. In the heavy silence that hangs between us, I recall the kind lady in a Newport pier beauty shop who sacrificed profit and refused to sell me cover, told me I was lovely in my youth, to enjoy it, gave me that summer afternoon of uneasy peace.

Her face glows with foundation, the scar an unnatural pink, and I want to murmur something tender and wise and wholly without pity to this girl who could have been my daughter had God so desired, but my mouth is empty as the air through which her hands fly, empty as the womb ripped from me years ago, empty as a promise that can't be kept. I thank her and the bagger, hastily push away the cart, its telltale wheel thwapping, hope there is time enough in this life to heal us.