



the sleeping porch

arielle silver

I fell in love with the sleeping porch in June.

The converted second story deck with three walls of windows overlooked a vegetable garden, pie cherry tree and a row of lilacs whose blooms fell like snow at the furthest edge of the backyard. The petals perfumed the summer breeze that wafted through the room. I moved in.

From the ribbon collection at the art store where I measured bolts of fabric and advised customers on which glue to buy

for their projects, I swiped half yards of grosgrain, satin, organdy, and velvet in purples and wine-reds, and hand-stitched them together for a curtain at the foot of my bed. Through summer I sometimes slept on the porch with the boy I had loved for three years—the first boy I ever loved—and sometimes we slept in his bedroom downstairs off the entryway.

I stitched my ribbon-curtain through

fall and the holiday fuss, but it fell forgotten at the bottom of my sewing bag after one night in his darkened bedroom when the first boy I had ever loved spooned his body around mine and laid his palm on my thigh. He whispered that he'd kissed a girl he knew from the art studio, and I froze from his palm print upward. My body shrank to the size of the crumble atop a sugar-dusted doughnut. I don't know why that image came to me of a chocolate Entenmann's doughnut that I hadn't tasted in years, but I asked from

I saw no other way after that kind of destruction, so I said we were through. It was February then, or March, one of those months you expect indicates the end of winter, but the thermometer drops another ten degrees, below zero, and another nor'easter blows in, the worst yet. I went to the sleeping porch and shivered alone, huddling in gray layers in the monochromatic winter light from the ineffective storm windows that shuddered with every gust. One by one the lilacs at the back of the snow-covered yard

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my crumb-smallness how many times they had kissed. The boy I loved lied. *Only once*, he said from a far-off distance, like he and my crumb-self were stars apart. How was it his palm still burned my icy leg? How was it I still had legs? I banged my fists against his ribcage like he was a house, because his heart had once told me it would be my home for a lifetime.

In frozen bursts, the boy I loved chipped out details about the girl at the art studio, about her mouth and his body parts, that once embedded in my imagination could not be unhinged.

bent over the neighbor's fence, doubled under the weight of the wet snow, and buckled, then snapped into a heap of gray branches on the ground.

The night before the morning of a new job (one that paid better than the six-dollars-an-hour art store, plus tips), an April Fool's storm threw down forty-eight inches of thick snow. The plows couldn't get to our socked in neighborhood streets for three days. Later, before dawn, between mountains of gray, I walked the frigid two miles, part on local streets, part on the bike path, to brew pots of

regular and decaf, and bake off batches of ginger scones in time for the café's 7 a.m. customers. I blasted heartbreaking ballads in the dim light, and set out coffee mugs and spoons, and smoothed my apron bib over my chest, a flimsy layer of protection against a messy job.

On walks home after my shift, the weak spring sun coaxed out crocuses and, later, daffodils, brave little pink and yellow soldiers on the frontlines of spring. Street musicians and bare-legged girls soon returned to the square. In the afternoons I found my dresser on the sleeping porch covered with jelly jars

and glass soda bottles filled with daisies, forsythia, peonies, sunflowers, irises, tiger lilies, Peruvian lilies, cosmos, coneflower, dahlias, feverfew, and Queen Anne's lace, left for me by the first boy I ever loved. Amid the field of cut flowers and yellow sun, I relented to his pleas to stay the night, because though the row of lilacs against the back fence never returned to bloom, I didn't know if love was a thing that could ever come again. I remembered too well how it once perfumed my summer nights; how the petals had fallen gentler than snow. ❄️



Arielle Silver has been nominated for a 2016 Pushcart Prize and has appeared in *Jet Fuel Review*, *Brevity*, *Gulf Stream*, *From Sac*, *Lilith Magazine*, *Moment*, and *The Poet's Billow*. She is currently at work on a memoir about (step) mother/ing. She received her MFA and Post-MFA in Pedagogy from Antioch University Los Angeles, where she served as Editor-in-Chief of *Lunch Ticket* and is currently adjunct faculty in the MFA and Undergraduate Divisions. www.ariellesilver.com