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## American Girls

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# American Girls

By Elizabeth Farschon

## *Best in Show*

In a pink-papered corner bedroom  
of a whitewashed ranch house  
there is an eighth grader  
cutting the legs of her hand-me-down jeans  
so she will have shorts  
like the high school girls.

Outside her palomino,  
muscles tight from last night's race,  
runs the fence line,  
fast, like any other champion mare.

The stall she has abandoned  
is lined with blue best-in-show ribbons,  
awarded not just for tight turns—  
flexed muscles working  
at incredible speeds  
with precision enough  
to leave the faded orange barrels  
standing—  
but also for her pristine coat,  
smooth like the felt of her stable blankets,  
and her mane's carefully sewn braids.

Last night, after pinning her award  
to her horse's saddle,  
the girl watched her long time crush  
leave with a high-school girl in light-denim shorts  
whose frayed edges barely hung  
to cover the tops of her bare legs.  
Even though she didn't win,  
the boy liked to watch the muscles  
in her thighs flex  
when she rode.

*Meadows*

We played house as children;  
a raked out juniper the house,  
I always the mother. I learned  
the words duty and husband simultaneously.

I learned to bend  
like the trees in windstorms;  
my spine grew, elastic  
bark, grey and flaking like my skin  
in winter.

I want those meadows, the juniper house,  
in the distance. I want the trees, my spine to snap,  
not bend, under the playhouse duties  
of a wife, but the meadows are here under my feet,  
they are the shag carpet of your apartment,  
the touch of your hand on my back.

*Dads and Dancers*

My mother keeps her scale in the kitchen,  
I'm not sure whether for her or for me,  
to remind us to be thin and skinny  
like the girls my father chases again

and again. They are thin, slender through their  
hips, thighs, while I carry half of my weight  
in those very places. You won't say it,  
but mother does too. You don't hide your stares

in the grocery store, at church, in dance  
class. I want to ignore the thin teacher,  
her perfect turns, or I want to be her.  
At recitals, you take every chance

to see her and my clumsy turns go  
unnoticed. Mother drives us there and back  
because she knows you'll stay wrapped up in racks  
of dance costumes, leotards size zero

for perfect dancers who play perfect swans.  
At home, mother downs a glass of wine, steps on  
the scale. No changes. She turns on the song  
you first danced to. We pretend you're not gone.

*Venus*

I.

Adam longed for a brother.  
Without, he could only test his strength  
against God's rocky beaches.  
Who could outrun the waves?

When God made Eve  
He took half of Adam,  
doubled it. Neither He  
nor Adam thought past races  
and winners,  
but Eve didn't like to run,  
and Adam ran round and round,  
twisting paths into Eden  
while she twisted grass into a crown.

Adam's feet turned green from the grass,  
then his legs; the color reached up and up  
until even the sun forgot what made Adam  
different from the garden.  
Eve watched her wild plant brother  
breathe in the sunlight. She wanted to know  
how the yellow showed green on his skin,  
on the stems of the sunflowers, the leaves,  
but red on an apple.

Her plant brother ran, still,  
and Eve bit into an apple,  
tasting for answers.

II.

The dinner table grew  
from the trunk of a tall oak  
and Adam grew into his seat, put down  
thick roots to trip his sister:

You aren't as strong as me.

Eve broke open fruits, scooped seeds out  
with her hands, spread the red innards across the table.  
Through green skin, Adam's cheeks flared, still no response.

I'll prove it.

Adam unburied his roots, wrapped  
two around Eve's ankles. Like a fly trap,  
he swallowed her whole.