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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.