

## A Well-Worn Suit

You figure out that vulnerability is aggressive when it follows from unanticipated love. Your mother went on too many dates when you were young. Around 1 am as you padded to the kitchen for a glass of water, you noticed the light left on in your mother's room, the door wide open. Cells were popping on the surface of a parched tongue. The water went down like milk, thick and laced with the taste of hard minerals. The kitchen was like a stage setting, silent except for gulps of water sliding into breaths, and then... Dad's got a girlfriend too, you know. It's all on the inside those family patterns, the flicker-lit kitchen, the hallway that's darker still, the footsteps were mute from shag carpet but there they are, still. Come out to play, it's all here.

You rush through the city to meet a friend on short notice and sweat amasses under your breasts, arms and at the back of your legs. It's sticky and then cold. *I need* is something you can say easily, though not as easily or as defiantly as you talk about everyone else's needs. If your needs get met, then hers surely can be too, and then we can all just pipe down. You're refreshed by this friend's vulnerability, which is a prelude to straightforward talk about feelings. On second thought, this observation stays on the inside, since you've hurried in the heat to see her. She wiped her own sweat swiftly from the lengths of her arms, and because she had nowhere to dispose of it, she flicked all ten fingers once, twice. Perhaps she should run her hands through her hair; her fringe is splayed apart and needs resetting.

Vulnerability runs on a different scale than one's defenses, which exist externally and respond to atmospheric changes. You could catch a cold, fall down and skin a knee, eat spoiled food. You were unarmed, defenseless and therefore vulnerable, or was it the other way around. On balmy days, your friend recommends, douse your upper abdomen and under your breast with talc to absorb moisture. You imagine this powdery armor, weak, turning into a paste like a dental impression.

When your mother was nine months pregnant she made a plaster cast of her bulging torso. You liked to inhabit this heavy skin, you say, with its painted surface: gold swirls, a snake with a ruby-colored gem eye. The mold was heavy and you would excrete it, this body double, from its closet storage, then ease it onto your shoulders, letting it slowly hang down past your knee caps. You stayed quiet and still in your bedroom watching car beams play on the wall, as your mother returned and replaced the lock with a soft click.