

MARTY MCCONNELL

when your grandmother mistakes your girlfriend for a man

do not rise up over the dinner table
like a sequin tornado

or a burning flag. it is Christmas.
though the forks

curl their tines into tiny silver fists
and the frost-

rimed windows blink in embarrassment,
focus on your lover

as she clears her throat, extra low, passes the salt
to your grandmother

who thanks the young man with the strange
haircut and delicate

hands. this is no time for declarations and no one's
seemed to notice

though the milk's gone solid in the pitcher
and your father

is suddenly fascinated by the unmoving air
in the other room.

your mouths do not move, except
to chew. this is family,

this is holiday, there are no affairs, no
addictions, your family

crest reads in elaborate embroidery
the less said,

the better: though your father did offer once
to pay for your therapy

back when no one you knew was in therapy
and there was no way

you were going to talk to a stranger about things
you'd never say

to your mother, even drunk, even on Easter. so
to say something now

about what might be a mistake, or just the easiest way
to explain a mohawk

would be bringing sand to the bank. unprofitable
and a little bit

insane. you study your lover's chin. the tweezers wince
under the sink.

she could be a boy, you think. apocalyptic Christian
emails aside,

maybe your grandmother is progressive. astute
in her own

Southern, incidental way. your voice offering her
the butter is a punk band

playing an abortion clinic. all feedback
and nobody wants you.

she's your grandmother. she's nearly 100.
your uncle

took thirty years to get sober. your grandfather died
still owning the manual

to every piece of machinery he'd ever owned.
you still

don't know how to make any kind of pie.
there are no

family recipes. in the far corner of your liver
your other grandmother

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looks up from her patient sectioning
of a grapefruit,

offers you a chunk of your own atrophied
tongue, trembling

at the edge of her serrated spoon.