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## Jumpers

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# Jumpers

Marlana B. Fireman

**S**hame on the architect who built this house. Whoever he was, he thought he was being artistic by putting these horizontal bricks sticking out from the exterior wall of the house. They look fine, I guess. But what they're really good for, actually, what they're excellent for, is climbing out my bedroom window.

The drop from my window to the closest brick that sticks out is the longest and hardest drop. By the time my left toes brush the brick, I am hanging from the window ledge by the upper knuckles of my fingers. But when my toes clad in creepers brush that brick, it's ecstasy. The rest of the climb down is easy, easier than walking down the stairs. I step off the last brick and land on both feet, feeling like both Indiana Jones and Elvira.

Cat is waiting for me three houses down in her 1989 Buick, headlights off, dome light on. I clomp down the narrow patch of grass between the street and the sidewalk to avoid the *clunk, clunk, clunk* of my shoes. Cat is applying black lipstick to her mouth, carefully following the angular lines of her cupid's bow. I've never seen more movie-star lips.

"Your turn," Cat says, twisting in the seat. I lean over the console and she pumps the applicator in and out of the tube of lipstick. "Kay." In two quick swipes, like Picasso with a brush, I have black lips. Mine don't need angular strokes, they're just thin and plain and straight across my face.

"Cool outfit," I say. Cat looks down at herself like she's forgotten what she put on: a very short black dress, a black choker, her knock-off Doc Martens, and a gigantic plaid blazer she got at Goodwill.

"You too," she says. She's lying. My outfit isn't uncool, it's just the same thing I wear every single day. Black dress, green flannel, and the blocky creepers I begged my parents to get me for my birthday. I can't wear chokers like Cat does. They make me feel like I'm being strangled. The only different thing is the black lipstick, which my stepmom won't budge on.

## Ellipsis

“Got everything?” Cat asks, looking me up and down. I reach into my backpack and pull out a half-drunk bottle of Absolut Citron. “Nice.” Cat reaches over my lap, her elbow brushing my bare knees, and opens her glove compartment. She hands me my fake ID, which she locks in her car with her own because I can’t be trusted not to lose mine. Cat grins at me. I think she might be the only good thing about Ohio.

We take off into the night. I rest my temple against the icy window, softening my eyes until the houses and streetlights flying by are just an abstract blur.

I look over to Cat, who is pointing at the bottle that I’m holding between my thighs. “Oh, yeah,” I say, unscrewing the silver lid. I hold the bottle up to Cat’s lips while she keeps her eyes steady on the road. She takes a few swigs and makes a face. Her lipstick leaves a black ring around the mouth of the bottle. I tip the bottle up into my own mouth gently, like feeding a baby rabbit. “Ugh,” I say from a deep, guttural place.

Cat parks under a dark tree a couple of blocks from the venue and we take turns sipping from the bottle. On the last sip, my tongue turns to dryer lint and I gesture that I’m done. “More for me,” Cat says with a sugary grin. She takes another swig and then locks the bottle in her trunk. I follow her down a maze of dark roads, streetlights obscured by masses of nearly dead leaves clinging to branches, and black clouds against a cobalt sky. The maze spits us onto the street, a kaleidoscope of blinking convenience store signs and traffic lights.

“There,” Cat says, pointing to a black and white sign that reads *Ace of Cups*. I stifle a grin when the bouncer nods us in. We exchange devilish glances and plunge into the dark sweaty ether of the bar. Cat clasps my hand and pulls me toward the edge of the bar, waiting for a spot to open up. Electricity surges through me for the first time I can remember since I came to Ohio.

“I’m so excited,” I say, looking down at my shoes. “I can’t believe this is happening.” Cat grins at me again, her teeth brilliant white against her black lips.

“We’re fucking heeere,” she coos. “Want a drink?”

“A vodka with orange juice?” I ask, and Cat disappears toward the bar.

The spotlights spin from the crowd and onto the stage, where people in all black carefully place guitars and arrange drums. Someone places an overturned blue construction bucket next to the microphone. I crane my neck toward the bar.

“Is my make-up okay?” Cat asks from behind me.

## Ellipsis

A cloudy-clear cup of orange liquid appears over my shoulder.

“It looks great,” I tell her.

Cat leads the charge with me behind her, a tiny baby duckling on platforms. We twist our way through the crowd until we find a perfect vantage point. The lights blink again and the whole place goes black.

*Bum*

*Bum bum*

Someone is playing the drums, I can see the outline of her blazer against the red lights. *Bum*

*Bum bum*

Blue lights begin to flash and two girls run onto the stage, one with an electric guitar slung over her shoulder and the other with a bass. The drummer is illuminated by yellow light, her angular haircut, and razor-straight bangs twisting to the beat of her drums.

*Are you here, are you coming?*

*Come on nomad, one last time*

The electric guitar girl half sings, half yells into the microphone. Her black babydoll dress moves around her with a mind of its own, her heeled combat boots slamming down into the floor.

*No more waiting, go on, go on*

*Are you coming?*

*You could be a neon nomad*

*Come on*

“What’s her name again?” I shout over the music to Cat.

“On guitar,” she says. “That’s Kara Gold. Drums, Jeanette Weil. And on bass, that’s Keni Dimant. She’s a fucking legend.”

Keni’s unbuttoned flannel flaps in the wind she makes with her movements. Under it is only a black lace corset and cut-off shorts. I can’t help but stare at the place where Keni’s flannel brushes her thighs, muscular and clad in fishnets. In unison they step up to their microphones, gazing at each other like lovers, or maybe enemies.

*Come on*

They sing together.

*If you’re coming, let’s just go*

*Set a fire, neon nomad*

I can feel the drums beating inside my chest. We stomp our feet into the dirty floor stained with black spots of spit-out gum.

## Ellipsis

“How you doing?!” Keni shouts to the crowd.

Cat whoops and I clap my hands above my head.

“We’re Twins and Extroverts,” Kara says. “Let’s have some fun!” She takes off into a guitar intro, a silver cuff around her wrist spitting the colored spotlights back into the crowd. *That girl thinks she’s the queen of the neighborhood*

They croon, the room becomes electric, hair flying in all directions, the heavy *boom, boom* of feet hitting the ground in unison. I turn my face up to the ceiling to look at the cracked paint and the waving chandelier. I feel devoid of everything but the bass in my chest and Keni and Kara’s words. Like darts, like something only I can feel. Glancing over at Cat, her eyes are bright with reflections of spotlights, pink and yellow, pink and yellow. Her hair is a nest of stick-straight static.

*Rebel girl, you are the queen of my world*

*Rebel girl, rebel girl*

*I think I wanna take you home*

*I wanna try on your clothes*

Twins & Extroverts careen in and out of their own songs, kicking their feet in the air, slamming hands onto buckets and butts and guitars, tossing hair, guitar picks, triumphant cackles into the air. The colored lights twist us into new people and then back to ourselves, I am blue, I am purple, I am yellow, I am pink, we’re all pink, I’m blue again. I’m alone and in tune, shifting and jumping to the music, tossing my hair, being alive for a few moments. There is no Cat, just me and chorded electricity making me move freely for the first time maybe ever.

Then they stop, the only time they do, and Kara kicks over her blue bucket, clutching her guitar close to her stomach. She leans over and vomits right into it. Keni doesn’t react, she just laughs at the crowd and waits before starting a new song and Kara joins right back in. A man in black takes the bucket offstage, holding it out from his chest like, well, like a bucket of vomit. “Hardcore,” Cat says into my ear.

And then, just like that, they leave the stage, like a triumphant exit from hell. “It’s over already?” I ask Cat, whipping my head around. I can hardly hear my own voice over the ringing in my ears.

“Yeah!” Cat says with a laugh. “It’s been two hours!” She taps her fingernail on the face of her watch. It’s 2:15 am. The show started at midnight.

## Ellipsis

“Damn,” I say. “Wait, look.” I point to the stage where a woman in black places a stark white guitar. “Encore.” The lights turn black again and the white guitar gets picked up by nimble hands with long fingers.

*Ah, I don't hardly know her*

The room stays black save for the orange-red exit sign lights making waves over that white guitar. The drums and the guitar slam down together.

*But I think I could love her*

*Crimson and clover*

*Ah, I wish she'd come walking over*

*Now I've been waiting to show her*

The drums tap into their upbeat, guitars and bass and voices altogether. Everyone in the room is jumping, bouncing, bobbing their heads to our new lords and saviors. I could be in this song forever, imagining Joan Jett up there too, all of us together in this black box flying through space, like there's no outside. I'm not alone anymore, we're all dancing in a void, flinging our limbs like they're brand new, scream-singing the lyrics to each other, a last heroic swan song. The outro arrives too quickly and the urge to cry tickles the back of my throat. I smile at Cat and she smiles back before pointing toward the stage.

“Look,” she says. “This is their thing.”

Before I can ask what the thing is, I see Kara and Keni bowing their heads to the same beat, looking at each other and then away, both shy and confident, like they're the only people in the room.

*Crimson and clover, over and over . . .*

Keni and Kara hum into their respective microphones. Their lips move against the metal of the microphones like gentle soft sniffs of flowers. The music hardly exists beneath their lustful gazes. And then Kara breaks it all, struts to Keni's microphone, and sings into that, like the steely connection, like the lack of space is what she prefers. They lean into each other, rocking back and forth to the music before their faces meet under an imaginary archway, pressing their mouths together like it's their last action on this earth.

“Whoa,” I say. Kara grabs a fistful of Keni's flannel, pulls her in harder and lets her go. I can see her tongue, everyone can see her tongue, lick the inside of Keni's upper teeth before they part. The room goes black, and then they're gone.

## Ellipsis

Cat pulls me out into the biting late fall air, it makes me nauseous how quick we go from humidity and sweat to crispness and cool breezes. Her hand is still locked around my wrist and she runs, flies, her boots slapping against the brick alley.

“Stage door,” she says. Her breath is fast and shallow. I don’t care, she can take me anywhere.