

How I Broke My Nose

Flash Fiction By J Bennett

I peered out the car window, letting the tip of my nose chill against the glass as my mother and I slowly circled around the apartment complex. My mother must have been gripping the steering wheel tightly as she always did when she was unable to control the small universe of her life.

I can remember her hand so well - long healthy nails dabbed in expensive polish, *coral beaches*, set against withered skin and ropey veins that the best creams could not hide. My mother hated her hands, obsessed over her nails, regulated hours of her day to short and furious bursts of polishing, shaping and hewing them with pinprick care. Every week she saved a tantrum for the indifferent manicurist, muttering “damn foreigners” under her breath as she drove away, bloodless hands clutching the wheel. Even the sought after American manicurist could not please my mother.

“Damn kids,” she’d mutter.

Now, our car eased around the complex again. I looked at the apartment buildings noting their strangeness, the still unconcieved notion that my new home was tucked within these identical buildings. I remember just how cold the glass felt on my nose, just how the excitement tingled in my stomach - carsickness and anxiety stirred together with my outlandish imagination and childish melodrama.

I glanced up and caught my mother’s scowl in profile. Her face was pale and tissuey. The dark lips, *raspberry delight*, hung in a tight arch against what the windshield

showed- drab buildings, wild grass growing along the curbs where the mower hadn't cared enough, and cars all parked in plain view to let God shower them with whatever he pleased.

She scowled at the dents that puckered more than one vehicle; the risqué bumper stickers. Her thin lips must have almost split when she saw a man snoring in a lawn chair with a can of beer tipping between knobby knees and no shirt on his back. I peered at his bloated white body and drooping nipples with fascination.

"There it is." My mother's black irises reflecting in the rearview mirror contracted to needle points. I followed her accusation to a building lined with doors, all the same gallant aqua, the color of my mother's eye shadow, *sunset marine*.

142; that was our number. Skimming across the doors, I found 142 second from the end. The brass numbers hung limply from our sunset marine door, and distain gnawed at my young sense of justice. I never cared that our apartment was much smaller than our old house or that the cars had dents, and the lawn wasn't clipped to the last blade. I felt disappointed that our apartment looked just like all the other apartments – that my adventure ended at one door along an entire line of doors.

My mother sighed and released her grip on the wheel.

"It's only temporary," she said in a voice so slathered in distain that even I picked it up as young as I was. My mother turned the car around abruptly, and we sped from the complex. 142 vanished, but the row of doors lingered in my mind. She did not slow for the speed bump guarding the entrance, and the car bucked forcefully. My head flew back, then forward. I heard it smack seconds before the pain split up the bridge of my nose. I opened my eyes and saw the window covered in blood. It ran down the glass just the way rain does during summer showers.