

Jennifer Wolfe

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I have no voice for my
father, no memories
of how his skin feels
or what he smells like.
I know that he plays
darts, cards, shuffleboard
games of chance
and that he used to work
for Fiat, for the Navy,
for a pantyhose company.
He is convinced that the phone
is tapped and doesn't
write letters.

He sometimes has a beard
and sometimes doesn't,
has two tattoos; one
for each arm, two wives;
one for each life.

We drove to San Francisco,
me sick with love and fear
and you tight, watchful;
both wanting me
and wanting me to go away.

It was called a vacation.
In the middle of one of those
endless curves on the coastal route
I mentioned, I said, I
told you that my father
lived up there and then held
my breath, sat, waited.
And you, on cue:
Does my baby want
to go find her daddy?
Yes, I nodded, mute.
On the second night
I looked him up
and you were surprised
that I found him so quickly
until I pointed out
that what I was looking for
couldn't be found in the phonebook
and you held my hand
the whole way there.

I'm in your house now
Daddy, I see your
children and hear your wife
in the bedroom
waiting for me to leave.
You look at me,
and then at the man
who brought me here
and I want to laugh
at the invisible thread
that lies broken between us,
the one your feet stumble on
as you go for my coffee.
I know I'm the strangest
girl you'll ever meet;
your eyes peering out

from a face you married
over twenty-five years ago.

Somehow you got us out
of there and back on
the freeway; away from
the broken cups, the piles
of piles, that smell.
I'm breathing hard, tight
against the door
and you pull me over,
combing your hand
through my crazy hair.
I know I've been hit,
that I'm hurt, but all I want
is your thighs in that hotel room.