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## Mannequin

My Aunties take me to the Rose Garden, a tattered, sandy spot of paths and rusted signs that once identified shrubs and bushes that overgrow the edges of the place. My mother’s sisters smell of coffee and drugstore cologne. They have fuzz on their upper lips, *lady-staches* my Aunt Collie calls them.

Though my aunties are blood, and they comfort me, they feel as far away as billboards on a hill—gathered cotton skirts, old purses, their manner of speaking in low cigarette tones, small felt hats with folded veils and pearl hatpins, *This ’ll put a man’s eye out*, my Aunt Collie says, feigning a lunge.

After a single, slow turn around the Garden my aunties drive me back to their rambling shingle house. *Oh, your mother*, they say with a sad downturn of voice. *Oh, your brother, what a handsome boy, how could he go like that?*

In the upstairs den my aunties keep a dress mannequin moldable in shape and size made from wire hexagons ringed together, her pubis naked, untended. She lives in a closet with house dresses and an ironing board. At the hips she is bolted to a walnut stand with wheels.

I pull her out and turn her to me. She is headless, armless, legless but seems proud of purpose, fitted with blouses, ensembles, pinned and stretched, now naked, poised.

To soften the chafe and scratch I place a tissue in the hole below her stomach and enter her. It is fast and complete. The stained tissue falls at my feet. I roll her back into the closet and gently close the door. She belongs to my aunties.