

Brittle Star

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Cover artwork by Elizabeth Clayman: *Untitled*
Charcoal on 600gm Saunders Waterford paper (76cm x 56cm)

ELIZABETH CLAYMAN has an MA in Fine Art from the University of Pennsylvania. Her work has been exhibited and published in both the UK and US and *Lace*, a book collaboration with poet Susan Wicks is forthcoming from Stonewood Press in November 2015.
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Hugo dos Santos

STORY: A LIFE IN THREE MOMENTS

1. Senior night

Oscar's mom. She purchased her pretty white dress long ago, saving it only for special occasions. Adorned with flowers red, yellow, and blue, so sad for being out of place. That's the danger with saving what's beautiful, with dusting off a dress only once in so long when the moment calls for it – and an old beauty is about the saddest thing that ever lived. But Oscar's mom was there, at least, to see her son's last high school game. She had come in her two dresses – the one she found beautiful and the one that looked sad. I wondered whether that wasn't the nature of all things – simultaneously living and dead, both present and absent, just as beautiful as sad. Oh, but what a dress that must have been back in the old country all those years ago.

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2. The day my father decided to die

First thing that morning, shirtless and in a cotton shower skirt, he downed a shot of port wine and smoked a cigarette. On the TV, an anchorwoman mouthed important updates he would not need to know.

The first time he breakfasted this way, as a boy of fifteen, there was such freedom in his choice. There was, too, a wisp of manhood that he relished.

I imagine he saw this routine as a bad habit he could finally be rid of. An unfit punishment for living – the same breakfast, day after day, for thirty five years.

That last morning, did he think of the origin? Did he rue the sweetness of that first morning's taste? Did he finally realize that he had been trying to kill himself even back then, even before he finally up and did it?

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3. Robin moved in

Robin moved in with her clothes and her toiletries and her mother's silver necklace that she never wore for fear of ruining or breaking or losing it. And the cat, too.

The few interviews I had weren't calling back and I was nervous without letting her know. It was her name on the checks to the rent and the cable and the gas. I paid the electric, mostly.

We had been in the kitchen that first night when I said to her soft almond eyes, "I'll do the dishes." She answered, "OK," in a half-whisper and that was when I first knew we'd be ok, somehow, in the small apartment that was suddenly ours. And the cat's.

Now she's bedridden and doesn't know her own name, and I drag my stubborn feet when I walk, but we had a good life in between then and now. ●