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Crack of the Fruit

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Erin Flanagan

Crack of the Fruit

Candace pulls the charcoal and his hip appears. In three short lines he has a knee. She drops the charcoal on the easel's ledge and brushes her fingers on her pants. She has black smudges all over her clothes, remnants of these three hours, proof that she is here. Her teacher calls time and Jason's shoulders push toward his ears then roll back, his arms stretching behind his head. Candace wants to believe she is the only one who knows his name. Jason. Jason Jason Jason. She says his name as she draws him, his figure coming to life.

A year ago Candace was trapped in a mall bathroom, her body held prisoner by the narrow stall. She hasn't been to a movie since she was fifteen. She is fat. Specialty-store-shoes fat. What the doctors label as morbidly obese. But here, in this class, all of that disappears—the over-cooked gnocchi she consumed for dinner, the cream-filled doughnuts she ate in her car. All the way back to the butter and brown sugar bread she snuck as a child, the rice cereal her mother fed her as a baby. Gone. The foods disappear when she is drawing, as she connects to the canvas, as she connects to Jason, the man she draws.

Between twenty-minute poses Jason stands by the building's entrance and smoke two cigarettes, a piece of fruit in his hand. He alternates inhalations and bites wearing a plaid flannel bathrobe. The first night of class she went outside while the others headed to the basement vending machines. "Hey," he'd said to her and she stopped, startled, than said "hey" back. Over the weeks they have moved onto conversations about Candace's other courses which she has stopped attending—she doesn't have time, her whole life contained in this three-hour class—and Jason's job as a semi-pro golfer at a community course. He is a headless body on her easel now, and after break she will begin his face, the hollow of his eyes the most difficult part.

A girl walks by and smiles at Jason under the edge of her hair. She glances at Candace, her eyebrows pulling together, than quickens her pace. Jason scuffs an untied Chuck Taylor against the cement and exhales. "I wish people would stop staring," Jason says. "I'm on break." He looks at her knowingly. "People are so rude."

The comment is like a stab and Candace understands what she thinks has connected them, the drawing, isn't the connection at all, but the opposite: their physical bodies in the world. His thin perfect wrists jutting from the cuffs of his robe, her fingers dimpled like a baby's.

He bites into the pear and she can tell from the crunch it's out of season, not yet ripe. She hears the crack of the fruit as he takes the bite in his mouth, but for all her memory and all the food, she can't recall what a pear tastes like.

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Erin Flanagan is the author of two short story collections-- *The Usual Mistakes* and *It's Not Going to Kill You*, and *Other Stories*—both published by the University of Nebraska Press. Her work has appeared in *Prairie Schooner*, *The Missouri Review*, *Colorado Review*, and elsewhere, and she has held fellowships to the MacDowell Colony, Yaddo, and the Sewanee and Bread Loaf Writers' Conferences. She is an associate professor of English at Wright State University in Dayton, Ohio.