

THE RUBBER-BAND GUN

I brought to school a rubber-band gun I bought at the mall. I bought it at that store with the tarot cards and the stink bombs and the beer T-shirts and the posters of women in thongs bending over on beaches with sand stuck to them in all the right places. So I brought the gun to school and showed it off to Stacey Swanson. I was a little in love with her. By that I mean I regularly jerked off into an athletic sock when thinking about her naked.

Normally she would not talk to me except to say, "Don't even talk to me—you haven't even gone through puberty yet." But this time, when I held out the rubber-band gun, she said, "Let me see that." She grabbed the gun and weighed it in her hand a moment before lifting her arm and staring down the line of it and shooting me directly in the eyeball.

The eyeball did not fare well. The rubber band hit the pupil directly, punctured it, buried itself like a worm. The doctor removed the eyeball and put it in a bottle of formaldehyde. I keep the bottle on my dresser. I can tell the temperature by the eyeball, its buoyancy. Whether it is up or down makes me throw on shorts or a sweatshirt. Sometimes the eyeball seems to stare at me. And sometimes, when the pressure drops and a thunderstorm rolls through, the eyeball spins in circles like some possessed weathervane.

Every night I clean out the socket with a warm washcloth, a squirt of soap. There is a smell otherwise. And the danger of infection. When I blink, the socket appears to be talking to me, telling me what to do, a toothless mouth with rotten breath.

Used to be, people would make fun of me, a little rough in the hallways with their shoulders, a shove at the urinals. Now nobody touches me. I am their king and they call me Cyclops and they beg me to lift my eyelid, show them the scooped-out socket. Sometimes I do.

I put things in the socket. A penny. A marble. A strawberry. You should have seen the look on Gabby's face when I walked up to her desk and without a word dug into the socket and pulled out the mashed-up strawberry and popped it in my mouth to swallow.

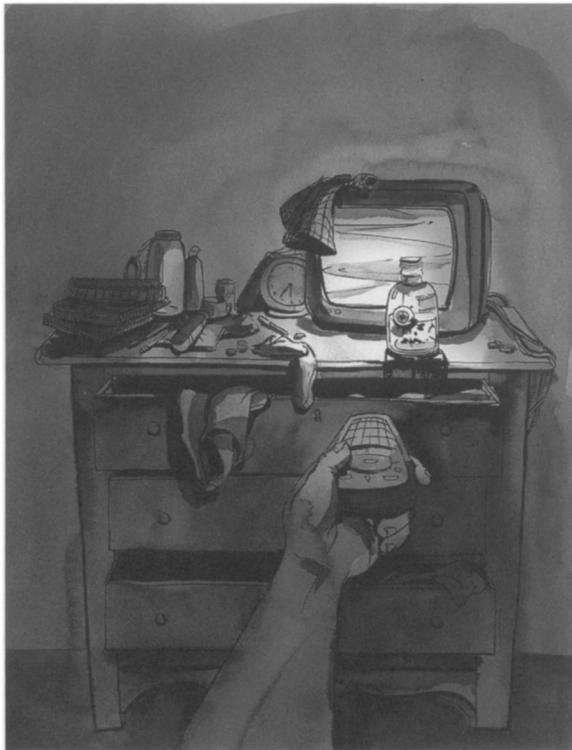
Other things, too. Like a tongue. Stacey Swanson's if you can believe it. Ever since she shot me in the eyeball she has been touching me on the shoul-

der, asking, “How are you today, Jimmy?” One time she asked if there was anything she could do for me. I said yes. I said indeed there was.

She said, *no*, not that, that was terrible—that was the most disgusting thing she had ever heard. But I said please, it would mean a lot to me. Then I offered her the forty dollars I had swiped from my mother’s purse.

It was a great feeling, our closeness, her inside of me, the best feeling. She wiped her mouth afterwards and demanded the money and ran from me crying, and I stood there, behind the school dumpster, breathing heavily and trembling with a dark electric pleasure that I never would have experienced had it not been for the rubber-band gun.

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Artwork by Danica Novgorodoff