Trumpet Love

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200 pounds of stone. Fine, she asks for the most hideously towering, be-flowered, be-curlicued stone. Fine, for her own most-dear mother she'll do it, just to hold her in that grave if she ever gets there. Six months of doctors could-be-any-daying, and her mother is still dashing about, hospital-(un)gowned, stealing nurses' coffee and other patients' dying flowers.

Sil is walking home, the X-marks-her-mother's-stone pamphlet in one pocket. At the Lil' Bit Cafe on highway 50, Stacy squeezes her a limeade with fresh limes. Fat Janice smokes at the first table, and Sil pauses beside her, hearing a noise, high and punchy. "You hear that?" she asks and Janice shakes her head.

Sil trudges on, sipping her limeade. Still that ringing, like that song they play for the dead, persistent as the sweat crawling down her spine, wrinkling past the waist-band of her cut-offs. She watches the ground treadmill toward her, finds, today, a zippo lighter. Tiny dent on one side, but silver shiny. She sees Mrs. Parker, former art teacher, pasting magazine-shiny faces to her porch, sees Mr. Smith, her old science teacher, balancing his inclined plane on the porch rail.

Sil's always looking at her feet, but one of these days I'll get her to look at me. I do love that girl. I'd dress her in peacock feathers, I'd feed her petunia sherbet and fresh lemon-leaf pie if she'd like it. I failed to catch her blue eye or perky ear at the Lil' Bit. An ambulance, and she doesn't so much as look up. There she goes, slip-slidey-oh-honey walk, and I pick up my trumpet, hit the first three notes. She looks up, but doesn't look back and see me.

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Sil cuts across the football field still sprinkler-wetgreen. She's got two hours left before she has to get to work at the Dart In. She steps into her little white house and, shutting the door, sees an ambulance parked out front and Pete Baker humming up the walk.

* * *

I say to her, "You're a lovely bird-woman, Sil. You're squelching the beat right out of my heart with your polar bear ways." I say, "My panther-love keeps me leaping tree to tree. I'm just a red-breast-robin that can't fly north without a greenleaf-sign from you."
“Don’t, Pete. You remind me of my no-good-ditched-the-family-scene-early father.”

“Your father.” I have to sit down.

“Don’t go looking like that. I know you’re thinking that I word everyone’s tooting these days, incest, Incest, INCEST! Not me. He acted in the soaps, wooing those T.V. women, and he’d sit watching with me and laugh himself loony.”

She’s put on her armadillo shell. I’ve got no choice but to play tough.

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Pete rushes out and she’s too dog-hot tired to wonder why. He’ll be back. She takes the zippo out, examines it, lights it. The flame flares too high and she’s trying to adjust it when the sound comes loud, for sure now a trumpet, and she jumps to the door. There’s Pete Baker standing inside the doors-wide-open ambulance, his feet planted, belting it out. Taps. He hits the high notes. He spots the orange bloom hungry-spread behind her, but she’s got her eyes on him. He grabs the wavemaking sprinkler from the neighbor’s yard and rushes the house, black hose snaking behind him, white water cascading wildly up and down ahead, and he pushes past her. The fire is out in a moment, but the water still undulates over the room, silver lighter dancing demonically on the current. Repairing the damage will cost her more than she can earn in a year, forget her mother’s tombstone, but she’s cooled off some and laughing now, and so she goes on and lets him kiss her.

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