

Edith Konecky
(From *View To the North*)

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My mother is admirable and brave, devoid of self-pity, uncomplaining, and absolutely unready to slip into decrepitude. I blur the focus of my gaze against the betraying skin and see that she still looks young and trim in outline if not in detail, gamely defying the years, hiding behind cosmetics that grow more ingenious as the need grows greater. Her strawberry blonde hair is teased into an elaborate arrangement and frozen there by some fixative that gives it a texture so far removed from the original that if someone tried to sell her a wig of the same material she'd be furious, horrified. I have a vision of her waking each morning to confront her image, seeing it more and more as the armature on which to sculpt the self she daily sends forth. Hers is a fierce and indomitable pride, the habit of vanity so common to beautiful women.

"How long are you planning to stay there, Annie?" she asks. "In New Hampshire?" I watch the smoke slowly curling out of her mouth, her nose, feeling the longing inside my own mouth that may never leave me. How long? Measures of time. "You've been gone three rolls of toilet paper," Angie once wrote. "Please come home."

"I don't know," I say, honestly.

My mother sighs. "I only want you to be happy. I can see you're not happy."

"I'm not unhappy."

"Have you met anyone out there? In New Hampshire?"

"I wish you'd stop saying New Hampshire as though it's an emerging nation."

"You know what I mean."

What she means is have I met a man, the one I am going to marry next. I watch her light another cigarette, feeling in my own fingers, lips, mouth, the lovely lost gestures and sensations. "You never give up," I say.

"No, why should I? I can't stand the thought of you living alone. It isn't natural."

She's right, of course. Living alone isn't natural.

"I like living alone," I lie. "It's a luxury."

She snorts. "Some luxury!" We are silent for a while, thinking our own thoughts. Then she says, "There's someone here I want you to meet."

"Mother!"

"As soon as Daddy gets out of the hospital, I'm going to arrange it."

"I don't want to meet anyone."

"Why not? You know I won't die happy . . ."

"Nobody dies happy. Anyhow, you're a long way from dying."

"Does it hurt to meet someone? Don't you think you've been divorced long enough?"

I can't tell her that I don't think I can love a man again, that I've developed a sweet tooth. My mother smiles lovingly at me, not saying that I will always be her child, as she usually does, but gets up, instead, to go to the kitchen to freshen her drink. I follow, not reminding her that I was married for twenty years, gave her two grandchildren, raised them to manhood, have already gone that route.