

AND IF THAT
mockingbird
DON'T SING



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PARENTING STORIES
GONE SPECULATIVE

75 FLASH BY
76 AUTHORS

EDITED BY
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And If That Mockingbird Don't Sing
Parenting Stories Gone Speculative
Various Authors
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BUMPS

Lydia Kim

I have large breasts, hypochondria, and a maternal history of mammary cancer, so I have been diligent. In the shower, I raise one arm, soap the cursed sac, massage the perimeter. The joke is, even a healthy breast is notoriously bumpy: sliced, it's like a cross-section of an orange, pulpy triangles pinned by a nipple. The self-exam is both recommended and pointless, performed, as it is, by an amateur.

I dreamed of bumps taking up residence in the exurbs of my body: marble-sized blips on the back of my neck, the crook of my thighs, the tops of my feet, of a single lump creeping along my fascia, propelled by peristaltic power, eventually expelling itself out a pore.

The children began as bumps.

I noticed a new bump in my armpit, another above my top rib. I went to the doctor.

"Not cancer," she said. "Just breast tissue."

Colonies of breast tissue. Scouts.

"Keep an eye on them," she said, making it my problem.

I poked at them, palpated them, the way one mindlessly wiggles a baby tooth. I stuck my hand down my shirt and worried them all day. I think this encouraged them, as if it were a kind of passive exercise.

I drew an outline around each one with a black marker, and they outgrew their boundaries, month after month. I considered the elective surgery to remove them but was ashamed. I'd waited too long. They were my problem now.

One day, during my perimeter massage, my finger slipped inside the armpit bump. It had a mouth, slippery gums. We startled each other. A tongue, lips. It cried. Instinctively I cupped it and shushed it. I felt a draft whoosh into my right rib and realized the other bump had a mouth, as well, and that it was also crying. I stood in the shower like a wet stone, two crying bumps,

among the older, silent ones. I towed off, held both my arms up and turned from side to side to look at the bumps in the mirror. Small, soft mouths with glossy gums, sitting at the peak of each bump. They hiccuped between wails until they stopped crying. I had to lower one arm to stroke the other bump. I had the feeling I imagine people have when they get a new dog: an immediate desire to take care of and be liked by tiny creatures.

Above the mouths, each bump had gentle divots where eyes might have been, and something dark pushed against dips. They looked fragile, cute. They looked like babies pressing their way face-first through a milky plastic.

It was easy to name them: Armie, for the armpit bump, and Eve for the other.

I had to sleep like someone falling backward in outer space, arms flung wide. That first night, they slept well.

I fed each mouth with a dropper, some warmed broth (I am allergic to dairy). They napped a great deal, emitting tiny snores, and smacked their lips when peckish. I boiled a whole young chicken for broth and ordered a set of droppers, ascending in size. I fed the bumps every two hours. I quit my job.

Motherhood meant so many things: I'd never be able to wear sleeveless tops. I'd have to walk like a bodybuilder to avoid smashing the children. I'd have to shop when they napped, lest they cried while I was out, posting a letter, pumping gas. I sent up a prayer of thanks that I did not sweat much, and never had body odor. I practiced telling prospective partners about their possible step-bumps. I understood that cats might hiss when I approached.

Like all children, they grew teeth, lost teeth, fought with each other and with me. Armie developed an allergy to chicken; Eve went through a phase where she only ate peanut butter, a mess. They pushed my buttons, wanted to stay up late. My trapezius muscles grew thick, strong. I dreamed of the children growing arms and grabbing at my nipples, reaching to stick things up my nose. They went through puberty, sprouting hair, then middle age, losing it.

We had almost ten good years.

The few hairs around their divots turned thin, then gray. Their lips chapped, they took less and less vegetable broth, their contours went to jelly. One day, they expired. No more wails from my dark places. I finally went for the surgery, cradled the Ziploc bag all the way home, placed them in the freezer. “My babies,” I say, thumbing the frost from their lips.