

Players

Do you see that nut there—the acorn?
It was a hollowed out shape like that
you pressed upon my head when we were
six years old, and then you draped a
blanket over my shoulders like a shawl.
What was I supposed to represent?
You were so intent upon the game—there
is a photograph that still shows your
concentration, and I, the actress, so
much putty in your hands.

I came pounding over rails to visit
you—a baited blessing. Wrapt in layers
of bright paper there was a gift I had
to give you, a doll in a papoose, just
like mine, only bigger. We played
nonetheless. Later on a game called
“Beautiful girls.” We hid in the bath
and pulled leotards over our heads to
look like braids, practising the beauty
we’d grow into as a matter of course.

Once, we kissed. At night, the bed’s
mattress on the carpet and many shushings
of giggles that would bring angry treads
to our door, we put a kleenex between our
lips, thinking, “let’s pretend,” and took
turns playing the boy.

You used to move your hands across
my back in patterns and I’d have to guess
What you were drawing. Your hair had
grown very long by then, and you took
the tip of your braid in your mouth while
you worked.

I grew up first, who’d have thought it?
Always the one who couldn’t keep the
colours inside borders—my pictures were
a mess, while you outlined yours boldly,
dusting them in pastel. I had a real
love now, and didn’t come to spend the
holidays. I dreamed of a room hung in
cloth from ceiling to floor, with a wall-
to-wall carpet keeping me and my lover
close. Even you wouldn’t find me.

There you are now, tossing pebbles into
the lake, not watching where they sink,
just scooping up another. Nearby your
baby paddles. It’s late summer and you
pick up an acorn fallen among the stones.
It’s midway through its arcing flight, as
it hangs in the air longer than rock, that
you notice. I remind you of the giggle
fits we would call “one of those moods.”
When we were small, we sat on two white
stools at the foot of the dinner table,
One blond head, and one dark.

Judith Kalman
Toronto