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**A Comb with a Glossy Butterfly Embellishment**  
**Samantha Atkins**

My aunt has too much jewelry.  
I went over to borrow diamonds once,  
during the summer that the locust swarmed,  
and I listened to them smack against her bedroom window  
as she dug through department store boxes laced with dust.  
She has hair combs, like this gold one here,  
and clip-on earrings from 1965  
and wedding pearls  
and conch shell necklaces from Hawaii.  
She also has brown carpet in her living room  
and a white terrier that stares at me with black eyes  
while pissing on the floor.

My mother pursed her lips together.  
Her food was overcooked  
and the floors needed mopping  
and the windows were grimey  
and where the hell was the waitress?  
The restaurant was a rat hole with clanking dishes  
and fish smell pouring out from the plastic kitchen flap.  
She rapped her fingernails on the table,  
made to look like an old surf board,  
and leaned across it to say she wasn't going to take it much longer.

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Our grease-covered waitress, popping her bubblegum,  
finally flounced down our aisle  
and my eyes tried to tell her to run.

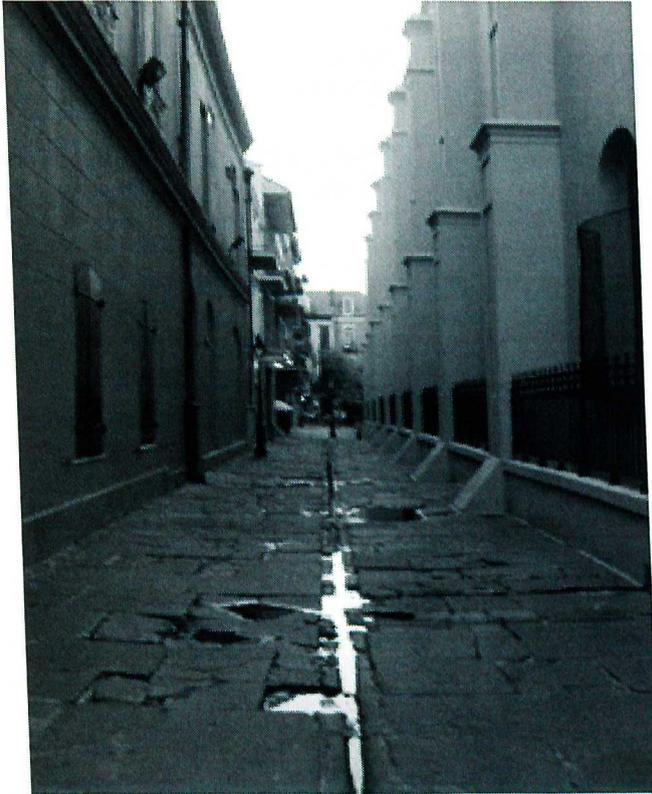
My dad was driving me around in his rusty pick-up truck.  
The soybeans were bright green in the fields  
and the dairy cows dotted the rolling hills  
and the pavement gleamed with fresh rain  
and I hated it all like I hated my Dad.  
His embarrassing yellow and red flannel shirt  
was covered in sawdust and I was sobbing  
that I wanted to kill myself.  
I pressed my fourteen-year-old forehead against the glass  
trying to look like a sad little princess.  
My dad stared out the windshield in silence.

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Katie had a pink, electric jeep with a Barbie sticker.  
She also had blonde, shiny hair, like Barbie,  
and three big horses  
and a swimming pool with a slide  
and a dad who wore cowboy boots and still loved her mom.  
She drove me around in her backyard one day  
while our mothers made prayer lists in the living room.  
Our laughter was so loud  
until we saw a bee and had to swerve toward the fence.  
We screamed and blocked our faces with short arms  
as we slammed into a pole.  
Our heads bounced off the plastic dashboard.

I slept with my mother as a girl.  
Her mattress was too thick in summer  
and her back was hot  
and the pillows were hot  
and I couldn't escape the covers.  
I wore a T-shirt and she wore a silky slip  
that I watched shimmer up and down as she breathed.  
I would twist around and put my bare feet  
against the cool headboard or the wall.  
Or I would listen to her snore or to the crickets  
singing in the dark through the screen.

I wanted to sing like that.



Alleyway  
Samantha Atkins