



On Earth As It Is

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God in Ocean City, New Jersey

Christine Fadden

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on earth as it is

prayer as story, story as prayer

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photo by matthew simmons

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Christine Fadden

Sometimes, God, summer weighs on me like wet ropes. My lungs seize trying to have the most fun in the world before school starts.

September is Hell and we all die and go there after Labor Day.

Yesterday, I saw my English teacher stuffing her bright red face with pink cotton candy. She is supposed to be reading books all summer, not coming here—wearing her hair down and eating the same things I do. I felt like the boardwalk was going to explode one splinter at a time under my feet, even though yesterday was the kind of day my cousins draw with a smiley face sun. I whipped a grape Pixie Stick out of my back pocket and downed it, but that only made me feel sicker. I carry Pixie Sticks for emergencies, and because I steal them.

They're Pixie Sticks, God. Don't get riled up.

I said I wished it would snow in August and my cousin called me a *bleep*. You should have seen the eye I gave him. You did. Well, You know what happened to him the next day. It's hard to believe it wasn't my fault. Guilt is one thing, God, I hope to outgrow, although since I'm going to be a large animal veterinarian like James Herriot of *All Creatures Great and Small*, I know animals will die in my hands, and that guilt follows death around like an annoying friend.

Uncle Brad cut his foot on a piece of glass today. Glass is sand. I'll do a report on glass in science class this year. Of course, I won't be allowed to mention You or use my poetic skills about your many forms and letting light in. No offense, but I get good grades in science. I'm something of a wizard. My teacher said that, because of the battery I made for the fair. He said I could light up a small town. I wouldn't mind being in charge of all the red lights.

Speaking of red, my soles sizzled yesterday, thanks to You. Why burn me like that? I'm not trying out for the *Guinness Book of World Records'* Youngest Fire Walker. That book is not one I want my

picture in one day. The guy with the world's longest fingernails looks like Satan. It makes my filling sting, imagining all the ways one of his curly fingernails could get torn off, like by his own foot for example when he wakes up in the middle of the night to pee and forgets he has those nails. People forget they have things like that once in awhile.

Sometimes people just try to ignore what they have. I have lust for one of the 57th Street lifeguards. I call that lifeguard, Greg, *a God*. Even though I blaspheme, I pray I'll have his babies as soon as I look like the girl talking to him now.

God, I hate her.

I'm going for a dip.

Where the waves die down to a half-inch deep, I sit and forgive. I take dark slick handfuls, then *drip drip drip* You like cake frosting onto my thighs. I've made castles so tall on top of my legs it takes the next tide to knock 'em off. Well, they shift first. My sand castles turn to blobs. God, does this mean all of my dreams will melt like wet sand?

I ask too many questions, especially to animals and things that don't breathe. Like pencil cases. My teacher says there are no stupid questions, so I don't think it matters who or what I direct my questions to. You could be a boll weevil for all I know, God. That's why I let bugs dance along the insides of my wrists.

A lot of my girlfriends at school wonder how I know You are there, or here. They'll say things like, "There is no god! Give us proof!"

I give them Pixie Sticks.

God, how does it feel to be stuck in my earwax on a Q-tip in the trashcan? Not too left out, I hope.

I scratch my peeling sunburnt scalp, and You fall out like salt I want to sprinkle on my brother's eggs.

You are in my eye booger, God. You are everywhere.

Between my toes.

You and the millions of other gods team up to rub away dead bits of me. I sink myself calves-deep, cemented at land's end ready to scream when the tsunami comes and I can't run and it slams me into the face of the planet.

Screaming at the beach is 100% *appropriate*.

Greg sees more than he hears. He—

You know something, God? God Damn It! What's the point of me asking You questions and trying to be a better listener and saying I LOVE YOU if I can't focus because boys *intervade* my space?

Boys are the only thing on the face of the planet that make me question your existence.

I'm tired of body surfing like a dolphin for Greg. But I'm too proud to drown.

I'm tired of pretending I'm tired, taking a rest, just looking at the water, but really I'm watching the girl I hate leaned up against Greg's stand.

I pray I won't be a girl that puts one hand on one hip, harder than I pray I won't be a freak in the *Guinness Book of World Records*.

I pray I won't lose anything else at the edge of this summer. I told Mom, "God swallowed my suitcase with the doll in it," which wasn't a lie, because I lost it when I was lugging it across the dunes pretending I was an airplane crash survivor in Ethiopia and I had to get back to Greg with our baby.

I hear You, God. I'm lucky to be alive and not to live in Ethiopia. I should send some money to that girl with the flies on her face that I see in magazines. I should be happy with my hand-me-down boogie board.

I do hear You on that, God.

I hear, even though listening makes me tired.

Sometimes I'm sandy when I lie down; sometimes I'm not. I check that my towel corners are tucked. I take a shell and place it at the east end of my towel where my feet will make a heart shape around it once I get into position. I rest on my stomach. I can do that because I don't have boobs yet—my cousin Kate has to dig a *trench!* I bend my arms like angel wings, but I don't put my head on my hands. I put my head right on the towel.

My ear is pressed flat.

I can name the three bones in my ear, God, the stapes—yes, I will stop.

Yes, I hear You, God.

Wait. Go easy on me. Don't let this be the summer You unleash major devastation. I'm aware of how bad...

Yes, I hear You, God.

I hear.

I hear kids screaming like Jaws just walked up onto the beach and it's so much fun, but I don't feel left out. When those sun-crazed kids run by my towel, their feet screech. I hear my mom and aunts talking about sandwiches. I smell pickles. Seaweed. I hear the ocean, but not the pounding hissing waves that are always doing their best to toss me. The ocean fans out beneath my bones and beneath You and all the other gods stuck together. And then my bones feel like gods stuck together, fixing me over a still sea of forgiveness.

Christine Fadden is a graduate of the Warren Wilson MFA Program for Writers. Her work appears or is forthcoming in *Titular Journal*, *decomp* magazine, *Storyglossia*, *Staccato Fiction*, and elsewhere. She has been awarded an artist's residency at the Kimmel Harding Nelson Center for the Arts.

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