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.
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.
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