

RED TOENAILS

**Melissa Traister, Scottsdale Community College
Honorable Mention, Poetry**

In grandma's yard my four-year-old fascination is over my newly painted toenails the color of apples. My older cousin watches me while he holds a beer bottle. He smiles as the other children are called in for sandwiches.

Standing behind me in the backyard he says, I have something to show you. This is my first time, alone with him. As I watch him coil his fingers around the bottle, I feel alone in my wet swimsuit. His eyes are feeling me. I follow him to a shed with a broken lawn mower and magazines about machine guns. I wonder if I can teach my cousin to count the stars in the shapes of warriors with a lens bigger than my own eye. This time the wood smells of the cigarette between his lips. He runs his hands through my wet hair that splits like shafts of wheat and smells of chlorine from the kiddie pool.

His hands encounter every part of my skin with grease from the auto repair shop. He yanks a fluorescent pink bow from my swimsuit. He does not stop. His fingers trip over indentations in my spine. He tears into my scars, the scars that were made in a hospital room with walls that paint a rhyme about a broken egg and a jumping cow. His rhyme has grunts and moans. He is about to injure the nerves that were given to me more dead than alive at birth. He spills a seed inside of my body that makes me grow slanted like the trees. I look up and the same stars create warriors in the shapes of females the size of my own eye.