

Kate DeLay

## Slapstick

I prayed Jesus would let me kiss a nonbeliever.

I did not kiss that man, and Jesus may have had something to do with it.

I kissed a man in the fountain in the center of my college campus.

The fountain doubled as a baptistry.

The Sunday after my baptism, my mother picked me up early from a  
sleepover.

I couldn't miss my first communion.

I broke off larger and larger pieces of the communion bread.

It tasted sweet and melted in my mouth.

I heard I could eat from the body and never hunger.

I knew a woman who said she was blessed and highly favored.

She said when her prayers were answered, gold dust appeared on her palms.

She was saving her first kiss for marriage.

It would not be her first first kiss but the rebirth of a kiss.

Jesus couldn't care less who we kissed, but how could we know.

We couldn't see past the lips of who was kissing who.

I thought the trouble of kissing was the end of trouble.

We couldn't see the teeth.

All the what-kissing-when and why-kissing-how.

I was late to a women's ministry meeting because I gave a blowjob in a rock  
climber's van.

I said my car battery died.

I said sex was really just the intercourse part.

When I said no, not that, he said then how will I remember you.

I remembered myself as a baby.

I remembered a man who cupped my belly and said what if a baby was in  
there.

I heard a hungry cry between our sprawled bodies.

He broke up with me a couple weeks later.

Four years after, he made a movie about me rejecting him.  
The story of what happened gnawed the bones of what happened.  
I once explained to a boyfriend that he should not aim to become thinner to  
gain more power.  
He said he wanted to become thinner in order to gain more power.  
He said I never have anything like this to hold against you.  
The boyfriend said he dreamed he killed a man who he believed slept with  
his ex-girlfriend.  
He said there once was a pregnancy scare.  
He went on a long walk and decided he would become a father.  
Back then, abortion was legal in Tennessee.  
In Tennessee, I went to the art museum to see a Picasso retrospective.  
*Girl in a Chemise* was Picasso's lover, Madeleine, whom he pressured into  
having an abortion.  
Women are suffering machines, Picasso once said.  
His muses were hung in a gallery, before he smeared them from tomorrow  
with a fist.  
Oh, but the colors.  
An older security guard in the gallery asked for my number to talk more  
about the art.  
He said he couldn't pull out his phone, because of the security cameras.  
He memorized the digits, one by one.  
When he called, I was walking at night, like always.  
He said isn't that dangerous, and I said I know when I'm in danger.  
That was when I realized I was in danger.  
I sat on a dead wasp and it still stung me.  
Sweeping out the windows, my grandmother knocked it loose.  
She made fried apple pies to make me feel better.  
My grandmother fed a family friend when he came to mow the grass.  
She snapped his beans and fried his okra.  
From the kitchen window, I looked out at the lawn and saw my mother as a  
child.  
When my mother was a child, the family friend tried to touch her.  
My grandmother was down by the barn.

My mother's voice calling out to her mother was the sound between grasses.  
Her voice was the sound of well water rising to the surface.  
Later, my mother would tell me this story about her childhood.  
I would tell her, I am sorry, I am so sorry.  
I would gnaw the marrow from the word, suck the sorrow from its root.  
She would say we don't make a fuss.  
You and I, we never make a fuss out of anything.  
The man said when my father dies, he will come looking for my mother.  
My father joked that he could have her, and my mother laughed.  
I was tying silk flowers to my grandmother's grave when the family friend  
tried to kiss me.  
The white stubble on his chin caught the light.  
I was no longer a child.  
He had no one to talk to now that my grandmother was gone.  
When he called for the seventh time in a day, we waited silently as the phone  
rang.  
In Tennessee, there are fields that bury your throat but give you hands.  
I pushed him off me and hurried toward nearby church members.  
I weaved through cross-engraved headstones and stepped over tiny flags,  
staked in the ground.  
The sun was bright overhead.  
Nothing was a secret if you paid attention.  
I sat under the tent, in a circle of congregants and folded my hands in my lap.  
Light kissed the words from my mouth.  
Under the tent, a man told a joke.  
The muscle of his tongue writhed in his open mouth.  
He looked at me to watch me laugh.  
When I looked at him looking at me, I stretched my lips across my teeth and  
howled.