

Children Made of Cotton

My son asks where he came from. It is my first lie. I say, *I brought you home from a place where hundreds of little lamb-boys live.* He says, *Really!?* I say, *Yes, and I almost couldn't choose. Then you, so bright and soft. I put you in my cart and went straight to the checkout line.* He furrows his plush brow, *Hrrmph!* I ask him what's wrong. He says, *If it was so easy, why didn't you bring my brothers?* I tell him he has plenty of brothers, pointing to the others strewn across the bed. *No, mama,* he whispers, *it isn't the same.* He tucks his head down, covers his eyes with his ears. I'm completely without answers. My second lie is to tell him the laundry is perfectly safe. I watch him bob at the water's soapy rim, gurgling and straining, fighting the impossible pull. He wails on his way to the dryer. When I retrieve him I find grid marks burned into his rump. He says he forgives me and I begin to cry. A raw, convulsive kind of sob. I go like this for hours. The third lie he never believes. I tell him, *Mama loves all her children just the same.* When he asks if I have real children I tell him, *You are real, and you are mine.* He pouts. Says, *Mama, stop it. I know I'm only made of cotton.* All of my bones break at once.

Casanova Comes to Dinner (Or, the Poet and His Hundred Wives)

Your eye snags on the hook of an invincible smile. Handsome in his fedora and smooth smooth shimmer. He is full of bourbon and genius, and you just want one bite. And it's good, you think, to be the gal at his side, even once. And, my, how smart you've become. How effortless, beautiful. Everyone wants a promise. You bring him home and he finds a sister to astonish. Your visiting aunt, best friend, neighbor gal, a pregnant dog. Your mother. He pulls everyone into a different locked room. You finish preparing potatoes. Ignore the wall's thump, the dog's burdened yowl. When everyone gathers at the table, someone comes crying. Someone loose on wine uses all the good curses. Someone lonely falls mute. Someone poised goes desperate. Dishes break, frames crash. The one with the most bruises shouts, *back off, he's mine.*