

“That’s the way I like it too, Sophia,” she spoke with a dreamy haze in her eyes. Flecks of gold glinted in her deep brown eyes as she peered over her crooked nose at me. Tears welled along the red rims of her eyes. Her bony, clay-stained hands trembled as she spoke, barely above a whisper. “Playing with clay is calming.” I saw her Adam’s apple bob up and down as she swallowed. What remained of her once thick, black curly hair was only a few thin wisps. Her skin gave off a greenish hue and was so thin I could almost see the light through the other side.

“The doctor recommends it as my therapy since it is so soothing, honey. He says that when your body is sick like mine is, there is nothing to do but relax. Clay between my fingers helps keep my inner mind at peace, even when my outer body is . . .” her eyes clouded over “. . . falling apart.”

I didn’t understand what she said—I was too young to understand the life-snuffing horrors of bone cancer—but a wave of sadness swept over me. It started in my stomach and radiated throughout my entire body, meeting and swelling in my jaw. I clenched my aching jaws together, trying to break through the prison of pain. My throat felt dry and fiery, and my body heavy, as if gravity was pushing it deeper and deeper into the floor. I needed to lighten the heaviness, to stop sinking into the floor of sadness. I knew I shouldn’t cry and choked back my tears. I forced a smile and said, “We can do therapy together, Auntie Jill!”

The beads of water that had collected along the rims of her eyes spilled down her cheeks. She swept them away with the back of her hand and, with a trembling, choked-up voice, said, “We can, Sophia. We will.” As she pressed her ice-cold lips against my forehead, I shivered. And that is the last memory I have of Auntie Jill. ★

## A Girl and Her Rock Star by Stephanie Feldman

You walk home in new blue jeans, skipping such an easy beat, true rhythm, rock and roll across the pavement, reaching with its hands of broken glass for ankles, knees, and thighs that dream of blue-skinned San Francisco Bay. Forgive the blood its panics and its joys; the drums promise lightning, guitars cry out. You’re holding in one hand the feeling of his hand, in one hand the newest record, remembering the kiss beside the bus, his silence, his smile. The stereos fly. ★



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