

**MARTY MCCONNELL**

**when your grandmother mistakes your girlfriend for a man**

do not rise up over the dinner table  
like a sequin tornado

or a burning flag. it is Christmas.  
though the forks

curl their tines into tiny silver fists  
and the frost-

rimmed windows blink in embarrassment,  
focus on your lover

as she clears her throat, extra low, passes the salt  
to your grandmother

who thanks the young man with the strange  
haircut and delicate

hands. this is no time for declarations and no one's  
seemed to notice

though the milk's gone solid in the pitcher  
and your father

is suddenly fascinated by the unmoving air  
in the other room.

your mouths do not move, except  
to chew. this is family,

this is holiday, there are no affairs, no  
addictions, your family

crest reads in elaborate embroidery  
*the less said,*

*the better.* though your father did offer once  
to pay for your therapy

back when no one you knew was in therapy  
and there was no way

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you were going to talk to a stranger about things  
you'd never say

to your mother, even drunk, even on Easter. so  
to say something now

about what might be a mistake, or just the easiest way  
to explain a mohawk

would be bringing sand to the bank. unprofitable  
and a little bit

insane. you study your lover's chin. the tweezers wince  
under the sink.

she could be a boy, you think. apocalyptic Christian  
emails aside,

maybe your grandmother is progressive. astute  
in her own

Southern, incidental way. your voice offering her  
the butter is a punk band

playing an abortion clinic. all feedback  
and nobody wants you.

she's your grandmother. she's nearly 100.  
your uncle

took thirty years to get sober. your grandfather died  
still owning the manual

to every piece of machinery he'd ever owned.  
you still

don't know how to make any kind of pie.  
there are no

family recipes. in the far corner of your liver  
your other grandmother

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looks up from her patient sectioning  
of a grapefruit,

offers you a chunk of your own atrophied  
tongue, trembling

at the edge of her serrated spoon.