

BRITTANY CAVALLARO

The Girl in Question

What the girl goes through to get here—thickets, coverlets, the half-built halls of this manor, and its elegant, crumbling drawbridges, the tease of the moat beneath. She stops at its banks. Her frock is on wrong but she can't help herself, and what's below knows her, knows her buttoning hands. *Hello* she says back to the water *you wouldn't let me float would you?* but the moat would like her to unroll the grass on the other side, to fasten it shut like skin over a sore. She hesitates. Behind her the chanting. She knows there is a boy in the wood who has dropped to his knees and drawn a circle and is saying each of her secret names. *Susanna* he says *Silent Dog* and *White Scarf* and she tightens hers to hear her pulse. *Mend my wrapping coat* he says *I am so cold*. The water begs, the boy begs her, and she could pull a girl from the storm cellar, a twin, tornado-legged and frozen, from her hiding place in the icebox, the place she learned her breath's real shape, a twin from the shaved-grass garden. She could teach them how to mend, to wait for the final girl on the road, the one who will not answer. How to wait for the answer. How to tell the two apart.