

He waits under the dining table and tickles the toes, troubled, tentative, but he waits and bides and sneakily, quite craftily, he takes the whole foot.

You can't quite leave after that, not without assistance, but where's that gone off to—the wheelchair, the walker, someone to whisk you off—no, the battle's fought alone, to die alone, to win alone. But you want to leave—never mind the fear of defeat or maybe the horrible thought of losing that last word—it isn't worth it, you say, but it's always worth enough.

Until the glue seeps from the pores of the wood (glass if you're fancy) and sticks to the elbows, the faces of stubborn children. You're not done until you're finished your plate! Some of it goes down easy, but not all of it, not most of it, and we tear away at the wrapping and the cardboard, all those unsealed letters but never did we think we wouldn't want to read the words inside.

There's dust kicking, whipping up—duck! And the debris is scattering, but we can't leave. No, it feels like we'll never leave—hold the line! Hold, and never relent, because she'll never relent, and we'll give up anything to be even. The catapult launches, and the meteor comes, a great star hurtling until it finds its mark. It smashes through the dirt, driving a valley, but it cracks at a tap—it's hollow, and for some reason that makes the bruises hurt worse.

He's laughing. You thought he'd never play you but you were too easy—you gave him your heart and soul and he laughed all the way to the bank. There's blood on the floor but you can't look—she said she'd mop and she didn't, and that's what started this whole thing, isn't it? Or maybe her socks on the couch, or the fact that she hasn't washed the bathroom in 17 weeks—you counted, and you know!

There's fire raining down, and it sizzles and screams, and the pain sears your brain, drawing tallies along the grooves so you'll never forget, no matter how little. It takes everything to stay afloat, so of course you don't—offense is the best defense, they always said, so we throw the fire back until the world's ablaze. That's fine too; you lose sight of the person in the flames, and isn't that what you wanted?

It isn't? Then why didn't you say so?

Of course, you wanted to say so, and she wanted to say so too, but she never did—so you never did. He ran off with the foot, so instead you crawl, leaving the traces of blood and sweat to mark your contemptuous contention. It's miserable, dragging yourself through the mud; dress it up as effort, solidarity, as strength or conviction—all that matters is the mouth full of shit, and you couldn't swallow.

In the middle of the night, he's back. Sneering and giggling, dangling his prize just out of reach. If you tried, you could get it back. But then she wins, so you don't.