

Severance  
by Natalie McNabb

**cut** *v.* To penetrate or strike an opening in. To separate into parts with a sharp device. *n.* A wound made by a sharp edge. A part cut from a main body.

Mother's scissors, the manmade godsend that helps me keep her dusty curtains distant. I stretch left from atop the stepladder and slip the lower jaw of the scissors through the nearest fabric loop securing curtain to brass rod. I snip the first loop; the curtains sag. I snip the second; they sag a little more. I continue cutting and cutting, making my way along the rod, Mother's curtains sagging and slumping, forming hills around my stepladder, shrugging dust off in puffs. I rub my eyes with the back of my wrist, cut the last loop and the curtains drop, a pale cloud wafting upward. A ghost caught in the sunlight burning through the front window. I sneeze. I always do in bright sun, and I wonder at this crossing of pathways in my brain, at this intersection of primordial reflexes, the reaction of my eye to bright light and the sneezing reflex. A relic of evolution. An unexplainable ghost.

Dust powders the window glass, settles on the wooden sill, and dust clings to gauzy webs pressed against the glass as if they have been trying to get outside from in since spun. How many spinners must they have seen. How many windowsill tenants must have come and gone, come and gone, spinning out lives, leaving webs to billow in window and vent drafts. Billowing sails that never traveled, never took their creators anywhere.

The dust has settled upon Mother's once pale, now dark green, carpet. *The color's all the rage*, you said. I hadn't believed you. I couldn't. Not carpet the color of the mashed garden peas you fed to Sheila one tiny spoonful at a time.

**mother** v. To birth or produce. To create. *n.* The biological female parent of offspring. An origin.

*62 years, and this is it?* All around, Mother, are your monuments, evidence that you existed. But, I cannot yet consider the things in your piles, cupboards, closets and drawers. So, I stand with my back to them all, with your curtains snipped and fallen to the floor. The spinning spiders have moved on, and so many flies just lie there now cluttering your sill and aluminum window track. So many spinning spiders, once cutting lace webs in sunlight, their yet-undusty webs disappearing each time the sun crosses them just so.

Laurie and Sheila could not come, not today. Not ever, I think. But, *Someone's moving into the place in a week!* the agent said, and so here I sit, your eldest, cross-legged on canned pea-colored carpet with your scissors and dust, trying to swallow all of this one tiny spoonful at a time. I rub my fingers across my brow and squeeze the bridge of my nose. The dust has also settled in a fine, nearly imperceptible layer upon me. My hands have your dust, and my forearms. I sneeze again and wonder if I could blend into the carpet were I to lie upon it long enough, unmoving like you are now.

**How to Make Paper Dolls:** *First, fold your piece of paper, just so, into an accordion. Then, cut the head, neck and shoulders out, But, leave the hands connected at the folds. Cut out the torso, skirt and*

*legs next, but leave the feet connected at the folds too. Open your paper up, et voila! You have a string of dolls.*

I pull the felled curtain toward me and cut an eight-and-a-half-by-eleven swatch from it. I fold it into an accordion, just so. I cut out our heads, necks and shoulders first, leaving our hands connected at the folds. *Like you taught me, Mother.* Then, I cut our torsos, skirts and legs, leaving our feet connected at the folds too. I place the scissors beside me and open my swatch, revealing our connected silhouettes. Left to right: Laurie, Sheila, you and me. The four of us strung together, draped across my palms.

**cut** v. To shape by penetrating. To pass through. n. A passage made by digging or probing. A transition from one scene to another.

I brush the dust from my hands and squint against the sunlight to watch a long-jawed orb weaver on the other side of the window extend its long copper forelegs and gather lengths of previously spun thread. Perhaps it is a lucky one that made it outside from in. The spider drops quickly upon new thread, stopping, dropping and stopping again. No, it's not the sunlight that tints this spider's thread an unusual, golden hue. It is the thread itself. The breeze tousles the dangling spider, pressing it sideways, and the spider catches the aluminum window casing, fixes its thread and, now free, climbs upward to do it all again.

I pick up your scissors and slip the lower jaw beneath Sheila's fabric hand, the one grasping yours, and I snip. I cut the fabric connection where your feet touch too. Sheila and

Laurie, still connected at their hands and feet, fall to your green carpet. I slip the lower jaw of your scissors beneath my fabric hand, the one grasping yours, and I snip. I sever the fabric connection at our feet too, and my doll falls too. Yet, I still hold you, Mother, just so.

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