

going to say anything until he took a few raspy breathes, as if he needed to gulp down air in order to speak.

—Son, please. I just... I just want to sit quietly in the back.

—Do you know what Kimberly and I found out the other day!? Jason Day was you and mom's son! You shit head! Every damn day you hit me, you hit Kimberly, you hit mom, you cheated on her and never showed her any appreciation! And to top all of it off you made her give up her first son!? And then he dies in her arms! You probably wanted her to get an abortion, you selfish prick!

He still hasn't looked me in the eye. He looks so weak and feeble. His arms are skinny and his hands are tiny.

—It's not like that, son. Your mom is the one who decided to give him up for adoption. She wanted an abortion in the first place but I talked her into keeping the kid and giving him up for adoption!

He begins to cough when he tried speaking just slightly loud.

—I don't believe you.

—Listen, I know I was a bad dad. I always held resentment for your mom after she gave up our first-born son. And then he died! If she would have kept him with us, that accident may have never happened! My resentment and bitterness grew and I became a mean, womanizing alcoholic. But I loved her! And I know I was a shit head, but your mom wasn't an angel, either! But I'm sorry... I'm so sorry. For everything. For being the piece of shit I was.

He begins to cough so hard that he can hardly catch his breathe. We're both crying now.

—Are you sick?

—Yes, son. My liver is failing and my lungs are in the beginning stages of cancer. It's what I get for being a scumbag all my life. This is what happens when you drink and smoke and live how I lived. I'm getting my karma, okay? Now let me in there to sit peacefully in the back... please.

He's actually remorseful. I stare at him for a few more moments. He's still looking down and not at me. It's like he's too ashamed to look at me. As I stare at him I realize I'm looking at my future. I will be this weak man in a wheel chair at only 55 years old, if I continue letting my bitterness grow and turn me into someone I'm not. He sees the tip of my flask sticking out in my jacket. He slowly turns his head up at me and finally looks me in the eye.

—Don't... don't be like me, son.

JEN HEITER

Behind Curtain Number Zero

I often wonder which thief I would have been hanging next to Christ—thief, yes, *definitely*, caged by my desires for a better deal I envision myself with her husband's soft hands or that one's six figures, theirs as curtain number two: the grand prize! while I load my lifetime consolation of Rice-a-Roni into the back of my minivan. Struggling

to breathe, I push upward on the nail with each wheeze of suffocation. My quads are shredded, burning pain radiating so long it has cooled to numbness as the audience strolls about at my cloven feet sipping their mocha frapps from the Starbucks booth and grazing their Pop-Tarts and donuts, the cinnamon sugar dusting the neckline of their flannel pajamas. My shoulders popped out of joint hours ago my breasts thrust forward, my flagrum flesh clotting crusting and flaking... in the wind of my wailing, I glance over at Jesus—skin as dark as separate drinking fountains and fatal gunshot wounds eyes as opaque as mud mixed to cure a lifetime of blindness. Mouth silent. When

you left me for the couch, anger became my lover, stolen warmth continually whispering injections into the loins of my ego. I didn't realize the depression was dismantling you its host with every broken window and spittle-laced invective: diagnosing my own was not my spiritual gift. Meanwhile I see the crowds have been home to shower and trim their ear hair and return for a corn dog from the concession stand. Littering their cotton candy cellophane & flayed ketchup packets at the base of the crosses, they point to the man beyond the carousel and the juggler. Suspended next to Jesus on the other side he appears to have expired. I can barely hang on. The curtain cleaves. The earth convulses. Truly

a thief, *of course*, but left, the mocker Gestas, or right, the penitent Dismas? Glancing to the side, I spot the uncast stones, little *ostraca*, still encased in my left hand.

(Please forgive me.
I know what I did.)