

EIREENE NEALAND

Painter and Model

Have you ever seen a mother mad with grief? Well, it doesn't look great. Pick up the diaper, put it down: the diaper, the dish, the laundry, the kid. Suddenly, worrying over a sniffle turns out to be the madness that is happening after the kid learns to drive. Before they can crawl or put too many things in their mouth is when you're supposed to set everything right. Trying, perhaps, you sit with your own mother and hope to feel slow and safe. If you don't have that, that's when you enter Picasso's world, like after the accident, when they put my arm in a sling, and it was just hanging there right by my tit.

I stood up and looked at my shoulder and thought, Uh oh. It's not supposed to look like that. Sucked in, skin concave where the bone's supposed to poke: it's not supposed to look like that unless I'm in a Picasso, which is when I started to laugh, not because I'd wanted to be a painter, not because I wanted to be a model, but because suddenly I saw I'd never had a relationship with my own mom. Back before I had my kid, I knew I didn't deserve the kind of relationship that would make me feel whole. "That's how I ended up like this," I thought, and once again I laughed at how my arm just hung there, all on its own.

The nurses were afraid to touch me. I lay on my back while the doctors discussed my clavicle, which appeared not to be connected to me in space or time. I must have had

a certain joyous look on my face because they didn't say anything to me directly, just grabbed my "good" arm and gave me a shot, complaining about how "she doesn't have any fat." The nurse who said that was younger. Probably it was hard for her to understand how the love of a child can use you, especially when you're not close to your mom, and I was on morphine. The doctors said I couldn't leave, but I knew the power of mothers, and I had decided to reach mine, whereupon I diagnosed the space-time continuum and chose a direction to dive.

"If you're not falling over in the hallway," I told myself, "you're not going to fall over on the way to the bar," which is where I went when I walked out.

I needed a drink so I could drive.

"Time to learn to use my left hand," I said when I found a car unlocked. I was no longer thinking about my baby, or how a real mother is ready to arm wrestle anyone who gets between her and her child. It was enough for me to be in the car to set my resolve. By the time Ma finds me passed out on the couch and unwraps my sling while I sleep, everything will be beautiful, beautiful, I thought. We'll be three generations of women, watching our bodies fall apart as easily as our minds.

Eireene Nealand's previous stories, poems, and translations have appeared in *ZYZZYVA*, *Chicago Quarterly Review*, *St. Petersburg Review*, *eohippus*, *Western Humanities Review*, and *elimaë*, among other places. Her work has won multiple awards, including a Fulbright Fellowship and an Elizabeth Kostova Fellowship for study in Bulgaria. She currently lives in Moss Beach, California.

NOAH BUCHANAN

Dreaming Woman, 2018
Oil on Linen, 36 x 48 in

