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## (Archive) Story: Jennifer McGuiggan

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### Sugar Baby

Every time I clean my kitchen sink, I think of you. You, who gave me housekeeping tips about a shiny sink while you were dying (and trying not to die) of cancer there on the other side of the world, *down under*, we call it. I think of you and how you can no longer shine your own sink, because despite trying not to die, you did. Tonight, I think of you and clean my stainless steel sink before washing a dusty watermelon.

The melon is almost perfectly round, like a bowling ball, and heavy like one, too. There's one flat, yellowed spot—the ground spot they call it—that glows pale against the smooth hunter-green skin, no stripes. A shadow-green moon with one shining crater. I bought it from an old man and woman selling produce off the back of their pickup truck on the fringes of the farmers market. *Is that a watermelon?* I asked. *It's a sugar baby*, the woman said, nodding once, her face wrinkled and puckered like an old grape with just a few teeth. Turquoise wedges of eyeshadow perched above her eyes and optimistic smudges of rouge bull's-eyed her cheeks. While she bagged tomatoes for another customer, the old man struck up conversation with me. His teeth were mostly missing too, and he spoke with such a thick accent of old age and fieldwork that I couldn't understand him. I think he was telling me why his watermelons taste so good, giving me the secrets to perfect, sweet sugar babies. I pretended to follow along, nodding and smiling, saying *oh* and *ah*. I bluffed pretty well, but I think he was on to me.

When the woman came round to fetch the melon I said, *Here, let me get it*, and helped her half-scoop, half-roll it into a white plastic bag. She looked frail, but for all I know that toothless raisin of a woman could have lifted me. Women have strength that surprises.

When I cut into my little round watermelon tonight, after washing it like a baby in the sink, the fresh pink smell of summer juiced the air. I thought about your little boy, how he will be half-orphaned for every Christmas morning, every beach vacation. I sliced off a thick slab, sunk my

teeth in up to my gums, and I swear: Fireflies and the smell of sweet grass filled the room. It was full summer there in my kitchen on September first of the year after you died, even though it's almost fall here and nearly spring down under. I chomped and slurped, filling my cheeks like a squirrel or a child, gorging on the essence of summer and life, eating for all of us, there in my kitchen next to my clean silver sink.

**Jennifer (Jenna) McGuiggan** is a freelance writer, editor, and teacher based in the southwestern corner of Pennsylvania. She received her MFA from Vermont College of Fine Arts. Her articles and essays have appeared in various publications, including *Numéro Cinq Magazine*, *Pop City*, *Just Cause*, *Mingle Magazine* (from Stampington & Co.), and *Hunger Mountain* (where she previously served as an assistant editor). She curated and published *Lanterns: A Gathering of Stories*, a collection of prose, poetry, and photography by seven women writers and artists. She is currently writing an essay collection about spirituality and landscape. Visit Jenna online in *The Word Cellar*, where she writes about everything from navigating the writing life to venturing into the world of roller derby.

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