The Nightgowns

In the mid-1970s, you purchased two things that have made me what I am; the first was a night at Little America Hotel, where you and Dad celebrated your honeymoon; the second was a pair of nightgowns from LaVoy’s. They were considered lingerie in their day, but I wouldn’t even consider them nighties—there was nothing truncated about them. They were long enough to cover your feet when standing, and they billowed out a foot in each direction. They were, however, transparent in the sunlight. Polyester manufactured in its most striking shades—one black as tar and the other a blinding yellow that you called “pale.” The only way to connect such an adjective to the nightgown was in describing those who saw it for the first time. You chose such colors for a reason, albeit it must have been subconscious—black for your future feelings on shopping in bulk, endless “guaranteed” winnings from Publisher’s Clearing House, dog hair, and dreams deferred—for the end of each day and the beginning of the next. But not Sundays. Yellow was for the peace and quiet of Sundays. Sundays and classical music, the PTA, your Super-Mom title, and your high school drill team outfit that still fits. But yellow was especially representative of your thoughts on us children, whom you determined would be your

Birth of a Daughter

Angela Colvin
greatest accomplishments. I suppose the melon yellow version still haunts your closet today. Although I intended to take it to college, I mostly took your other half with me.

Dress-up

I don’t know why I confiscated the black remnant. It was on impulse, probably because I lacked the initiative to go out and buy a bathrobe, and I needed something to see me through the long trek from dorm bathroom to bedroom. I used to steal it from your closet when I was little. I’d listen to you playing the old upright for hours, playing out your frustrations and anger, your fingers caressing the same keys your mother played. Accompanied by your music, I’d drag the thing from its hanger and dress up as you. I always seemed to get tangled up in the layers however and never made it to the mirror before stumbling inside it and slamming into the green shag sea below me. It served me well my first year in college, but then I met “that young man” as you called him, and simultaneously the gown began to fall apart.

The Moo-Moo

Life is not meant to be experienced in halves. I don’t believe my other half should still be hanging, unused, in a storage closet. But I guess the first thing people see is what they grab and run with.

Debunching

You were the only girl in the pool with clothes on—that’s how I noticed you. Someone had invited me (on account of my being “the new boy”) to the party while I was walking through the dorms. There were only about fifteen guys at that party, and I felt like I was at a disadvantage because I was the only one who hadn’t spent a semester getting to know you, and you seemed to be enraptured by some twig of a guy at least six inches shorter than you. He could have been the Munchkin mayor.

I watched you for over an hour before I decided to do anything about it. Whenever someone would throw you in, you’d stealthily debunch your clothes when your body reemerged from the water. Your smile could be addictive. Opportunity arose when you and a roommate suddenly burst into song at the edge of the pool. It sounded awful, but it was a chance to meet you—“always introduce yourself
Food For Thought

You weren’t anorexic, but close enough to it that I had become a candidate for Miss Body-Conscious of the Universe. I was obsessed with food, preoccupied with the latest fat-burning exercises, and I hadn’t worn a swimsuit in over six years.

I caught him staring at me once and made a concerted effort not to let my shorts and tee-shirt gather up and stick to me as I left the pool’s sanctuary. I didn’t want to look fatter than was apparent. Annie and I had both thought he was a delicious morsel—she thought he was cheesecake, but I knew he was more like a juicy piece of steak. His legs were definitely steaks. I had another obsession, and that was lean-bodied soccer players. They move like liquid, each movement pouring and blending into the next. To get his attention we boisterously began singing off key because he was floating with an all-too-attentive California Barbie on the “Donut of Abomination” (as we called the inner tube). To our delight, that abomination finally floated our way.

Threadbare

A silhouette wasn’t enough. He tried to get more than ankles showing; however, I only became a little threadbare. Here a stitch, there a patch of thinning, but he wanted to take the scissors to me.

Curves

What did you call that thing? You told me once that it was christened “the moo-moo” by mortified roommates. And yes, the spelling was intentional (you often described yourself as a cow). Your idea was that it covered you entirely, a bathrobe substitute so you could just “flow” from room to room. Two problems, though: it was transparent in the light, which was often the setting I saw you in, and when you turned, it grasped every curve of your body, “wanted and un-,” you laughed. That laugh smelt of mothballs—dusty and sour. You surely had a sense of humor, ripping yourself up into laughable little confetti-sized pieces you could throw at a party.

You had a crazy worldview, some of it formed from leftover perusals of ridiculous teen magazines; some from being your mother’s
daughter, and some from just being you. Those parts were beautiful—stars you kept on reserve for clear nights. But such expositions were rare; generally, it was all shadows and curves beneath the moo-moo.

**Showering**

He tried to change me—save me from myself, but I struggled with his fitting in the moo-moo. He left while I was in the shower, with my thoughts swirling about my feet. I stepped out clean, but he wasn’t there to see it. He had gone to save the world, and I guess that changed both of us.

**Pulling Threads**

He was gone, but he left behind a large hole exposing her rib, and she had to hold it shut as she scurried past people to the privacy of her room. Although the hole bothered her, she had even started to pick at my threads herself.

**Reflected**

My roommates jokingly conspired to burn the moo-moo, until Jules found out where you bought it—then the jokes got serious. LaVoy’s was her grandpa’s business. Horrified to be part of something that so embarrassed her, she apologized profusely to the others for her grandpa’s designers and began planning moo-moo abduction, since I refused to give it up. Once she even accomplished it, but knowing I’d die without something to cover my nakedness through the early morning hours and that I was too lazy to go buy something new, she only gave it to our next-door neighbors as a joke. They, of course, couldn’t resist playing along in the heist.

I fell asleep that night and about an hour later the back door, which opened directly into my room, creaked open. Something tall and black swept in. It was my neighbor Jeremy, fully moo-mooed and looking like death incarnate. White boy in a black moo-moo—not a Kodak moment. There he was, a man draped in my inhibitions, teeth gleaming and moonlight shooting off his glasses, dimly lighting the mirrored hallways of my soul.
Patching Holes

I came home for the weekend to find the sewing machine humming. It wasn't the usual burring purr of efficiency, but a languid growl, starting out deeply in the back of its throat, then its voice rising in intensity as it picked up speed, and then changing its mind and slowing down to a yawn. You were patching holes, all sorts of them. Some in clothes, some on stuffed animals, some on pillow cases; everything that could be, would be repaired that day. I mentioned something over your shoulder. I was going to apply to that arts school in Boston, give up chemistry and that scholarship we had worked for. You didn’t miss a stitch, just mentioned in return that there was homemade pie in the fridge. I tried to open a window to let some air in, but you stopped me without looking up—said it was too cold. So I ate, you worked, and we sat that way until you breathed out, lightly clenching the side of the counter with out-turned palms and resting your body on your wrists. "Do you want this?" you asked, pulling the yellow moo-moo out of the sewing basket, "I'm not going to fix it if it's not needed."

An E-mail

Dad—
Thanx for the cash, I think mom will love her present. I realized something when you told me that she sold her piano to help pay for my tuition next year in Boston. I don't think I'll ever be her—I could never do that. It seems like everyone around here is on a crusade to find themselves, as if we'd suddenly gotten lost the day we registered for college, or left ourselves in the car by accident when our parents drove off—waving at ourselves no less. I obviously didn't get all of mom's genes so i don't completely understand her, but she knows me better than i thought, although she still thinks I'm too much like you, but that's all of her i could get close to—you. I can't drive, read, and practice my voice all at the same time or graduate in four years as a valedictorian with kids like she did. I'm trying to be as practical as she would, but i must’ve caught some of your dreaming germs (as mom calls them) so i guess I'm just gonna breathe life in for a while before I decide to do anything with it. —me
Boxed Away

I wasn’t going to arts school, and, even more surprisingly my side was ripped completely open. I wasn’t put back on, just ripped open, held, looked at, then thrown in a box with other home-bound stuff. Not with the stuff that would be unboxed, but into a package with trinkets and tickets, gum wrappers and photographs, dried flowers, bits of pottery projects, and old keys.

The Minimalists

It was very weird that your number was in the Boston listings. Living and building homes in Panama’s villages had made a minimalist of me and moving back to Boston sounded great. It’s known for small rooms, private lives, luxuries too expensive to buy, and little freely circulating money. But I had a cousin there, which meant he had an apartment, and maybe connections to a job. When I saw your name, I only called to see if it was you. Your voice was different, so I listened to it for a while before I decided to see you. That was nicer than I expected, and so was the next time, and the time after. Before we even thought about marriage, you had me in a steady job, and calling your parents on holidays. This afternoon you said you wanted a “little pink bundle” to put in the quilt your mom sent us for Christmas. A baby quilt made up of squares from old nightgowns. The inner lining was black and yellow checkered—you couldn’t seem to get over that. But your comment about the pink bundle is what made me laugh. It reminded me of this morning, which is why I was smiling just now. It was simply an image; one I can’t get out of my head. You, coming from the bath, standing there—pink as the day you were born and grinning like a Cheshire cat.