**Bicycle**

J.L. Shively

Twilight was getting along when Henry found the arm. He wrecked his bike running over it riding fast down Franklin Street. He’d ridden that way home for the last six weeks since moving to the Cape and had never seen anything before. He picked himself up, jostled and annoyed, knees bruised and knowing he was going to hear it from his mom if she found out his helmet hadn’t been buckled and had gone skidding down the road nearly to Hughes.

He brushed loose gravel from his skinned hands, turning back to see what had caused him to nearly do a header into the street. It could have been a branch except Henry had never known nature to make anything quite so delicate for a tree and he’d never known a tree to have long, thin fingers with nails painted a soft pink. It wasn’t the ghastly sight he’d seen in horror movies he wasn’t supposed to watch, nor was it the hokey kind of prop you’d see at cheap hayrides in October.

It was an arm. A woman’s arm. It was neither severed nor torn from a body, but it was there just the same—real.

He did the only thing he could think to do. He picked it up and put it in his bike basket. At the freshly minted age of eleven Henry was in that awkward stage where it was terribly hard to make friends and was still debating if girls actually had cooties or not.

At home his father would be cooking dinner, not quite wondering after him yet, and his mother wouldn’t be home from her “big time” job running one of the fancy hotels.

Speeding down Washington, he knew he’d have just enough time to stash the arm. He’d put it out in the garage, which was really an old carriage house, that his parents had given him to use as a workshop.

Unlatching the door, he wheeled the bike in arm and all. He placed the arm on a workbench, took one long look at it in the desperate glow from the porch light, then threw an old sheet over it. He thought, as he walked to the house, that this would be a once in a lifetime occurrence.

He found the foot on Elmira near the bridge. He marveled over the sight, then popped it into his basket to wheel home and place next to the arm. He combed over them both with a magnifying glass.

Other than the fact that it was a little bony and the fingers a bit long there was nothing odd about the arm. The foot was a different shade of fleshy white and the toes where stubby and painted a neon shade of green. He liked them in their uniqueness and wondered at the spectacle of it all before throwing the sheet over them both and heading in for dinner.

The finding of body parts became a bit of a daily adventure. He found pieces of women along the beach, by the Convention Hall, not far from the lighthouse, and in the bushes of corner houses or beside the unused walkways between tightly built Victorians. He had nearly half a woman now. It was when he found a torso, brilliant bronze skin fitted into one of those frilly lightweight blouses, that it occurred to him to put the pieces together. He went to Swain’s with his allowance money to pick up the tools he’d need.

Perhaps, he thought, he could make a friend.

He spent stolen minutes before dinner knitting pieces together. Because of their surreal quality, they did not decompose nor change at all from the day he found them. Not once did he consider where they were coming from or why, until his mother said something standing in front of the mirror, smoothing down the dress she was wearing to an event one evening.

“You look stunning,” his father said to her as he helped with the zipper.

“God,” she said, turning. “I just can’t stand my arms.”

Henry realized then that sometimes people didn’t like themselves. He hadn’t thought much about his own body, ever changing, but he’d leafed through some of the ladies’ magazines his mother left in the bathroom. He’d seen ads for things like *tone your thighs in twenty days* or *get the lips he’s been longing for*. He thought it was something woman liked to do—like dressing up for Halloween. He’d never drawn the conclusion that some women were constantly wishing away parts of themselves they could never really change—parts he’d found. A nose, a hand, an ankle.

The creation wasn’t perfect, it was different sizes, shapes, and colors. But he liked it just the same.

All he needed now was a head. He cruised around thinking of where he hadn’t looked, biting his lip and wondering if the final piece would make his creation become alive.

His father knew something was up. Even though Henry had told him it was a secret he wasn’t sure how long he could keep him away. Even covered by a sheet the creation had the distinct shape of a corpse.

Henry found the head in a flower garden on Jackson. He bundled it into a burlap sack and peddled fast, thinking he could get it in place before dinner.

He worked with delicate movements, loosing track of the time, when he heard the back door open and the footsteps of his father walking off the porch and toward the workshop.

“Henry,” his father called.

“Just a minute,” Henry called back, threading the last stitch and tying it off.

“It’s past time for dinner.”

“I know, just a second.”

His father was outside the workshop, an arm’s length from opening the door. Henry didn’t know if he should throw the sheet over the creation or if he should rush to the door, hold it shut. Before he could decide, he heard the door creak, and the creation’s eyes, likewise, opened.