**Fool’s Gold**

Olivia Badoi

I didn’t deliberately consider the power of her hair until she chopped it all off. It didn’t come out of the blue — she’d been talking about doing it for years— but that still didn’t prepare me for the sight of my girlfriend coming in through the front door, her lioness mane now a sandy-colored pixie cut. I felt like I was the one who had lost something irreplaceable, a kind of Samson by proxy.

As I ran my fingers on her now-unencumbered nape, I could trace the origin of my fascination with her hair back to my own childhood. As a little girl, I had a strong attachment to a doll, one of those life-size, makeover dolls. This particular one was a disembodied head surrounded by an assortment of trinkets, fake plastic curlers, sparkly eye shadow, bright pink lipstick. The doll had big blue eyes and long, golden tresses. She didn’t really look like me. Nor was she, in fact, an actual doll, but a piece of paper, a full-page ad that my dad had ripped from a fashion magazine. Growing up in Eastern Europe during the final years of communism meant that I did not have a lot of toys, certainly not dolls as fancy as this one. But my dad was good at getting his hands on bootleg stuff, including all kinds of magazines from the West.

The doll and I shared the same name. I can picture my father flipping through the magazine and doing a double-take when he saw my name in big pink letters. It was not a common name back then. It was a Western name. I’m still not sure how my parents were able to get it approved. My dad must have bribed some ruddy comrade with a bottle of homemade moonshine, his go-to method for bypassing the communist police state.

The story goes that my father named me, about four years prior to finding the doll ad, by looking at another pretty blonde, this time on a bootleg VHS tape of an American classic. *Grease*. “He had a crush on Olivia Newton-John and pictured himself some kind of John Travolta,” my mom would say with a smirk. Putting together a picture of my dad through my mom’s stories was like doing a puzzle having lost the box. My dad loved American movies. One piece. My dad taught himself English and read Whitman in the original. Another piece. My dad’s dream was to escape communist Romania and take his family to America. The irretrievable piece.

My mother, the realist, and my father, the dreamer. The realist begged the dreamer not to go out into the streets when the revolution broke out. “You have a four-year old to think of!” she implored. “I’m doing it *for her*,” the dreamer said. “She should grow up free and unafraid.” He assured the realist that the soldiers would never shoot at unarmed civilians, their brothers and sisters. My father was crushed by a tank, together with other dreamers. He also had a close-range gunshot wound to the head. An act of brotherly mercy.

I picture my dad ripping up that ad from the magazine and giving it to me instead of a real doll. A promise, a brochure for a future in which I, like the doll, would be pretty, smiling, content, surrounded by shiny things. Like Olivia Newton-John in Grease, I’d be golden and summery, free to choose my own future.

When my girlfriend and I met back in grad school, some nine years prior to our now impeding dissolution, she exuded that American cheerfulness that by contrast makes us Eastern Europeans look like the cast of an Addams Family reboot. She was pretty, but not a stunner. Her lips a bit too thin, her teeth too small – chicklet teeth she’d call them – but it all came together harmoniously, not least because of that glorious mane of molten gold. During our good days, when we’d read books while sprawled on a picnic blanket in the park, I liked to wrap a strand of her hair around my index finger and hold it in the sun. The gilded coils came alive like mercury. When she cut it off, the light left too, golden sands darkened by the waves. Aware of its magnetic power over me, she once gave me a lock of her hair. I still have it. I keep it in a box together with various shiny trinkets, an ad ripped from a magazine, and other such broken promises.