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The Wall

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The Wall

Jennifer C. Cormack

On the top floor of a high-rise apartment, my bedroom overlooked the Army base playground with its towering super long, electric blue and fire engine red slide. One day halfway up on a blue rung sandwiched between playmates, a yellow jacket stung my hand in the web space between thumb and index finger.

Waiting for my train at an underground newsstand in the Paris metro, I learned the Berlin Wall fell and remembered the bee sting, Raggedy Ann curtains, learning to tie shoelaces, and stories of Checkpoint Charlie—the Russians, the guns, the art of eating wine glasses, shard by shard.

With the Cold War at an end, I readied myself for spring break on the French Riviera. I tucked the news magazines in my satchel and boarded the train of tomorrow. Which hat would I wear to match my bikini? Which beach would I stroll along, bronzed to perfection, as I met my debonair future husband?

I dreamed of window shopping, cafe menus to drool over, marbled hotel lobbies with peeing cherub fountains, a once in a lifetime stroll from Nice to Monte Carlo, little sandy nude beaches tucked into gentle rising hills, yacht-filled marinas, and scenic overlooks, high above train tracks, to perch on and watch sailboats play

in the pure blue Mediterranean. Throughout that dreary Paris winter I stuffed sunshine yellow bags with hope, extra francs, and the latest spring fashions, routinely tugging nylon web straps for stability, weighing the contents for fluency and bravado. Daily I boarded the metro to university, wondering which Saint Tropez

gallery would beg to sell my artwork, which sea view home my husband would own, which Picasso sculpture would be my favorite at the Antibes museum, and how compatible my best friend would be in Nice for a week. Four months after the Berlin wall fell, I descended the metro staircase into Gare du Lyon and twirled through the last turnstile into spring break. As I set bags down and applauded myself for timing the 7:00 pm

departure perfectly, I met furious, lecturing eyes.
Something about 17:00 hours. Army brats. A 24-hour clock.
Seizing my largest bag, my friend hightailed it to a platform,
where he pitched it through the rearmost train door, shoved

me up the stairs, threw his backpack on my sore feet,
sprinted alongside the departing train, leapt for the handle,
dragged his shoes on the last few feet of *quai*, muscled
himself in, and marched towards the engine. The trek
to the front of the train provided ample time for anger
to build a sturdy wall.