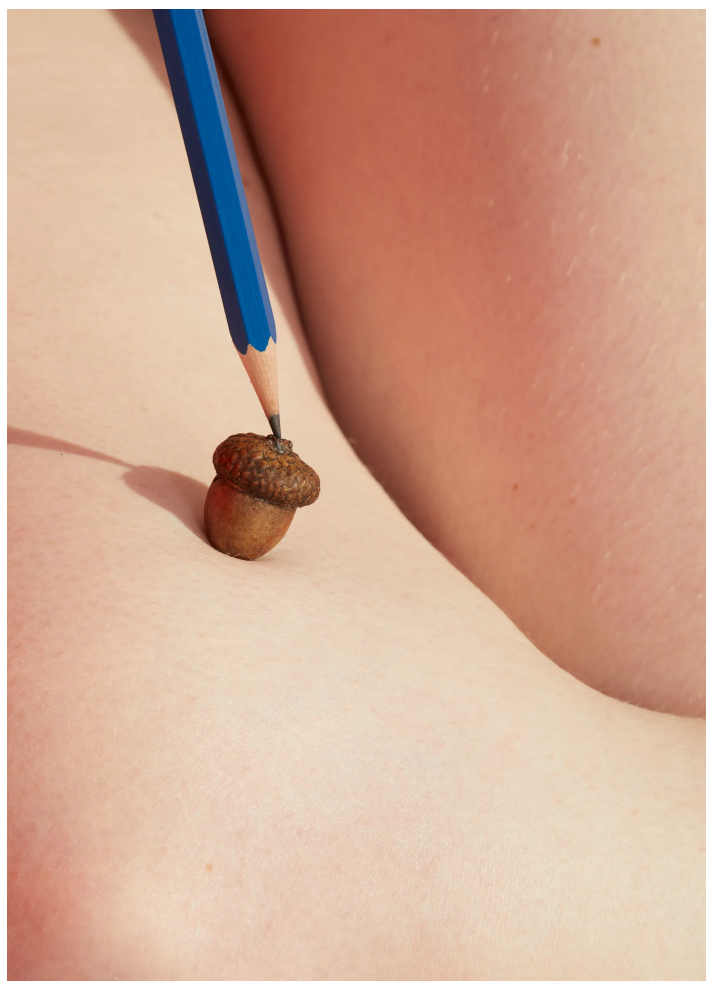


FLASH FICTION

# ACORN

By Danielle Dutton

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Photograph by Kyoko Hamada for The New Yorker

*This is the eighth story in this summer's online Flash Fiction series. You can read the entire series, and our Flash Fiction stories from previous years, [here](#).*

everal of her friends were writers, too, and they talked about the body. Where is the body when you write? You are always writing from the body, they said. But we can't really feel the body in your work. We don't believe in the bodies in your stories. Your stories are all words. Bring the body into your writing, they said.

She wasn't sure.

When she was writing, she was in her body, she couldn't argue with that. But how to explain that she was somewhere else as well? When she was writing, it was as if she were working from six inches above and in front of her own head. If the energy of writing fell back into her body, all writing stopped. Then she was just herself, sitting in a chair. She was ready to admit—to herself, if not to her friends—that keeping that energy afloat was peculiar work, bodily work. It was like bathing a squirming baby that you weren't allowed to look at. Babies are so slippery. You can't believe it the first time you bathe a newborn. It's like trying to wash the water. Writing was like that. Like water. More like water than like a body. Wasn't that something she liked about it? Then again, if her friends were able to simply sit in their bodies and write, maybe this meant that their writing was more connected to the world, the real world, which everyone seemed to want. Everyone wanted more of the real, more of the world. Maybe it meant that they could get up from their writing and go do something else, immediately, something useful, wash a baby in real life, for example, looking at the baby the whole time. They might even wear those gloves made out of washcloths, cozy pastel mitts, which made it so that the baby would never slip from their grasp. They could soap the baby's back without any worry that they might accidentally drop the baby out of its blue plastic tub and into the grimy kitchen sink. They wouldn't have to worry about the baby's little arm or leg slipping into the garbage disposal, oh, God, or about the baby sliding out of their ungloved hands and onto the bathroom floor, cracking its head, the blood, oh, God. Not that she had a baby. Not that any of her friends had babies. This isn't a real baby, she thought. What was a baby in a story? It was a word. The word was baby. The word was body. Was her own body a word? She couldn't stop thinking about it all the way home: body, body, body, body, body, body, body.

The next day, while she was walking to the grocery store, an acorn fell from a tree, bounced off the sidewalk, and hit her on the nipple. Hit her squarely on the left nipple. But was squarely the right word? Was nipple? Was acorn? It hit her hard, too. Hard, certainly, even if not squarely.

*Danielle Dutton's most recent book is the novel "Margaret the First." She teaches at Washington University in St. Louis and edits Dorothy, a publishing project.*

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