

## Just A Pinch

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At three and a half, I am driven to Riverside Square, where my mother and I lean against a glass counter, the letters above spelling out Fine Jewelry in fancy script. She taps the glass with her long red nail and picks out a pair of rubies. Your birthstone, she explains when I make a face at the color. I never did like red, how fitting that I would be born in the month of red rubies! I would rather have—well, I don't know. But at the age of three and a half, I know I am not at all concerned with piercing my ears and wearing jewelry for more than a fleeting moment while pulling on my mother's ears. No, I care about elephants and purple crayons and finding roly-poly bugs in the dirt. I definitely was not the one in charge of the day's agenda. I did not lift myself into the car, did not strap myself into the car seat. I did not drive to the mall, or lead myself by the hand through the parking lot and past the perfume.

I am seated high on a stool, and can see down through the top of the glass rows of earrings pressed into felt squares, and rings on plush fingers. Mommy holds my hair back, while a pretty lady wipes my ear with something cold and leans in real close to my face. Hold still now, this isn't going to hurt. You will only feel a pinch. Good girl, what a good little girl! And then, KA-CHH! the gun has pierced me, deafened me! And okay, good girl, just one more time! And then KA-CHH! and Oh My God! And oh good girl, you look so pretty! And I am deaf in two ears, and OH! I think it is hurting now, ok yes, it is definitely hurting now; I am scared and my face feels hot and what is that buzzing noise? Don't cry, I tell myself, I won't cry, I won't cry, I won't!

Don't touch it Jack! You'll get an infection, my mother says. But oh my God the throbbing!

And then strange hands are lifting me off of the seat, and here now is the hand with the red nails that I know, squeezing my own pudgy one, my tiny sausage fingers. It leads me back through the perfume and the parking lot. I do not feel very pretty like Mommy said that I would. I feel hurt, and my ears are red, and I want to touch them, just a little bit, but I'm not allowed. I'll get

an infection.

And then here she is, strapping me into this car seat and smiling in my face, and then there she is, her eyes smiling in the rearview mirror. Now you can be like Mommy, and wear pretty earrings, she says to the mirror. The light is red, and she turns around, reaching her arm out to me, but the seat belt won't let her turn fully, so she just wiggles her fingers at my face.