glove

My father bought me a left-handed baseball glove, which made my hand look large and masculine, not the feminine, delicate hand I had to remember not to press against my hips. As soon as I slipped it on I knew I would be bored, and I made no effort to hide it as he stood a few yards away, yelling out “Catch!” as if I were made for this meaningless task. The baseball flipped over my gloved hand each time, my wrist a hinge.

I could see the frustration in my father’s eyes as my cousins stood around to watch, my uncles judging from a distance. It would be yet another athletic failure. His first: the boxing career that didn’t work out. And I, his oldest, nothing of a jock in my baby fat, my soft voice, my gentle nature. I collected stamps and books. I held my girl cousin’s hairpins while she tightened her braids.

My mind wandered, and I changed the ball into an egg, the red membranes glowing through. A seashell holding its salty breath. An avocado pit turned bone-white in the desert sun. Or maybe, just maybe, it was John Steinbeck’s pearl. I saw all of these wonders flying toward me, but not the baseball itself. The baseball, full of manly rage, came charging at my chest, striking my sternum with a thud that yanked me
out of daydream and into the terrible world of disappointed fathers and uncles who willingly exchanged their spectator sport from catch to knock-him-down.