

Cynthia Riede
from *Tico Tico*

In the morning, I walk to the television repair shop on the corner near my house. I've never been in the shop, but I've noticed it in passing--a weathered, wooden building with the words "Herb's TV & Radio Repair" painted in peeling black letters above the doorway. In the window of the shop there is a display of stuffed animals: a teddy bear, a blue horse, a zebra. There is a ceramic bald eagle and an inflatable buffalo made of pink vinyl. At the center, a mechanical Miss Piggy doll draped in a purple satin gown whirls on a pedestal, her arm rising and falling. A large sign taped to the window says: WANT TO KNOW THE FEEL OF FUR? SLAM YOUR HAND IN A CAR TRUNK.

The inside of the shop smells like chicken noodle soup and oranges.

I stand in the doorway for a moment, looking at the televisions that line the walls; their pictures are on but the volume is down. They remind me of lighted aquariums. At the back of the shop, I see a man hunched over a radio.

"Are you Herb?" I say.

"No," he says. He turns to look at me. The top of his head is bald and the hair that remains is white and thin and wavers around his ears like a pale sea plant. He looks like a man who is perpetually surprised. I realize this is because he has no eyebrows. His cardigan is powder-blue, and one of its arms is dotted with tiny holes, as if that arm alone has been attacked by moths. "Herb died two years ago."

"I'm sorry," I say.

He shrugs. "Never knew him. Bought this place from his son."

He turns his attention to the radio again. He gives it a sharp rap with a screwdriver. "Look at this piece of crap," he says. He tosses the screwdriver onto the countertop; it rolls off and clatters to the floor. A white cat emerges from beneath the counter, skulks past a ceramic model of the old RCA dog, and slinks into the back room.

Cynthia Riede

"I have a broken television," I say. The man studies me for a moment, frowning, as if I have said *There is broccoli growing in my basement*.

"It's a Zenith," I say.

"You like radios?" he says. He touches my elbow and guides me toward a glassed-enclosed cabinet. There are old radios on its shelves; they gleam beneath the lights--painstakingly cleaned and restored. I can see my face reflected in the chrome accents of a red Emerson. He takes a key from his cardigan pocket, opens the cabinet door, and removes a white radio with a six-inch high Charlie McCarthy perched on its top, tiny legs crossed. "I just got this last week," he says. "Had it shipped from Kansas. Isn't it something?" I peer at the delicate arch of Charlie's eyebrow, at the miniature top hat and monocle. "I loved Edgar Bergman," he says. He holds the radio aloft for a moment, gazing at it from below.

"My Zenith collapsed into a single point of light," I say.

"And then it was gone," he says.

"That's right."

"Nothing but a black and silent screen."

I nod. He sighs and pulls a pad of paper from his trouser pocket. "Write down your address," he says, handing me a pencil. "I'll have the boy come pick it up when he gets in."

I write my address in careful letters. I can hear the soft *click click* as Miss Piggy rotates in the window behind me. I glance up as the man reaches into the display and gently removes a face-down stuffed rabbit. "Can't have bunnies lying around like passed out drunks," he mutters.

I hand him the pad.

"Have you ever heard a rabbit scream?" he says, holding up the rabbit.

Cynthia Riede

"Never," I say.

"It's a horrible sound."

"I've heard a goose hiss."

"Not the same," he says, shaking his head sadly. He sets the rabbit in an upright position between the zebra and a whale.

Walking home, I try to imagine what sound a screaming rabbit might make. I hear the whisper of my dress against my thighs, the *tok tok* of a Styrofoam cup blowing along the pavement. I hear the long drawn out sigh of the hinge on my screen door. *Maybe it sounds something like a dog whistle*, I think, stepping inside and latching the door behind me. *Maybe it sounds like a tea kettle*.

This makes me think of tea, so I brew a cup. I sit by the window with Buster. Together, we watch two squirrels chase each other around the trunk of an elm; they loop and chatter, their bristled tails rising and falling.