Janie Goodmansen’s Reply*

Jim Richards

Jim asked me, encouraged me, even begged me not to do it. You’re surrounded by seedy lies, he said, don’t sew them into your breasts. Did he worry it would reflect badly on him? I don’t know, I couldn’t ask, and he couldn’t understand. His breasts were bigger than mine. (He hates it when I say that.) People think it’s D-cup ambition: “Boobs or Bust!” But that’s not it. As a teacher, I know how close D is to F. And I knew what it would cost. I had nothing. You’re not flat, he said, just small, and small is cute. After all the nursing—my offerings seemed so sad—I couldn’t even fill an A. I only wanted to redeem the goods God gave me, with a little interest, “mine own with usury.” I bought swimsuit after swimsuit every spring and sent them back. I took a knife and cut the foam cups from one and doubled them in what I wore. But that’s not it. I was missing the virtues that soften, that warm. I know, it could’ve been worse. Look around you, he said, often. Which body would you trade for yours? That’s not it. I wanted to trade what my teen feels when I hug him for comfort. I wanted half the generosity my sister had surgery to reduce. I wanted a lower grade, B instead of A. Nothing that stood out because it was absent or because it was present. I wanted love to pillow the cares of those I love. Not a sternum. Not a heart of stone.