RUTH BEHAR

FOR MY SON GABRIEL WHO MUST ONE DAY BECOME A MAN

> *. . . our sons must become men—such men as we hope our daughters, born and unborn, will be pleased to live among. Our sons will not grow into women. Their way is more difficult than that of our daughters, for they must move away from us, without us. Hopefully, our sons have what they have learned from us, and a howness to forge it into their own image.*
>
> —Audre Lorde, "Man Child," from *Sister Outsider*

I wanted a son. Most women I know want a daughter. But I didn't. I wanted a son. Male body and all. And I had you.

I see myself in you so completely. I know you have your father's baby fine blond hair and your father's lanky body, the kind of body stretching toward heaven that El Greco liked to paint. That makes people who don't know any better think you're a replica of your father. But you have my eyes, my lips, and my hands. Our thumbs match exactly; they have since you were born. You came out of my body. I tell you that a lot. And your body remembers my body. When you come into our bed in the morning, you reach for me, you put your hand in mine, thumb to thumb.

One day, as if you've had a taste of the apple, you gain the knowledge that you can strip the grass skirt and bathing suit off your Hawaiian Barbie, the only female doll you have amid an overpopulation of muscle-heavy male action figures. Look, you say, pointing to the breasts. Look, you say, pointing again, a vagina. And you take that naked Barbie into the bath with you. I watch you pulling her around by her long dark hair. Be gentle, I say. For my sake,