

Stroke

Carly Hafner

I spoon the dough out onto the cookie sheets—four globs by three—and put them in the oven. As I move the finished cookies onto the cooling rack, I revel in the emptiness of the house. Here alone, it is mine. For the first time in years I don't count the minutes I have the house to myself. I seize the chance to be in the kitchen. I open the blinds, play music and fill the oven. As I bake, the sun flows with the acoustic guitars. The smell engulfs me, filling my mouth and making me taste the irresistible cookie dough. That morning the kitchen had not felt relaxed. It was dark. Predawn. My father slumped, limp in his wheelchair. Hayley sobbed. I screamed for Mom, dialed 911.

Mom shook him into consciousness. Sirens approached. Men and women filled the room, looking at him. He didn't understand. Everyone left. I went to school and came home and everyone was still gone. So I mix chocolate chips with flour and butter. I eat the mixture and am too full to eat the cookies when they come out of the oven. I stack them and stuff them in bags and fill the freezer, humming all the while.