

In the physics
lab at the University
of Arizona, my father
studies semiconductor laser
theory while I play solitaire
on the guest computer.
Everything is the productive
beige of IBM in the early
nineties and the air is
thick with the heat of working
machines and the scholarly
buildup of dust. My fingers
are sticky the way kids' fingers
are sticky, and as I drag
and drop card onto
card, I leave the mouse
sticky in the places
I hold it. Ours is a secret
language here, me and dad.
No one else speaks
it. Everyone speaks to
themselves in their own
secret languages and to each
other in the universal
tongue of equations scribbled in
marker on whiteboard: a series
of long and short and shorter
squeaks. Everyone is,
in their specific way, far from
home. In fractions and
superscript, they tell one
another to take their
minds off it. In numbers contained
by parentheses, they say,
But look at all
the ways we have split
up this earth. I win
the game and the screen
erupts with cards, tumbling
and bouncing and
plunging again in soft
parabolas: the quiet
trajectory of hearts
and clubs
falling.

We

grow

human

ears

on

the

backs

of

rats

and

claim

to

be

experts

on

what

doesn't

belong.