

## Drink of Choice

*Ann E. Wallace*

Vodka tonic was my drink of choice  
those days, so it is probably what I ordered  
that night.

My friend and I sat  
and drank, as we cursed  
the man who put his hands  
where they  
do  
not  
belong,  
who lured girls, six, seven years old  
with a box of toys  
and kept the lights low.

Two mothers, we sat  
and drank, gazed into our glasses,  
zeroed in on anger, and felt afraid  
of the world that had never been  
safe for our children.

Eyes lowered toward each other,  
we did not notice the quiet man  
on the barstool  
next to mine  
until one of us rose  
to use the restroom. Turned  
toward us, his eyes lowered on bare  
skin that flashed on the lit phone cupped  
in the palm of his hand.

*Come on, it's time to go,*  
we paid the tab, slipped our coats on  
and hurried into darkness,  
two blocks to another pub,  
settled at the bar, let out

a tight laugh, ordered two Coronas.

We remained  
quiet  
when the man  
with his charged phone  
appeared  
and chose the stool  
next to mine.

Weary of danger, consumed  
by alcohol and the grief of innocence  
lost, two friends, we buffered ourselves  
in the safety of each other, blocked out late night patrons  
around us, including the man on the stool too close,  
and yet, our resolve held no weight  
against his.

It was late when  
my friend saw  
the man on the stool  
rub against mine,  
rub against, I know now, me.  
But when she saw, he pulled away, leapt up,  
zipped his pants, and  
bolted  
out the door.

My friend and I,  
we watched, paralyzed,  
as men rushed after, scouted outside,  
but he was gone.

Alone at the empty bar, we had no way  
to undo the horrors, compounding  
across generations,  
to make it all  
go away.