

by DENISE DUHAMEL

## SLIPPERS

When I went through security at the airport, a worker handed me a pair of slippers that looked like they were made of the paper bags in which I used to carry my lunch to school. We'd used the bags in Arts and Crafts to make puppets, flattening the bags into their empty states, sliding our hands in, folding our fingers into the bag's bottom like a mitten. The bottom was for the eyes and the nose and the top lip and the bag's side was for the bottom lip and chin and neck and torso. One Wednesday we made puppets as self portraits that even talked to each other all through recess. Some had bows or glasses or pipe cleaner hair, two extra dangling strips of construction paper for pretty but limp useless legs.

I slid my feet into the slippers as my sneakers traveled without me through x-ray. As I shuffled along, I was back in the children's hospital where the wide spongy slippers never quite fit, where those of us who could run were told to slow down in the hall full of trays and wheelchairs. I made a paper bag puppet of a nurse, of the clown who used to come with balloons on Saturdays. On her deathbed, my friend's mother hailed a taxi. My uncle said that his boat was here, and a friend was ready to push her empty grocery cart down the aisle. When I try to get to the other side, I'll be looking for gate H15, clutching my ticket, a window seat—steady in my paper slippers of departure.

## JOB INTERVIEW

I had to poop in a toilet—a special toilet that couldn't be tampered with—so the company could examine my shit. “But I don't have to go,” I said, sure I had lost my chance to make a good impression. “That's OK,” the boss answered. “I like you, kid. I like your honesty. Tell me, are your stools runny or firm?” He gave me a key to the bathroom where applicants had their feces scrutinized. He said I could come back anytime I had to go between now and tomorrow at five. “Make sure not to flush,” he said. “You know how many applicants have flushed out of habit? We don't like people to do anything out of habit here.” He showed me the red “analyze now” button to push after I did my business. My business was his business. As he shook my hand, a rat scurried out of his suit's sleeve and ran down across his wrist onto mine.