fugue

Issue 51

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Fiction, nonfiction, and poetry submissions are accepted September 1 through May 1. All material received outside this period will be returned unread. Please visit www.fuguejournal.com for submission guidelines. All contributors receive payment and a complimentary copy of the journal in which their work appears. Please send no more than five poems, two short-shorts, one story, or one essay at a time. Submissions in more than one genre should be sent separately. We will consider simultaneous submissions (submissions that have been sent concurrently to another journal), but we will not consider multiple submissions. All multiple submissions will be returned unread. Once you have submitted a piece to us, wait for a response on this piece before submitting again.

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Summer-Fall,Vol. 51

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14TH ANNUAL RON MCFARLAND PRIZE FOR POETRY

JUDGED BY ROSE MCLARNEY

WINNER: "BLAND MEDITATIONS" BY MARK JAY BREWIN JR.

I admire how Brewin tucks the ideas and statements into the poem's sections early on and lets specific imagery and objects ~ that are named almost animate ~ be the conclusions. Intimately personal as the atmosphere he creates it, many of us can inhabit it, and consider how his place is perhaps a common-seeming one, but never "bland.".

—Rose McLarney

Mark Jay Brewin Jr.

BLAND MEDITATIONS

"BLAND – From ½ blk south of Wilkins north beyond N Ashland, 1 east of Graham Oakdale rd"
Hill's Burlington Alamance County, N.C.
City Directory [1952-1953]

I. The Lost Colony

A break in the rain, finally, long enough for us to air it out.
"Everything in its place, a place for everything," my grandmother's creed.

How quickly I fill these new shelves with things I can't seem to throw away.
Her Skippy jar full of plastic birthday cake toppers from the sixties.

First one cicada bickers, then another from across the front yard.
The neighbor kids are running around with sodas and toy guns, yelling.
Our cover's broken—we're hit, we're hit—back to base! And from among them:
We never made base! That ain't fair! You can't call that now! Wait! Where is it?

II. These Colors Don't Run

I was taught early of the sense in separating colors from whites.
Delicate Only. Wash Inside Out. Do Not Use High-Heat; Hang to Dry.

Cops patrol as school lets out, the black boys too young to know how to fold.
No wonder autumn arrests the red maple. Compels its leaves like prints.

By the final spin cycle something gives and rattles off like gunfire.
I lift the lid to so many arms choke-holding the agitator
and search the wet mess. There, under the knot of pants flying their white flags:
two pennies forgotten at the bottom of the drum, one for each eye.

III. Smoke Follows Beauty

My father burned—busted bedroom doors and lawn chairs, dislocated limbs.
Anything the city couldn't cart away with the other garbage.

The simple fact: once it's past prime, it's either burn barrel or trash bin.
Fall's end always marked among the farms by the withered fields set aflame.

The suburbs agreeably a whole other beast, but here, still, a blaze.
Incense, wood-smoke in air as sudden as a hawkcry. A cardinal,
cat-mangled, missing the normal, feathered crest—his head a blue-black coal,
beak an ember searing free seeds from the suet block in the feeder.

IV. In The Twilight Zone

Witness if you will the willow veiled in mist beside the drainage ditch.
Late night TV illuminating the room that missing shade of blue.

Jack Corry speaks to himself, eying the XO on the shuttle fin—
"All you're leaving behind is loneliness. Yes, I must remember that."

This is no easy task combing the tangles from my sleeping wife's hair;
the gentle breaking that it takes to carefully work and not wake her.
She resettles and whispers something I can't hear, fortunes from her dreams.
Another white noise machine, a yowling beagle shatters this long night.

V. Indivisible

Summer complaints. Sprinklers hissing and spitting along the boulevard.
Out wandering the block, a lone ant walking the length of my knuckles.

Hard-pressed to name a single charmer among them that makes up these greens:
crab grass, sandbur, bittercress, common vetch, dollarweed, deadnettle, spurge.

Then that moment of outside peaking in, almost our split-level, here—
an older set of windows in the den, signs marked private property.
Subtleties. This change of address; the strangeness of a different view.
A punching bag chained to a fallen pine that won't be swayed by the breeze.

VI. On Pins and Needles

Why go to anything else but the source? Such beauty in the bare facts.
"The plane tree's globular heads of seeds hang singly from their slender stems."

That childish sensation. Button balls, we called them, sole-crushed to dust.
Nothing racy now, sycamores slowly undressing by the raised bed.

Every season needs those tiny pieces that get at the point of it.
How else to keep out the chill? The knitted cap my sister made for me,
a matchstick doll somehow in back of the closet—the warmth from these threads.
Like a godsend, that cheap fence-dial taking the day's temperature.

VII. And When the Bough Breaks

That instant the heart stops—caught off guard by the crash of the ice-maker.
Its endless multiplying, the most productive thing these short hours.

Again I sweep away the webs in the corners, the spider's soft nests,
my efforts exposed by the bulb glaring from the basement rafters.

Sundown, with my eye on rest, and I witness this reckless moonlighting.
Near my age. One man in the branches, no harness, hacking away bits.
Two below staring, their breathing out of earshot; they looked sore afraid.
To behold the desperate attempt to tear it down on their own terms.

VIII. The Zero Point Field

This time tomorrow, the same. Three D-batteries rusting by the curb.
These gusts bursting the dandelions' bubbles just a force of habit.

Incredible how far we sometimes must reach just to get our bearings.
A rubber cobra sunning on a carport over a gravel drive.

Consider this cosmic balancing act, making something from nothing—
I kneel to gather the rubies of Carolina clay from the floor,
the hall curtains drawn open so I might better observe this lesson—
mercy is bristles off the broom, redemption the dustpan's taped handle.

Caitlin Scarano

PARTINGS

Sever the night cloak latched
around your neck.

Take my father's hands that clutch the claw
hammer.

Sever the grief,
sever the hammer.

Remove the skin from my face
so I will stop mistaking myself

for my mask. Sever my vanity.
Gather the wolves in the silo.

The imagined family
farm now abandoned. Let their howls

become cylindrical, taut. You may sever
the barn with fire,

but these bastard bones
should stay in our bodies.

Call out your demons
for their long-limbed indifference.

I am more than a bedpost, more than
what keeps me tied to it.

I am the exposed parts
of a watch face, the ticking

beneath a tongue I haven't touched
with my own. Driftless

the body in the skull's
canal. *I came*

to a point in my life that I could not sustain.
Suffer the creature,

sever the soil from this eave of roots. Forget
your lover looking back at you

from a field of snow struck blue
by the fists of an orbiting

moon. There are rooms of silver,
winter. Sugar

separated from the blood.
There were whole days

when I didn't speak. Now, detritus
in and out of my mouth, smell

of wormwood, this black wasp
between my sheets. Separate her

wings from the thorax
for she is curious.

Marvel at her exoskeleton's
slender waist.

Marvel, too, an act of severance.
We no longer bow

beside our beds at night. I am no longer afraid
of fucking strangers

or being caught under a streetlight
as it flickers out. Fear

is a form of separation. I've carved an eye
into my palm. Gender now

uninteresting. A dog whistles back
at the shadow calling to it.

Ruby Turok

PRELUDES FOR SOLO PIANO

i.
What I have wanted for so long
is to begin,
by which I mean, to have no memory.

To press a key down and listen and let it die.

To press a key down and listen and let it die.

To look up and see
every feather

waiting for the direction of gravity
to be declared.

ii.

I find I am standing
in the middle of a long flat maze with black

walls and white floors.

How unnatural
it is, to stand still in a maze.
I let out

a melody for a
thread

behind me.

iii.

My fingers are falling to the keys
as if to the earth —

their earth,
an earth that falls
away under them and rises as they rise.

By the sound, I could
believe the earth had sunk

into me
slightly, and is emerging.

iv.

Since air is the ground you walk on,
music, what do you breathe?

I have noticed you grow
best when I close
my eyes, that darkness is your light.

My ears breathe in the sound you send:

they are grateful. In exchange,
I give out more time. You inhale it
hungrily and it colours you.

v.

Hands that were mine
having other limbs to end —

limbs, that are lines of sound
moving without desire

to add to anything —
if I am silent then,
it is because I am singing,

singing about how
my mouth was an illusion.

vi.

There is a silence after the end
when I raise my hands, having done
all I can, and all of you

wait; a silence that lasts as long as the forearms
remain tense;
each time, I tell myself, this time

I will hold the silence
forever, this time
I will not give you your lives back.

14TH ANNUAL FUGUE PROSE CONTEST
JUDGED BY MEGAN KRUSE

WINNER: "ARMS OF SEQUOIA" BY MARY MANDEVILLE

"In prose that is both precise and expansive, Mary Mandeville explores the points where our human grief intersects with the physical earth. What is the weight of our mark upon the world, and upon each other? Where do our losses belong, in a world so much bigger than ourselves? Mandeville weaves a moving elegy for her son that seems to scale far beyond herself, branching up from sorrow toward an enduring sun."

—Megan Kruse

Mary Mandeville

ARMS OF A SEQUOIA

Nature is always lovely, invincible, glad, whatever is suffered by her creatures. All scars she heals, whether in rocks or water or sky or hearts.

~John Muir, John of the Mountains

Traffic whizzed past on highway 99 just outside the small town of Aurora, Oregon. I slid out of the Subaru passenger seat and hurried toward the police vehicle parked a few yards away. I shivered and pulled my lightweight sweater closed against the late April breeze.

"This is the place," the sheriff called. A big man whose olive green uniform shirt and buttons strained around his wide middle, he rounded his patrol car to stand beside me. As my partner Kim neared, he inclined his head toward a huge tree on the side of the road.

"Follow me."

He strode behind the tree, leading the way to the spot where he found and removed our nineteen-year-old son's body the day before. For a moment I stood under the gray sky without moving, as if the roots of the Giant Sequoia had snuck up and grabbed my feet. As if I could stand forever on the road side of the tree and be saved from really knowing what had transpired on the other side. But I had to go and willed each foot forward.

Massive branches reached out from a huge main trunk in several directions like the arms of a great upside-down land octopus. Heart pounding, I ducked under an enormous limb. A thick layer of spent evergreen needles hid a network of sprawling roots. I caught a toe and stumbled. The sheriff offered a hand to steady me and I took it,

because though I was fit and strong and often rejected help, the steel core that normally steadied me was melting, draining out my rubbery legs.

The Sequoia dwarfed the man in green who towered over me, this small town sheriff who found Brandon's body dangling out of sight of passersby. With his free hand he pointed up and I followed the arc of his arm, tipped my head back and back, allowed my gaze to float high into the maze of branches that spiraled out from the trunk overhead. When Kim reached his other side the sheriff spoke.

"He strung his rope around that branch up there. His toes would have been, well ..." he waved his hand right in front of us "... right about here."

I didn't see Brandon's feet when they were pink and pudgy, couldn't press my nose to his fuzzy round head and inhale the yummy scent of brand new baby. I never counted each precious toe or pulled them to my lips for a soft caress. I didn't hold each chubby toe and say *this little piggy went to market, this little piggy stayed home.*

Brandon was born to someone else, his infant brain addled with methamphetamines. Passed from foster home to foster home, his little fingers and toes were counted by other mothers, if they were counted.

By the time he came to live with Kim and me just two months before his seventh birthday, he'd closed the door on cuddling and snuggling. That door was locked, the shades were drawn, the sign on the window turned to 'closed.' No little piggies for me to count.

I pressed my palms into the tree bark.

"He could have set his feet on this limb."

A car whooshed by on 99, the hum of tires on pavement muted by wood and bark and branches.

My son's toes hung one inch from salvation.

"I'm climbing up."

The sheriff bent his knee. Despite my dress, tights, and open-heeled shoes with straps, I stepped on his thigh, hoisted myself up, and landed in a cradle of massive tree limbs where cigarette butts mingled with a thick pile of rust-colored needles in a space big enough to stretch out a sleeping bag.

"You could live up here," I called out.

I sunk to the cushion of spongy bark and old needles. Through the curtain of evergreen boughs that hung like drapes, a golden field stretched toward faraway mountains. I drew my legs into my chest, wrapped arms around them, and leaned back against the trunk. Something crinkled. I turned and tugged at the piece of yellow and blue paper tucked into a crevice of bark, a Butterfinger wrapper. Brandon's favorite candy bar.

Perched on the deck of the tree house we'd built in our back yard, Brandon hollered.

"You're not my real mom, ya know."

"I'm not your birth mom, you mean."

I sat in an Adirondack chair, my spine pressed against its slats, belly pulled tight. I'd learned to steel myself, to protect both body and heart from his chronic rejection.

In a bright tie-dyed shirt, khaki cargo shorts and Converse tennis shoes with white tube socks, nine-year-old Brandon gripped the green triangle handle that attached to a zip-line strung from the tree house, across the patio, to a thirty-five-foot birch tree.

"My mom had a three-story house!" He puffed his chest out like Peter Pan. "The top floor was all toys for me."

"Wow."

I tipped my head back and gazed up at our third floor window. He'd lived in a trailer, a meth house, a shelter, ricocheted between his mom and foster homes until a drug raid sent his mom to jail and made him a ward of the state when he was three years old.

"I had more toys than anybody."

He stood on tippy-toes, ready, then kicked off the platform and flew over me, nimble and wiry like the gymnast he could have been, strong arms gripping the zip-line handle, legs dangling, hair flying, squealing with laughter.

From the ground, Kim aimed her phone into the branches of the Sequoia. She shot photo after photo, recording every angle of the last place our son had been. I never understood why a parent would want to see the place their missing child's body was found, too wrenching and too fucking gruesome. But we'd both been compelled, Kim and I, from the moment a Portland Police chaplain delivered the news on our front porch. We each knew instantly we had to see it, feel it, smell it, touch it for ourselves, inhale whatever last molecules of our son might linger. While Kim took her pictures, I curled into the tree, in the very spot he'd sat contemplating his end. He would have stood on the same thick limb before he kicked off, noose around his neck.

Before puberty smacked Brandon upside the head and the methamphetamines he was exposed to in the womb jumbled his brain chemistry more than ever, or the genetics that caused schizophrenia in his maternal aunt twisted his mind toward delusions, or the trauma of his early childhood exploded in a massive PTSD-type breakdown when he reconnected with his biological family, or all three factors blended in some terrible psychotic trifecta. In other words, before his beginning triggered his end, our young son climbed the trees in our backyard like a chimp in the jungle. Committed with every muscle and sinew, he backpacked with us in the Oregon coast range and reveled camping in old growth forests near Mt. Hood. He liked to row a boat and fish and swim and snorkel in the ocean. I never saw him happier than when he was outside. For the longest time, I harbored hope that his love of nature might save him.

"There's some carving in the bark." The sheriff's tone projected practiced calm.

I rolled onto my hands and knees, crawled along the limb, then straddled it like I would a horse. My mouth fell open, heart sped its beating, fingers flew out to touch what he'd left engraved.

"4:20," I read aloud.

"Do you think it means he did it at 4:20 in the afternoon?" Kim snapped another photo.

Only the cool spring breeze answered, a whisper of air through branches.

My fingers slid from his salute to the tokers' club onto the B and the M, initials that claimed the first name given by his birth mom and the last name – mine – he owned as his. I lingered on the letters, ached for this lost boy-man who hated himself enough to dangle from the end of rope when he could have set his toes on a sturdy branch, but loved himself enough to claim his existence by carving a woody epitaph.

"B. M." I read aloud.

Some time later I'd say, in an attempt to soften the un-softenable,"Why the hell didn't he use the middle 'A' like we always told him to? 'BM' makes lousy initials."

I let my fingers explore the dates: 2-26-1995, the day he was born. Then the next.

"Does it say 4-*nine*-2014?

My voice had a shrill edge that scraped against the cloud-covered silence.

My ribcage gripped my lungs, I could barely get a breath. He'd run off in a huff on April fourth. We assumed he'd come back home. While we were calling everyone who might have seen him, was he already dead?

From my perch I called down, "it looks like there might be a '1' scratched in front of the '9'. Maybe he changed his mind."

"It *is* kind of hard to read," the sheriff offered.

My brain slammed shut against the image of Brandon hanging in the tree unnoticed for twelve days before one of the rare pedestrians on sidewalk-less 99 noticed something odd behind one of the trees lining the road and raced off to arrive pale and panting at the sheriff's office.

Later I'd recall the sheriff's tone, non-committal with a slight question at the end. Later I'd suspect he already knew what I wouldn't be willing to accept for over a year. The clues would add up: the sheriff's avoidance of eye contact when I asked how long he thought the body had been there, the video suicide note found in his backpack date-stamped April 9, the pinched expression of horror on the mortician's face when I asked to see the body.

A year later, I wouldn't be able to make out so much as a ghost of that '1' in the 2014 date etched into the bark. I don't why it mattered so much, dead is dead, but I couldn't bear to know he died on April 9th and hung in the tree until the 21st when his body was found.

Time alone in trees was normal for Brandon. Our backyard trees wrapped arms around boyhood – sunshiny days hanging from the zip-line, sleepovers in the treehouse, and fantasies from books galore. He became a ranger's apprentice, a wizard, a boy-warrior alone in ancient forests, his joy evident in shimmering blonde streaks in sandy brown hair, strong, defined muscles in arms and back, rosy cheeks, broad smiles.

Our backyard trees absorbed agony as he grew from ranger-wizard-warrior to brooding vampire-teen. Red-faced tantrums over broccoli and homework morphed into stealing, smoking weed, alternative school, a brush with the law. He skulked out to the treehouse where he hunkered down alone and smoked cigarettes.

He started carrying a bowie knife on his belt and then a hatchet too. A thousand stab wounds oozed on trunks and branches all around our yard, wounds that gaped, wounds that bled pitch and sap. We were scared of him and didn't realize how scared he was of us.

"Please, Bran," I entreated when it became clear his mind was exploding, "just talk to the woman from Early Psychosis intervention, see what she has to offer. I made an appointment for next Tuesday."

"I'm not crazy." His voice gravely with overtones of cold rain.

"I never said you were. Just listen?"

"I don't need any help, mom. Back off."

That was the day he ran off with a full backpack, including his sturdy climbing rope. I stood in the driveway and watched him go. When I talked to a police officer he said, "He's an adult ma'am. He can go if he wants to." For seventeen days, we had no idea where he was. I climbed the ladder to his tree house in search of clues. The floor was littered with cigarette butts and Butterfinger wrappers.

Kim and I have visited the Giant Sequoia half a dozen times since Brandon died. We've gone alone or with friends or family. We've taken flowers, candles, Butterfinger candy bars. I climb into the branches where I sit, cradled in the giant evergreen arms that were the last arms to hold my son. In that quiet place, the agony so prevalent in his life dissipates, drifts over the golden field toward the mountains beyond, sinks into layers of evergreen needles, and is absorbed by the old tree.

Bark is rapidly growing over what Brandon carved. At first I was shocked, imagined that his inscription would always be there. But of course it's fading, scars grown over by the healing skin of the tree. Before long, I'll visit the largest Sequoia alongside an unremarkable stretch of Oregon highway 99 and the epitaph will be completely erased. f

Peter Gurche

CHICKEN SHIT, CHICKEN SALAD: ETHNOGRAPHY OF A NORTHERN

When I first saw Bill, I thought he might be coming to murder me. I heard his steps on the rotting porch and looked out the window, catching just a flash of my visitor. He carried the air of a middle-aged white supremacist: shaved head, sharp eyes, and the signs of strength gone to gut. I can't say why that first glimpse of him brought fear. Maybe it was his ill-fitting sweatpants, or the paleness of his large hands. All I could tell, from the set of his head on his neck, was that he was a man who didn't compromise.

I lived, at the time, in a one-room dry cabin in the boreal woods that hemmed Fairbanks, Alaska, from all sides. The cabin sat at the foot of a birch-covered hill and the edge a sodden spruce swamp, and the dry rot in the 4x4s it perched on made the whole place shake when someone came up the stairs. In the bare and eerie stillness of that October afternoon, I was home alone when Bill's steps rattled the Mason jars on their shelves. I was expecting a visitor. I was expecting a retired science teacher-cum-mechanic, the author of an ad I had responded to for a shop apprentice. The man I was waiting for would be dressed in jeans and a tucked-in flannel, would have broad, square palms, and would whistle beneath his mustache. This was not that man.

*

I was a reluctant newcomer to Fairbanks. In previous encounters with the town during brief visits with my girlfriend, who was interning with a local watershed council, I had turned my nose up at its sprawl and grit, its northern-industrial funk. Elli, though, had been offered a permanent position and convinced me that something shining

lay beneath the frost and grime. I was skeptical, but agreed to head north and join her after I finished my summer of commercial salmon fishing.

In blue on gold, Alaska license plates proudly proclaim their state "The Last Frontier." Though the statement can seem a bit overblown in the context of, say, Wasilla's parade of track houses and strip malls, a kernel of truth hides beneath the banal. Belonging is the new shining ore of the state, and newcomers must stake a claim on the unproven grounds of their own incipient Alaskanness. Sometimes those claims prove up; and sometimes they wash out, back to Seattle or Kentucky or the Philippines. I had worked seasonally in the state as a fisherman for three summers since graduating college, and felt I'd begun to gain some credibility as a new Alaskan. But if the locals had started to cut me some slack because I lived on a boat all summer and worked in a part of their state most had never heard of, I myself was unconvinced. In fact, I wasn't even sure that I wanted to belong in Alaska; the whole state felt so distant, so sprawled, so unplanned.

And so when I arrived in Fairbanks it was with an outsider's chip on my shoulder. It would be my first full year in Alaska, and the prospect of spending a winter barely more than a hundred miles south of the Arctic Circle loomed black and bone-chilling. Shitty town, I grumbled to myself. Shitty city.

*

Some elemental shift had occurred in the moment between when I glimpsed Bill on the stairs and when I opened the door. He was still large, still intent, but his eyes were blue and kind, and he smiled as he shook my hand. His buzz cut and lumpy sweats no longer felt menacing or strange; they spoke instead of a man who didn't want to muddle in trivialities, like worrying what his hair looked like or what to wear in the morning.

We shook hands. "Nice place," he said, glancing around the one-room cabin. And it was nice, by Fairbanks standards, with its cast iron

woodstove, warm tongue-and-groove paneling, and spacious loft. "So, first winter up North, eh?" Bill gave me an appraising glance. "Looks like you've got plenty of wood."

"Hope so," I said, glancing to the eight cords Elli and I had cut and stacked outside. Bill was silent a moment, then nodded. I realized this might be my job interview.

"Well, you know from my ad, but I'm looking for someone to come help me in my shop. Do you want to come see it?" he asked.

I did. I grabbed my jacket and followed him back outside. In the driveway was his rusty blue '82 Toyota pickup, two wheel drive and low to the ground. It was loaded with Alaskan detritus: two foot sections of beat up black stove pipe, a heap of rags, some nailey 2x4s, a winter boot. He had been prospecting at the dump.

"I bought this beauty for fifty bucks," Bill informed me as we climbed into his rig. "It had been sitting in someone's yard for a quarter century, but it's dry here—cold and dry—so I knew it couldn't have rusted out much. I rebuilt the engine and she runs like a dream—those 22R's are stud." I didn't know what a 22R was. The only dry I knew was hot. I was on my way to an auto shop, and I was only somewhat sure that I knew the difference between a ratchet and a socket, much less between a head gasket and a rear main seal.

I was new to the town and new to working on cars. But in the months that followed, I would begin to see the inimitable culture of interior Alaska constellated by a man, a trade, a season. I would hear stories of Bill's previous lives. I would learn that the 22R was a legendarily long-lived, four-cylinder Toyota motor from the eighties. I would see that the winters at that latitude—inland of both the Alaska and the Brooks Range—gave snow that was so far from its liquid form it felt like sand under your skis. At that moment, I didn't know much. I was only hungry; hungry for whatever wisdom precipitated out of the cold, or came from Bill's ramblings, or lurked under the hood of a defunct old car.

*

*

Bill's house and shop were across town. We drove past two transfer stations (what Fairbanksans call the dump), the Oasis Bar and Grill, and the UAF reindeer pastures; took a left out Chena Pump road towards the river, a right on Chena Point, and a left on Skinner Drive. The neighborhood was typical suburban Fairbanks: rusted out excavators, sled dog teams, and a smattering of airplane hangars haphazardly tucked amongst the stunted tundra spruce.

"Besides being a washed-up high school science teacher and small-time Subaru mechanic, I'm also a slum lord," admitted Bill as we pulled into his drive. Three small rental cabins in various stages of completion crouched around a larger two-story structure, and about seventeen Subarus jockeyed for the rest of the space on the lot.

Bill caught me eyeing the architecture. "I pretty much build my places from the dump," he said with pride. "It's amazing what people will drop off at those transfer stations— plywood, windows, fridges and stoves that just need a little love. There's a lot of real good garbage in this town."

Bill's shop turned out to be the whole first story of his house. The floor was made of recycled garage doors—3 inches of insulating foam—covered in plywood in its second life. It was painted a tidy white so that dropped bolts stood out in sharp relief and leaks could be quickly spotted. Repurposed cabinets sat on the walls, and a general air of earnest work hung about the place. You could trace the patterns of labor in the shop by the layout of order and disarray: the well used tools and the places they hung or laid on a workbench were clearly organized and free of clutter, while on far-flung shelves languished forgotten jars of thermostats, old batteries, and a rusting collection of water pumps. A woodstove hulked in the corner.

"If you decide to work with me, I want you to treat this like your own shop," Bill said as I gazed around, trying to make sense of the unfamiliar geometries. "Good mechanics are in love with their

tools—treat them like you just spent your fishing paycheck on them." I nodded solemnly. "I can't pay much, just eight bucks an hour and some secrets of the trade, but you're welcome to join me. I won't have you sweeping the floor and doing oil changes—you'll be wrenching on engines within the week."

I gave a small smile. I wanted to know the things Bill knew. I wanted to feel the thrill of slipping on a greasy blue pair of coveralls, crawling under a car, and knowing what the hell I was looking at. If that chance struck in a strange town with a strange man in a shop built from the dump, then that sounded like a ray of redemption on the otherwise bleak horizon of my tenure in Fairbanks to me. I told Bill I'd be ready to go the next week.

"Alright, brothah," he said loudly with an avuncular slap on the shoulder, and headed back to the truck to drive me home. I grinned. I grinned past his neighbor's stack of rusty culverts, past the reindeer in their fields, past gravel side roads and one-story mini-malls, all the way through the early dusk to the cabin on its quaking stilts.

*

Fairbanks is not a glorious city. It sprawls in a careless rash around the confluence of the Chena and the Tanana rivers, its collapsing structure held up by a few stolid bastions: the University of Alaska Fairbanks, the Military Base, the cluster of Big Box stores. Downtown does not make the list. When I first arrived, I knew it for the ugliest city I had ever seen. Strip malls stacked on trailer parks crowded out ATV dealerships perched on the edge of gravel quarries were overgrown by dense patches of birch and spruce woods, and through the clamor ran your pick of six lane arterials or gravel driveways. The quiet neighborhood street is a rare creature in Fairbanks. If you can find one, it will be lined with synthetic-sided ranchers and faux log cabins with yards full of junk and driveways full of overgrown diesels.

Fairbanks is less like a city than a bloated, modern-day trading post for the bush: the last frontier of the last frontier. The Homesteading Act was viable in Alaska until 1986, and the seventies saw plenty of people stake a claim on forty acres of spruce in the interior of the state. Though the frontier is now officially closed, a vibrant culture of semi-self-provisioning people still thrives in the liminal space around town. The population of the city proper is around 32,000; of the borough, 101,000. That means nigh on 70,000 people live off in the woods, shooting their own meat, burning birch for heat, and driving an hour into town for Velveeta slicers, Bud Light, and Chex Mix. You can drive for a couple of hours through what feels like uninhabited woods, and set your watch by the regularity of dirt roads leading off the highway with forty mailboxes at their mouth. It is the land of the nearly-wholehearted bush dwellers: they could live off the grid if they wanted, but they'd rather have their moose and drink their Pepsi, too.

Modernity and tradition breed out of necessity and comfort, and their offspring have the hybrid vigor of a mule. Backwoodsmen shop at Wal-Mart, fur trappers ride snow machines, and prospectors drive excavators and backhoes up whatever stream they can stake a claim on. Once, when wandering the fluorescent-lit toiletry aisle of Fred Meyers, I ran across a man in filthy leather pants with a revolver holstered at his waste. The regular rules don't apply.

*

Bill's tutelage was patient and thorough. He was a natural mentor, and true to his word he had me deep in the guts of an engine within the week. I felt like a child learning a new language: going through the motions first, then feeling disjointed chunks of knowledge slide suddenly into alignment. Bill had a stockpile of Subarus ready for fixing, and as winter came on, they waited silently for our administrations, buried in white.

A mechanic is equal parts priest and surgeon, and I was never sure if the cars were our patients or the altar at which we worshipped. We'd winch them out of the drifts with a come- along. They moved like oxen: recalcitrant, white, immense. Just before the garage door we'd go at them with brooms, gently clearing the winter's deposition storm by storm. We worked like archeologists with a succession of tools: when the brooms had done all they could, we'd bring the air compressor and blast the narrow nozzle across hoods and fenders, in the notch of mirrors. When we were through, a cryogenic vehicle sat revealed, squat before the wide, glowing orifice of the shop. We'd winch it the rest of the way in and then shut the door. In the meteorological microcosm of the small space, a gauze of cool vapor would rise and swirl; you could feel it brush your skin. Overnight, the rime and haze of ice would fall away and wet the floor, and in the place of the frozen, encrusted hulk would sit a simple Subaru: ready to be prayed over, ready to be healed.

Some days, we would leave Bill's and go on parts runs to the lite-industrial rustscape of junkyards and corrugated metal shops south of town. The shops housed the businesses that kept the northern town in cars: small time auto-paint and body operations, transmission and differential rebuilders, machine shops, electrical parts repair. The men and few women who worked in those places shared a metalline competency. They could weld up a steel plate on a rusted out truck frame, or replace the brushes in a starter motor so we didn't have to buy a new one. They could change the gearing on a rear differential, buff out and fill in a dented fender, or machine internal engine parts. Their minds were wound like copper wire around the intricacies of alternators or the penetration of a TIG weld.

Among them were quiet geniuses. Their schooling was years of standing on cold concrete floors under dim fluorescent lights, probing and testing and coming to know what lay hidden beneath rust and grease and forty years of forgotten engineering. Out of the annals of their experience they could call up the number of valves and cylinders

on a '76 Chevy Chevelle, or the exact shape and curvature of a Toyota taillight from the eighties. They knew lineages, techniques, ways of working. They were scholars, undertakers, keepers of the dead; they worshiped at the altar of the automobile, and had found geared grace and rusty redemption.

Master of them all was Bill. Bill owned and ran Action Auto: a four-acre wasteland of lifeless, rotting vehicles. He knew every one. He knew that the power steering pump had been pulled on the '97 Honda sedan seven cars down on row twelve, and that the number three-cylinder on the old Ford pickup halfway down row two wouldn't hold compression. He tottered around his ancient storefront with its leaning walls and potbellied stove like a wizard, small and wizened and steeped in the arcane. Some would say he held domain over a mortuary of junk. But his powers were metamorphic: from the forgotten, from the useless, he could wring something precious. We'd come back from those trips with small gems—power steering pumps or windshield wiper motors—that could breathe new life into a busted Subaru, transubstantiate it, make it whole.

*

In those months, I entered the greasy, threaded world of the Subaru mechanic. I learned engine shapes: H4, straight six, V8. I learned intake and exhaust, drive-train and valve-train, the four strokes of a four-stroke. I learned to fish for pistons; I learned to lap valves. I learned, the wrong way, how to break a bolt and drill out the stub left behind. I learned the fluid and lubricating mystery of oil, the explosive power of aerated and compressed gasoline, the absolute necessity of coolant. I learned to read the heart of the internal combustion engine: beast, lover, ignominious machine.

I learned, too, about Bill: his five wives and four divorces (he had the first three under his belt before he was thirty), the places he had lived (every corner of the lower 48, Ontario, Japan, Mexico, bush Alaska), and the impossible number of jobs he had held: fruit

stacker on freight trains, pipe welder in the oil fields, carpenter with his cocaine-addicted contractor dad, biology grad student in Canada (he studied wild turkeys), Forest Service biologist, turkey hunting guide, professional turkey caller (there is such a thing, and Bill was national champ in '89), airplane mechanic, bush pilot, dog musher, tour guide, homesteader, high school science teacher, landlord, real estate investor, Subaru mechanic. He was incisively intelligent, endlessly patient, had two loves, both from Mexico: his wife, Melissa, and Chava the street dog—a pup whose vaccinations and immigration papers could have bought Bill interior plumbing. He used an outhouse instead, and showered at the university after squash games. He didn't vote, hadn't paid taxes in over thirty years, and didn't plan on starting. As far as he was concerned, his relationship with the government was pretty much over—state university supplied showers notwithstanding. He had a subscription to the magazine Messing About in Boats; sailing the Sea of Cortez was his final frontier. He was honest about himself and honest with others. When people bought the cars whose engines we had rebuilt, he gave them a one- year warranty and his cell phone number. He had lived more lives than anyone I'd ever met, moved more, changed more, loved more women. I didn't envy him, but I relished the color of the world as it filtered through Bill's life.

And, finally, I learned winter. I learned to wear gloves every time I went outside, no matter what my plans were. I learned to plug in my car overnight to keep the oil from turning the consistency of cooled bacon grease. I learned what to wear when headed to the outhouse at forty-below (everything you have); when it was too cold to ski (twenty-six below); and how many logs it took to heat our cabin in the morning (only three). I learned the white-on-white, striated pattern of birch trunks against the snow. I learned the crack of limbs in fierce cold, the glowing warmth of a sauna, the piercing clarity of celestial bodies when the air has thinned and flattened and somehow become lenticular to magnify the moon and stars. I learned the different blues of a far north winter: the blue-black of deep night, the blurred gray-blue before sunrise, the strident blue-on-white of day, the fuchsia

tinged blue of evening. I learned of dawn at eleven in the morning, and dusk at two in the afternoon. I learned the way deep cold muffles close sounds and amplifies far ones, as if trying to tell you how to listen. I learned frost nip and ice fog and hoar frost. I learned the crepuscular solstice noon.

*

A couple of months in, I had learned enough for Bill and me to work for periods without guidance needing to be given. One afternoon, we were finishing a '99 Outback: the engine, newly rebuilt, had been lowered onto its mounts, and we were completing the ritual, bolting up each component and attaching each hose in turn. We called this stage of the process "buttoning up," and it was a small grace to see things go back in their places, layered complexity emerging hour by hour. It was December. The woodstove snapped contentedly, the world outside was dim and darkening. I glanced at Bill, and caught him smiling.

"We just take chicken shit and turn it into chicken salad, don't we brothah?" he said quietly. "That's what I did with this house—built it from the dump, I've told you—and that's what we do with these cars." And then softer, not for me to hear, "I guess that's what I've done all my life."

For a moment I saw the wholeness that Bill was seeking. I saw him in all his strangeness and all his flawed grace. I saw him as an incarnation of Fairbanks: a golem risen out of the junkyards and machine shops, the quiet woods and yowling dog pens. There was an alchemical potential in the man and the town, the seasons and the work. Crucibles, ingots, forged alloys: seasons shaping a city, city welding up a person, and he, in turn, pouring himself back into a season of labor again.

I tightened a last bolt on the alternator. Outside a few, pale flakes began to fall. f

Molly Olguin

SMALL MONUMENTS

The love of Maria's life died and sent herself to an oven in Chicago, where she was baked into a diamond. Maria didn't learn of it right away, having been more or less exiled from Cecily's side. She had ventured into Cecily's protracted battle with lung cancer just once, and always regretted it afterward.

Maria had gone then because she couldn't banish the childish idea that if she were only close to Cecily again everything would turn out all right. Hadn't the world been wrong, strained and askew, since she left? Wouldn't the world gently right itself once Maria slipped back into her proper place in Cecily's orbit? It was stupid beyond words, but a soft part of Maria really believed it––if only she and Cecily could fix things, some sympathetic magic would spark in Cecily's body, and she'd be healed.

Instead, she stepped into Cecily's sickroom, clutching a bouquet of camellias, and her heart pounded so insistently in her chest that she wondered briefly if something was wrong. Cecily stared up at her from the bed, all black eyes and blue shadows, surrounded by a skillful arrangement of candles and white bottles and glass bowls of trimmed flowers, like a pale Madonna at an altar. Their fingers brushed when Maria handed her the camellias, and the little animal spark gave Maria an instant's dumb belief that she was right, and the world was to be reordered.

Only then Cecily spoke her name, and Maria's hope unraveled. Suddenly she was achingly aware of the veins bulging at Cecily's gaunt wrists, the failure of her perfume to hide the fevered sweetness rising from her pores, the dehydrated twitch of her legs under the blanket. Something must have changed in her face, because Cecily's smile fell away. "Jesus Christ," Cecily said, her ruined voice drifting up from

the wreckage of her lungs. "If I thought you were gonna get upset, I wouldn't have asked you to come."

"You don't get a choice about that," Maria said, and it came out sharp, embarrassingly resentful. "And you didn't ask me to come."

"But you came anyway," Cecily said, and laughed. Within seconds it turned into an awful, wounded cough that dragged Maria to her side like Cecily had her on a chain. Cecily shook, and the camellias spilled out of her hands to the floor. Maria knelt down, frightened and a little repulsed, to gather them up.

"Mary, Mary," Cecily said in her raw voice, and flung out her arm, settling her hand on the top of Maria's head, a frail weight. Maria's hands tightened on slick stems. "Wouldn't marry me."

Maria flinched away.

"I think you better get up," Cecily said, and her hand fell back to the bed. "I think you better go."

Everything that passed between them after that was more or less irrelevant. Cecily wanted her gone. Maria decided to go.

Her only contact with Cecily and Cecily's cancer after that came from Lin, Cecily's husband. He was a tall, sweet, stupid man, with sleeves that always bared his wrists, and pant hems that shivered above his ankles. He did something obscure with computers, constructed truly awful digital paintings with his wife's encouragement, and tolerated Maria's continued presence in Cecily's life with a benign grace that drove Maria crazy. There was a time, years ago, when she would have given anything to make Lin miserable.

But after she left Cecily's hospital room and spent a few furious minutes weeping in a stairwell, Lin came to find her. "I can call you," he offered awkwardly, proving that Cecily was serious. She didn't want Maria there. "Give you updates, that kind of thing. If you want."

Maria hated him in that moment more than she ever had. He waited, solid and patient, while she composed herself enough to nod.

He left her kind, faltering voicemails every few weeks, and she listened to them with a grim resolve, and texted him empty thanks in response. This was what she always did, with serious trouble––

she dedicated herself fiercely to avoiding it, until the point when the trouble sorted itself out or her feelings had cooled enough to make it bearable. This had worked with her first job, out of college––she stopped answering calls, stopped reading emails, took the employer off her resume, and eventually the calls stopped coming. It had worked with her sister, who stopped telling Maria about her awful boyfriends and her dangerous job, so Maria could cling to the pretense that she was safe. It had worked with Cecily, years earlier, when Maria turned down her marriage proposal, the deep well of her love sealed off by the weight of her terror. She vanished for three months, and when she came back Cecily had utterly reforged herself. She went from Maria's girlfriend to Maria's dearest friend, preserving the bond between them while giving Maria room to run away. It was probably the kindest thing anyone had ever done for Maria.

The abruptness of Cecily's death took her by surprise. Lin didn't call. She heard about it from a mutual friend, and the shock hit her so hard that she forgot to be sad. She called Lin, vaguely intending to be angry, but found herself at a disadvantage as soon as he picked up the phone.

"Mary," he said, and there was sincere relief in his voice. "Thank god." She couldn't work out what he had to be relieved about, but he sighed into her ear and told her she had to come to the funeral. "Everyone's being nice to me," he said, half-serious. "Even her mother, and she's been praying a bus would hit me for years. You won't be nice to me, will you?"

"Never," Maria said, and her voice wobbled a little on the way out.

"Yeah," he said, and sighed again, a soft pulse of static. "It's just us, now."

Maria sat beside Lin in the first pew, her arm tucked into his. Cecily's family hated her, of course, much more than they hated Lin, and Lin's family treated her like she was poison. Most of the people in the chapel probably wondered why the bitch that broke Cecily's heart was leaning her head against the grieving widower's shoulder. "Are

you enjoying your scene?" Maria asked him, mostly as a distraction from the pine box in front of them. There was a little bouquet of camellias resting on the lid, and Maria's mouth was going dry, like the box was Cecily instead of Cecily's vessel, and it had her power of making Maria's tongue go dumb in her mouth.

"I married her, didn't I?" Lin murmured, with a smile so brief it was more like a flinch. Of course he enjoyed making a scene. "She's not in there," he added, even as the first reader stepped up to the altar. Maria had her hand wrapped around his wrist, and his pulse was beating wildly against her palm, although his long face revealed nothing. "She didn't like the idea of being buried. But she wanted, uh. The coffin, the headstone. A monument."

"She wanted to live forever," Maria murmured, remembering a younger Cecily's hyperbolic sorrow at the idea that she would die before they ever made first contact with aliens. She'd take an alien moss, she said, a Martian potato. She didn't want to miss the future. "She told me one time. She wanted to fuck an alien. She wanted a little half-human, half-alien baby."

Lin laughed, too-loud in the quiet chapel. "She's getting forever," he said. "And then some."

Maria didn't get the joke for another eight months, when a package arrived at her door. She had to sign for it, although she didn't recognize the return address. She carried it to the little table in her foyer, and slit the cardboard open. A thick lambskin paper slipped onto the floor, and a little velvet box tumbled into Maria's hands.

She stared at it. She knew that box––it was powder blue, with a little gold trim, and six years ago Cecily put a thin band into it and asked Maria to stay. Her throat stopped up for a moment, a choked well, and opened again.

She fumbled at the box, fighting her own terror, and it snapped open. Inside the box was a ring, delicate silver circling a diamond as large as her thumbnail, tinted a faint blue.

Her hands were shaking so badly that the box jerked out of her hands and fell to the floor, the ring escaping the velvet to land on the hardwood. Maria couldn't bring herself to touch it, so she slid down to the floor herself, back against the wall, and stared at the little blue gleam.

The certificate explained the enormity of what Maria had inherited: nothing more and nothing less than Cecily's body. Her ashes had been sent to the LifeGem facility in Chicago, it proclaimed proudly. In their state of the art facility, a hundred million years of pressure and heat had been applied to Cecily's flesh and Cecily's bone, turning her first to coal and then to something harder. The diamond was stained blue due to the presence of boron in human ash, a chemical remnant carried in our marrow. The diamond was unique, the certificate promised. No two stones were ever the same.

"What the fuck is this," she said thickly into the phone, barely remembering making the decision to call.

"So I guess it came," Lin said. "Do you like the setting? She went back and forth between a ring and a necklace for a long time. She thought you'd prefer the ring."

Maria opened her mouth to accuse him of obscene cruelty, but the words wouldn't come. She made a sound she didn't really intend––a wordless exhalation with a barely voiced moan underneath.

"She wanted you to have it," Lin said. "There's one diamond, and it's yours. So shut up."

Maria closed her mouth, and let the truth of that wash over her, dizzying and terrible. One diamond, one body, one ring, and Cecily had given it to her. Had made *Lin* give it to her. "But––what am I supposed to *do* with it?" she asked, and it came out so plaintive that they both laughed.

"I don't know. Jesus. Put it in a safety deposit box?" he suggested, still laughing, and she followed him, breathless and shaking and helpless.

"Sell it for cash," she offered, and he went silent with laughter, only thin gasps letting her know he was still there.

"Pass it on to your kids," he managed finally between wheezes, and her lungs strained for air, but she couldn't help imagining it: a small monument shining on her hand, on her future daughter's finger, collecting dust in her granddaughter's jewelry box. Cecily inherited, Cecily sold off, Cecily forgotten, Cecily stolen. Cecily's vanished secrets hardened into stone, present in the world long after Maria left it. She reached for the little blue ring, Lin's laughter fading in her ear, and slid it on. It fit perfectly on the third finger of her left hand, as she knew it would, blue as a glacier. She shuddered and pulled it off, left it resting in the center of her palm.

"Dying people want to stop dying," Lin was saying, like perhaps he'd been speaking for a while, and she'd forgotten to listen. "She wanted to be preserved, you know, she wanted to be kept. And you––knew her. Better than me, in some ways. I get why she wanted you to keep her."

"No," Maria said, closing her hand around the ring, struggling to articulate what she knew: that this was Cecily's revenge, a way of holding Maria hostage for all the times she ran away. "This is her last word."

"Yeah," Lin agreed, soft as a whisper. "What's the word? What is it like?"

The gem was cool to the touch at first, but it was slowly adjusting to Maria's heat. "It's so clear," she said, and she could hear Lin drawing in a deep breath, felt her own lungs expand with it. "Blue, but I can see all the way through it. It's––clarified."

"Without flaw," Lin suggested, although it wasn't quite true. The ring was warm in the palm of her hand. f

Chelsea Dingman

TO MY HUSBAND, DISGUISED AS VIRGINIA WOOLF

If the sun doesn't reach
the corners of this room—forgive

yourself. You couldn't have known
how brightly silence burns

after the body refuses
light. Your grievances, like lanterns,

I light & launch on the night sky. Your face,
the lantern my fingers used to flit around

like a swarm of moths. I know you didn't mean
for me to find you in that cold, cold

water. But this winter took
what money we had. The bread

from our bellies. The pills
from the container you were

prescribed. When did you realize
running out would entail running?

We gave up morning for lent.
For a few cents from the donation plate.

But everything I don't know doesn't leave.
I tuck it in the hollow of a Tupelo. With the air

from your lungs. With each wound
I can't heal by breathing.

Christopher Maccini

AFLOAT

On the bow of the small blue sailboat, Lina sat wrapped in a faded patchwork quilt. From his vantage in the cockpit, Ethan caught the precise moment when the sun broke the tops of the tall pines growing along the shore. Infused with light, Lina's hair changed instantly from dark walnut to that golden auburn shade it only took on during summer. Wisps of steam rose from the white deck as the sun vaporized the morning dew, lifting with it the chill from the cool, clear night. The kettle whistled from below. Ethan ducked into the small cabin.

Today they would sail out of this quiet island cove, where they'd anchored the evening before, north to Bainbridge and across the sound back to Seattle. The forecast called for light winds from the south, so they should make good time. Taking this week off had been a good idea. It was easy to find peace out here on the water. Just around the point you could see the high-rises and industrial waterfront of Tacoma. Anchored in here it was easy to forget about all that. You could forget about the stress. Forget the endless doctor visits and fertility tests and that terrible night with the blood in the toilet. You could forget about the way she'd collapsed in tears of exhaustion and sorrow, there on the floor of the ER, when they'd said that word.

Ethan pushed down the plunger on the French press, picked two swinging mugs from their hooks above the stove, and stepped out onto the deck, blinking in the bright sun.

"Coffee?" he said, carefully setting a mug on the deck next to Lina and lowering himself to sit beside her. "God, what a beautiful morning!"

Lina smiled, "I was just thinking about seals. Do you remember those seals we saw down in Olympia?"

Ethan thought for a moment. Olympia was three days ago. Yes, the harbor had been full of seals. So many in one place.

"Oh yeah," he said. "I wonder why they were all crowded around those old docks. A fishing boat must have spilled something."

"There must have been two hundred." Lina cradled her steaming mug in both hands and brought it to her mouth. She blew on it softly. "Crazy thing is, I didn't see a single baby seal."

"I don't know Lina, it's hard to tell. We weren't really that close. There were probably lots of younger seals mixed in. Older ones too, who knows?" Ethan turned away from her toward the sun and closed his eyes. He could feel Lina's gaze as palpably as the warmth from the sun on his face.

"I've lived here my whole life," she said. "I've never seen a baby seal. I never thought about it until now."

"The babies probably don't come out much." Ethan said, his eyes still closed. "They probably stay in the nest or whatever.

"The nest? Seals don't have nests, Ethan. They're mammals."

He turned to see Lina looking at him intently, the coffee in her hands still untouched and no longer steaming. "Well, their den then," he tried not to laugh. "Or whatever! Lina, I don't know anything about seals. Do they have dens?"

"I have no idea." She said without smiling. She turned away from him and took a sip of her cold coffee. "That's what I'm talking about."

Ethan finished the last sip of his coffee and, with a flick of his wrist, flung the dregs overboard. "Lina, I love you, but I have no idea what you're talking about."

"I know," she said. She continued to stare blankly across the water toward the wooded shoreline dotted with vacation homes. A small flock of seagulls flew overhead, screeching. The morning breeze was beginning to fill in from the mouth of the cove, and ripples appeared on the smooth surface. Their little boat started to swing around its

anchor until the bow and its occupants were facing out toward the open water.

"Look, honey. It's the last day of our little vacation." Ethan put his arm around Lina's shoulders and pulled her close to him. "We needed a break. Let's try to enjoy this beautiful day. All that other stuff will still be there when we get back. Let's not think about it right now. We promised not to, remember?" He gave Lina's shoulders another squeeze and hopped to his feet dramatically. "Let's set sail!"

Ethan disappeared below and stashed the coffee supplies. He made a sweep of the cabin, stowing the chart books, tide tables, and clothes. He lifted the bench seat and pulled a sail bag from the storage underneath. Satisfied, he hoisted the bag onto the deck where Lina had finished her coffee, put away her quilt, cleared the deck, and was now hauling in the anchor.

When they were on the water, the ritual of sailing took over. Ethan had bought his first boat the summer he'd met Lina. It was a decrepit fiberglass twenty-one-footer he had gotten from a guy on Craigslist for five hundred bucks. It had no stove or head, and the cabin was barely big enough for the two of them to sleep in. It was more like camping on the water than anything else. But they were younger then. Lina was working a part-time job at a coffee shop and applying to grad schools. Ethan was sporadically employed, but it was enough to buy the paint and tools to work on the boat. It was on their first trip to the San Juans when Ethan realized that their relationship was something real. After a week of sailing in the sunshine, lying on the deck under the stars, and making love each night in the cramped berth, Ethan knew.

That was two boats ago. That was before the careers and the house, and before sex changed from an act of passion into a methodically calculated means to an all-consuming end, a maneuver carefully-timed to the precise moment each month when the thermometer reading was just right.

On that first trip, they established the unspoken morning routines that still persisted. Through all the changes—when they were at sea,

it was always the same. Lina would wake early, just before the sun. She would slip out of their warm berth, careful not to disturb Ethan. Quietly, she'd make herself a bowl of oatmeal and go on deck with her quilt for a private moment with the sunrise. Ethan would sleep in until the light from the portholes was too much, then he would get up and make the coffee. After breakfast, Ethan would set the sails while Lina cleared the deck and raised the anchor.

This routine had become so well timed that this morning the muddy anchor broke the surface of the water just as Ethan was hauling up the last inch of sail and tying off the line. They hadn't spoken a word, and the boat was underway.

The ritual, the certainty, made sailing cathartic for Ethan. So much was uncertain in their lives. God knows, they'd found that out recently. They needed this trip. They needed a reminder that things weren't so different from how they'd always been. The sun was shining. A gentle breeze was blowing. Things weren't so bad after all.

This week, though, Lina wasn't with him the way she used to be. It was a small boat. She was rarely more than an arm's reach away, but something had wedged itself between them.

The couple settled into their sailing positions in the cockpit, Ethan with one hand on the tiller, Lina beside him, ready to adjust the sails when needed. Little whitecaps were forming on the tops of a few waves as they rounded the point of the cove and turned north, the skyline of Seattle just visible in the still-hazy morning.

"You know, Lina," Ethan said, attempting to sound lighthearted, "we don't *have* to go back to Seattle tonight. What would you think about just sailing up to Bainbridge and getting a slip at the marina? We could walk into town for a nice dinner, spend another night on the boat. We could call in sick to work tomorrow."

Lina smiled with forced amusement, "Really, Ethan? You think they're going to believe you when you call in sick on Monday after taking a week's vacation?"

It was an old joke, something Ethan said every time they took a weekend trip. But there in the sun, the gentle breeze at their backs urging their little ship along, his beautiful wife beside him, he felt the impending end of the trip weighing on him. It pressed on his chest like a cold hand. He couldn't get a deep breath. He couldn't go back to that dark, empty house. Why not? Why couldn't they stay out here?

"What about this?" he said, turning the boat ever so slightly west. "There's a ferry from Bainbridge right to downtown. We could stay the night and catch the ferry over in the morning. It'd be an easy bus ride to work for you from the ferry dock." As he was saying it, the possibility of the idea started to congeal. Seriously. Why not? "Think about it. We could spend another week or two living on the boat and commuting by ferry. No Seattle traffic, no stress. Just quiet island life. We might never go back!"

"Don't be an idiot!" Lina slapped him in the chest with the back of her hand. "I have an appointment with Dr. Boyd on Tuesday. She wants to follow up to see if there was any permanent damage."

"Take the ferry in for it. I'm serious, honey. Remember when we used to talk about living on our sailboat full time? Why not now? It's so perfect out here on the water. What have we got to lose?"

"That's not our *life* right now!" She pulled away and turned on the bench to sit fully facing him. "What about our house? All our friends and our jobs and our lives are in Seattle. I'm not going to hide out here with you on this stupid boat!"

Ethan turned away from her and pretended to adjust a line already firmly cleated off. The sails fluttered rhythmically in the steady wind. Small waves broke off both sides of the bow as it cut persistently through the water. The wind's invisible power never ceased to amaze him. How this unseen force could move eight thousand pounds of fiberglass and metal and food and clothes and flesh so gracefully, so determinedly, to bring them closer and closer to home.

Ethan had no response to Lina's outburst. She didn't mean it. She loved this boat too. Didn't she? He had such vivid memories of

her smiling, freckled face, standing on the bow with the wind in her sun-lightened hair. But where was that Lina now? He hadn't seen her on this trip. She'd forced a laugh or two at his corny jokes and playfulness, but she was distant. She wasn't here with him.

Over the sound of the wind and waves Ethan heard a sound, a burst of air. He turned just in time to see the mist hanging in the air and the tall black fin breaking the surface. It couldn't have been more than two hundred feet behind them.

"Lina! Did you see that?!"

She was already standing on the bench seat, peering behind them, scanning the waves. "I heard it, but I didn't see it. Where was it?"

"There, straight behind us. Wait for it. It'll come up again."

Ethan tried to breathe as quietly as he could, his eyes and ears intent, waiting for the next sign. Then the sound again—rushing air—it was closer this time. There was no mistaking the sight at this distance. The high, black dorsal of an orca rose and fell. Then, beside it, they saw a second burst of air and water as a much smaller, rounder fin broke the surface. A moment later, a third appeared, this one even smaller.

"It's a family!" Lina said, "A male, female, and a little calf!"

Ethan was silent, waiting in awe for the next breach. All was quiet but for the flap of the sail and the lapping of the waves. A double spout shot up, then another rush of air; the orcas were just ahead of them now. The two larger fins rose and fell together. Ethan and Lina waited for the third fin that they knew would follow. Finally, a little spray and a tiny black fin surfaced just behind where the other two had been.

They appeared once more, well ahead of the boat this time and moving much faster than the clumsy man-made craft. Ethan scanned the gray waves for another minute, but they were gone.

Lina sat beside Ethan on the bench. Her eyes were red and tears were pooling on her lower lids. She placed one hand against her abdomen and the tears began to fall silently down her cheeks. Ethan moved closer to her and wrapped her shoulders with one arm. Her

body shook with a sob. Ethan hauled a line in with his free hand, adjusting the sail. The boat responded to his touch as he pulled the tiller back in. The bow swung slowly to the east and toward the city skyline, pointing them back home. f

Peter Krumbach

MERIDIAN

The heat has eaten all sounds
of this cliffside village,

even the sea looks surprised
by the sudden fall of silence,

its thousand eyes blinking
in the midday glare. I climb

through the mute maze
of whitewashed walls

and crooked mule trails,
not a soul to see,

cobblestones gaze up at me.
These are my arms,

my hands, my fingers,
the sky's illiterate blue, free

of birds and wind, two
thin vapor trails

crossing above my head
in a signature of a frayed X.

Perhaps this is the day
missing from calendars.

A nameless one, slipped
through God's floorboards,

and, like a blank sheet of paper,
drifted down to my feet.

Caroline Chavatel

BY THE NOTHING ALL LIGHT IS (INSTRUCTIONAL)

- for Timea Batts

The apology of morning folds itself
into little creases as the static
all light is repeats the details of a death:

a smile crack, joint pain shifting through a living
room, the newsman's voice. He said
she died of *natural causes*, that her body was

a city rising to complicate itself— that that's all we were
ever doing.

Try to think of tragedy
as light beams bouncing in
and out of us instead
of toys we're building,

as air and foil meld to make
a plane or something like it.

He says sorry and says, *without trying to be glib*,

the difference of one millimeter is life and death, a bullet
tucked gently into its chamber or a child.
I have been making an effort to think this:

birth is the quiet
promise of loss; there were
wires where roots should run.

Elizabeth Horneber

WHEN I GOT HERE THEY WERE ALL GONE

There is an entrance to Macau from an underground shopping mall in the People's Republic of China. I've been told to beware of children there. They slip things out of your pockets. A woman with a baby could remove your wallet from pocket or purse while you admire her child and hide it in the baby's blanket. So don't let them near you. Keep your things in front pockets.

The entrance to Macau is a brief five-minute bus ride from my apartment. The closer I get to the border, the thicker the crowds. Men are selling earbuds, tiger claws. I keep my hand on my purse and eyes ahead. I am pushed into bodies. I mind the curbs and the pirated DVDs arranged across the sidewalk. Those who see me call to me, no matter how many times I say bu yao, bu yao, I don't want it.

People cluster here because they know that most of those who go to Macau have money. These days, who goes to Macau if not to gamble? Word is that Macau brings in more money than Vegas. I've never gambled there though. Sometimes I go just because I'm craving a good sandwich.

*

In the 1930's, European traveler Hendrik De Leeuw wrote this about his experience of a previous Macau: "There is no question that it harbors in its hidden places the riffraff of the world, the drunken ship masters; the flotsam of the sea, the derelicts, and more shameless, beautiful, savage women than any port in the world. It is hell."

*

I am remembering Macau.

I am remembering it as a city-wide circus, with unwieldy juxtapositions around every corner. Asian shrines alongside Christian symbols. Manicured Western architecture standing across the street from a collage of neon Chinese characters advertising a hive of shops and businesses. Blackened, box-like buildings standing in the shadow of hulking mirror-plated casinos.

I remember daylight seems strong there. It finds its way through smog, through the branches of low hanging trees and the wings of cicadas. I remember houses that stand in rows with white painted balconies and verandas. They are a mix of pastels: yellow, pink, green, blue—each house a different color, forming together a row of dollhouses, except that years of tropical humidity have made their cracks black and gray. The colors are faded, stained by mildew and rain. The houses rot in a city strange and old, despite its new casinos, silent gold giants.

It even has its own currency, this cramped city. When I took some patacas all the way back to southern Minnesota and tried to exchange them at a bank in the small town of Mankato, the bankers were confused. They'd never seen such bills. They'd never heard of the city.

*

There are some places in Macau where traditional Chinese domestic architecture closes out space. The buildings are set close. Some stand as long, continuous structures that stretch down streets. Leaves labor and twist up the bricks of alleys, small lanes and becos. Lives press into each other. In other areas, one is surrounded by Macanese and European-style buildings. Churches. Schools. There is room to wander among them and the trees, the streets, the occasional square. In this space, the body spreads, uncramps.

By Campo is where early twentieth century European architecture is imitated. But the styles here are unpredictable. Some homes show indigenous influences. Buildings stand erect in a solid row, or alone and encircled with intricate columns, balustrades, cupolas, arches. Some are bungalow-style.

There is no one place in Macau you could identify as representing one influence or another. All of it blends and converges. Each style of architecture borrows from others so that the city is a bed of history and cultures. This is evident from every brick. Every plank of wood. Every door. They together form a kind of body.

*

I read something by David Shields once that said reality takes shape in memory alone. He says that in a certain way, all memories are already forgotten. They represent something that has already run its course and is complete. To remember is to recall what we've forgotten, and what we remember often isn't something that happened, but rather something that seemed to happen.

I suppose this means that remembering is tied to the moment of remembrance. That to dig into the past for what only "seemed" to happen suggests a present and pressing desire for something.

*

I remember once when I passed into Macau with four men. One, a black British man who would sing Caribbean Soca and bum cigarettes off me every other block. Another was a beer brewer from the American South, and the third an ex-law-student in his late thirties named Ralph. The last was Kristian, a man I'd dated in the United States, who I'd left years before and who was still trying to get me to change my mind, even after I'd been living in China for over a

year. He thought coming to visit would result in a romantic comedy fantasy and be the ultimate expression of his dedication. The whole time he was there I spent trying to make sure we were alone as seldom as possible. He met most of the local expats as a result.

We took him to Macau for the day and stopped at a restaurant to have pork chop sandwiches (Macau is known for them). We entered a box of yellow and white tile. The waitresses spoke no English. A mainland soap opera played on the mounted TV. I pretended to be absorbed in it, the melodramatic shouting, the fighting, and whispering. The umbrellas in the rain. I don't remember whether the food was good.

We piled our cash together, and Ralph took care of paying the bill. But though we sat for several minutes, the waitress didn't bring the change. In mainland China you never tip the waiters. This is not true of Macau. The waitress no doubt assumed she was to keep the change. We reminded Ralph of this, but he felt it was a breach of honesty. He hadn't told her to keep it. He wanted his change. He had no duty to tip. She shouldn't assume he thought she deserved a tip. So he made a great effort of explaining to the waitress in English with a peppering of Mandarin, then to another waitress, that he wanted his change. They thought he meant he'd been overcharged. He argued. He spoke dumbed down versions of English. He gestured. "My patacas?"

I stared steadfastly at the TV. The shouting. The weeping. The umbrellas in the rain. The waitresses spoke Cantonese, not Mandarin. Still, they would have understood me if I'd intervened; my Mandarin was better than Ralph's. But I didn't. I pretended I didn't see the white man arguing over a few patacas, thinking to teach these women a lesson.

Kristian had gotten up from the table and stood outside. I might have too if it didn't mean I'd have to stand alone with him.

*

Macau is selective in what it chooses to see. The city has decided that everyone is now equal. Chinese, Macanese, Portuguese, European—no one stands in a position of privilege. Rather, Macau allows the East to meet West in harmony and cooperation. Not just do these peoples and cultures coexist, but they have blended, melded themselves together till they are impossible to isolate. Now that the city has chosen this as its identity, it determinedly constructs monuments, museums, architectural restorations to reflect this.

The effort is transparent. Each statue says, "We are this." Each monument forms the narrative. As Gavriel D. Rosenfeld said in writing about Munich, "It is less what monuments represent than the reasons why they are erected that sheds light upon the construction of local memory."

All these layers drape over each other like layers of paint, pastel pinks, blues, yellows. Still humidity and rain seep into the cracks, chip away, and everything becomes seen. Harmonious or not, everything is simultaneous. The reality is persistent. Take the naming of streets. They have Portuguese names, and often the Chinese name is a transliteration of the Portuguese. Yet there are other streets where the Chinese names are entirely different and have a different meaning. The Portuguese name will refer to something done in that place. A function. An act. The Chinese name defines the place as something philosophical or poetic. A feeling. A morality.

*

It's been some years now since I was in Macau.
I imagine what it might be like for me to retrace all my steps someday—what remains in me? What would resurface? Were I to return to Macau, would the city I remember even exist?

An article by Monica Wehner explores the nature of memory, especially through the stories and memories of people who were expatriates in Rabaul, Papua New Guinea. One man, upon returning to Papua New Guinea after years of absence, remembered "the smell of mustard—the pepper stick they dip in the line when they chew buai." He says, "Even though I hadn't smelt that smell for twenty years. It was an instant recognition of what it was. And the pourri pourri leaves they use for their dances and stuff. A lot of the villagers have it growing nearby and you smell it on the wind." But while his body and its senses betrayed a physical memory of the place and its habits, he felt it was a place he did not recognize. "Even though you could see the signs and see the bits of buildings that you recognized, there was no recognition of this being the same place as the old Rabaul... I had all these memories of enjoyment. And when I got here they were all gone."

*

Diane Ackerman, as quoted by Wehner: "The latest findings in physiology suggest that the mind doesn't really dwell in the brain but travels the whole body in caravans of hormone and enzymes, busily making sense of the compound wonders we catalogue as touch, taste, smell, hearing, vision."

*

I am standing in Macau, missing something. I don't know what. I'm leaving China in a couple weeks. Moving on to the next thing. That's what youth is for, isn't it? Collecting experiences to yourself, testing different versions of who you can be. Staving off loneliness, meeting and loving new people. Leaving them.

I've come to Macau one last time with some of my students. They are eighteen. I am not so much older than them, yet I feel so.
One boy, though his English is poorest, seems the most perceptive, and he buys me a gift. It is a keychain. Tacky, plastic rubber. Vibrant flowers on the cover of a snapped shut little book of quotes about being happy. He tells me to smile every day. This will help me.
There's pain in the bottom of my ribcage.

*

Dinner in a tiny alley. A gas tank that looks like it's from an 80's sci-fi movie. Roughened pots and pans, and I'm eating at a short table with a couple little chairs, a shelter of tarp over my head. The burn of the peppercorns, the chewiness of the tripe. This place could never exist in the United States—a woman with a cart of fire and a couple chairs. But my senses are alive in this moment—the smells and the flavors push themselves into parts of my memory that I have no control over. I've heard that there is no short-term memory associated with smell. It is all long term.

I imagine that I come back to this place years later and forget I've been here. I've forgotten the faces, the street names. But the eating and the smelling will tell my body—yes, you've been here before. Yes, this is a person you were. This was a piece of earth that all your limbs found themselves located in once, your wandering body that forgets so easily. Forgets all the faces it's known. Forgets its old ambitions. The body will remind me of my history when seated at a tiny table in an alley in Macau, eating intestines and sweet red bean paste. I will find myself undeniable.

*

At the São Paulo façade in Macau, there is a figure of the Virgin Mary carved into the stone, and a figure of a demon with horns and wings. "Remember death and you shall not sin," it says. On the other side of the façade is another figure of the Virgin with the words "The Holy Mother tramples the dragon's head." The façade is all that's left of a church that was meant to epitomize the Portuguese evangelizing mission in East Asia. The mission crumbled as the prosperity of Macau declined for at least two centuries. European expansion was focused in other areas of Asia, and Macau, for a time, lost track of its ambition.

In the early nineteenth century, Macau found a new goal: colonial revival. Nationalism. The city erected a new gate—the Porta do Cerco—to clearly delineate the border between Macau and mainland China. The gate was dedicated to Governor João Ferreira do Amaral, who was assassinated by the Chinese after his efforts to further distance Macau from Chinese control.

For decades, the city went on memorializing figures and historical events that asserted Macau's autonomy, its European heritage, its rejection of Chinese control. It built a narrative of heroes. Previously forgotten or ignored historical events were raised to an epic status. Men who were only suspected to have anything to do with Macau were pulled into the narrative. Luis Vaz de Camões, for example, was rumored to have visited Macau in the sixteenth century and composed poetry inspired by the city. But there is no evidence he was ever even in Macau. This has not stopped statues from being erected in his honor and gardens from being named after him. His appreciation of natural beauty, out of fashion during the religious fervor of his own time, was conveniently useful to build a nationalist revival.

Of course all this changed with the Chinese Cultural Revolution, when much of this art and memorialization was destroyed.

When Macau was finally returned to China in 1999 after its years of being run by the Portuguese, the city saw a new crop of monuments erected around the city. These new statues were, are different. They seem mere abstract sentiments. Ahistorical and acultural. Many

Chinese find their messages and manners to lack propriety. In a life-sized set of figures, for example, a Chinese woman in traditional dress offers a lotus to a modern Western man, causing the Chinese to wonder: does such an encounter suggest good-will or imperialism? Neighborliness or submissiveness? Another statue depicts a girl playing with her dog, sitting with her legs spread apart. This spreading of legs is one source of discomfort, and another is the distinctly Western pleasure of friendship with dogs. Some Chinese find such friendship demeaning.

These new figures are like Hallmark cards to the city—*best wishes on your multiculturalism*. Macau is urged to feel. It is asked to look back and think, Yes, I suppose our city means *peaceful co-existence*. These new statues are thematically unified, as opposed to complex and complicated. They praise a relationship of good will between cultures, glossing over a history that is dominated by shifting values and identities.

Perhaps we cannot blame Macau's government for seeking to interpret and make sense of its city's history and identity by declaring it a beacon of multicultural cooperation. Perhaps it's not completely inaccurate. And after all, what is the relationship of the present with the past? Why let the past tangle things up?

*

Forgetting tends to be associated with repression. Psychoanalysis seeks to restore forgotten things. If restored, the memories can participate in the function of defining a self. Forgetting is seen as destructive, the denial of the self. It implies a diminished ability to create moral action. It implies a lack of wholeness.

And yet occasionally I wonder if forgetting can be positive—if it can clear out those things that bog down a self that seeks to move onward, to recreate itself, to be something it could never be if continuously plagued and maddened by its history.

*

Quotes from the keychain:

"He who continually searches for happiness will never find it. Happiness is made, not found."

"Happiness is good health and a bad memory." –Ingrid Bergman

"If we'd only stop trying to be happy, we could have a pretty good time." –Willard R. Espy

The thing is, my student bought me the keychain in the Venetian, in one of the casino's shopping malls, a space that was modeled after the city of Venice. It felt like we were in one of those museums that tries to create a simulation of the past—that tries to create a sky with paint, and ancient structures from plastic. Somewhere, I heard a gondolier singing. My students all had their iPhones out to take pictures.

*

When my ex-boyfriend Kristian came to China and I hadn't seen him in months, I of course had to hug him and tell him it was good to see him. I had to set about remembering all the details of him I'd forgotten, or just hadn't bothered to remember. The smell of him—the indescribable blend of his pheromones with deodorant. The touch of his hands—roughened, dry from his work as a construction engineer and his distaste for lotion. The pores of his face. The wideness of his eyes. The eyes my mother said were some of the bluest eyes she'd seen.

They weren't inherently unpleasant eyes.

Except that I'd changed the narrative. These eyes were no longer alluring. The smell was no longer associated with safety and comfort. Except when my instinct told me it was, and my mind had to, with great intention, reinstruct the senses.

*

Scholar David Lowenthal writes that nostalgia chooses as its object not the past itself but rather "the condition of *having been*; with a concomitant integration and completeness lacking in any present." Wehner says, "The past, with its finished forms and known consequences, appears more complete than the fragmented present, which is experienced as a series of *un*finished forms, with *un*known consequences."

We are terrified by a fragmented, uncertain present. So we look to the past, because in a way, we can control it. We identify beginnings, middles, and ends. Perhaps this is why the thought of losing one's memory is terrifying. One would be stuck in a state of unending "present." Persistent uncertainty. If nothing else, my memory can assure me that these arms, these legs, this hair is my own.

If memory gives tools for creation, so too does selective memory—forgetting. It creates the possibility of new juxtapositions. Different moments, people, places come to inform one another in different ways. I cannot say whether this is good or bad, just that it is, and that I base myself on this.

*

Say I come back to this place. I would like to think I will have changed. I would like to think even Macau will have changed. Macau's people—European and Chinese—will live together with no complaints. I'm dreaming now: people will have achieved understanding.

I would like to think I will remember myself, and that I will be gentle with that old self. But perhaps I will have instead forgotten more than I want to consider right now. It might even be a positive forgetting, productive. But say I come back—when I get here, which parts will be gone? Which am I willing to give up?

*

The shopping mall modeled after Venice boasts of a canal that stretches between name-brand shops. Men in gondolas row people down this bright blue stretch of water and sing opera to the visitors as they float under bridges, past those wandering by on either side. Their voices bounce eerily from the ceilings. The sky is the color and texture of paint. The clouds are stenciled and immobile. The gondola brings you to the other side of the mall, and you disembark to face more windows into more shops, feeling as though you barely moved. You'd deny having traveled at all, except for that singing of the gondolier, which, though it's past, rolls around in you now. f

Caleb Curtiss

A BLOOMERY

Today I scraped the smallest bit of scale off of the faucet
with my fingernail at work while washing my hands in the bathroom.

I have become so of-a-kind in my thinking I'm afraid you'll know just what
I mean when I say things like that — things like: I am making in my mind

an iron circle: a place to build a fire I can hold inside of myself like organ tissue:

a growing blankness I will empty myself into, slowly at first —
things like: let this body become a bloomery: a bloomery within a bloomery:

a body within a body so that something like a soul might come
to reside there. Let something like a soul come to reside there only after

you have said a soul might come to reside there. Let the sun's stillness
be the slow motion of our growth, a prayer, a petition that we hear, and we

alone. Let our emptiness be unfillable, and let us be full in the way
that the red dwarf is full when it looks towards an unconceivable horizon

and feels within its body nothing but the inertia we call *transformation*.
Let us be as we are: empty and full, together and not: let us be transformed.

It wasn't the sensation of the calcium holding itself beneath my fingernail:

it was the knowing that it has been here with us in some configuration or another
forever. It was the feeling, but more the feeling of the knowing.

Michael Dhyne

THE POET AT TWENTY-FOUR

~after Clarice Lispector / after Jack Spicer

Buying avocados six for a dollar
on the side of the road and my god,

I just remembered that we die.
Once, in a small town in Southern California,

I drank a liter of cheap vodka and woke up
laughing in the hospital. What I remember—

the plastic bottle's narrow kaleidoscope
as it tilted toward the light, the burn

like iodine on my acned jaw, dissolving
into honey as I wandered into the night,

sweetly unconscious. I remember
the conversation with my brother

the next morning, how he cursed me
through the phone, saying

I thought you were dead in a voice
that could have been my father's.

I've had this premonition before,
of death's landscape. At grief therapy

with my eyes closed, a sweet old lady
guided me through my house. To not forget,

I drew me and my father in crayon
alone in our living room. I found

the source of the chill in my bones —
words he could have spoken,

bruises on the body,
the avocados' ripe flesh.

Josefine Klougart
Translated by Alexander Weinstein

THE HENS

It smells of boiled meat in the garden, it's autumn and we're slaughtering all the hens, except the six-year-old egg-laying ones, the red Americans, the black-purple Austrolorps, and the five dwarf hens. My father has fetched Shirin, Massoud, and their two boys from the refugee center in Ommestrup. They're visiting. They help. And I stand behind the woodshed with my little sister. We watch how Shirin plucks the last feathers from the chickens. It's when they've had their heads chopped off by her at the chopping block, after they've flapped their wings with a hungry savageness in their eyes, scattered feathers, screamed in that language made of wings, lines through the air, the branches language when they snap from the trunk of the tree and tumble down in haste; the branches which fall from larger branches when they're seized by the wind in autumn and cartwheel in the storm, fall and are blown along the road, down towards the bend, while the leaves are whirled in circles along the avenue. Stiff now, the hens are dipped in the boiling vat; held lukewarm against the plucking machine. I stick my hands in my pockets which are full of breadcrumbs; always full of breadcrumbs and grass seeds, a few straws from a haystack, twine wound into a ball.

Twenty-four rubber fingers smack the damp feathers off and they look so naked, the next one, just as naked. Shirin doesn't have gloves on, we can see her breath, it's that cold.

My sister wipes her nose on her mittens.

My father and Massoud's faces are splattered: blood, warm water from the vat, they're sprinkled like the ironing over chair backs in the living room when my mother begins the next day.

We cook the oldest hens.

My mother skims the soup with the slotted spoon, its long handle hits the exhaust fan over the stove when she lifts it above the edge of the tall soup pot I found for her, fetched from the cellar.

We can see the kitchen from our spot behind the shed. Clouds of warmth billow from within, a salty exhale into autumn; the windows stand open like our summer jackets in the first sun, the air completely still around us, it's so ill-temperedly cold. They yell warmly to one another through the windows, keep up with one another in this way, inside as outside, all of it a movement, a long dance.

Vegetable peels lie in the sink. Leek tops, onion peels, potato peels, carrot ends, the gnarled skin of celery root; pale chicken legs stick out over the edge like branches in a lake, an old plow that no one will claim or drag up onto the bank; the bumps of the chicken skin where the feathers have been removed turn yellow, a severed bone, that color which bone marrow can have, that hysterical pink that can appear in a severed chicken bone. The boys' laughter cuts through the air; it turns within us, and my little sister takes my hand. We hear them all the way from the horse fields and down through the garden, we know how they jump from one terrace to the next, can see them over our stone wall which keeps that part of the garden in place, the three terraces that are dug into the slope, the tiered gardens we saw in South England that time we got the idea for the rhododendron bed. We've been driven out to the corner behind the shed, to the outskirts, where the rhubarb grows in the summer, where the snails are found, where there's always shadow, behind the shed beneath the rhubarb leaves. Later we release each other's hands and walk the length of the house to the back door, keep ourselves all the way beneath the gables; later still we lock ourselves in my room and stay there till it gets dark, until we're called and we seat ourselves at the table. It's dripping wet in the kitchen, the exhaust fan roars behind us, but no one rises, everyone's so tired, completely ruddy from exhaustion. We lean over our soup plates.

Shirin smiles with the whitest teeth.

The hen meat is so tender to chew on, it floats in the soup like shreds of soaked pinewood, my father's face completely swollen from fatigue and cold air, like when you've been frozen so long your shoulders can't relax and the muscles quiver in bed. I think, my little sister says to me when we're standing brushing our teeth, that they could've kept on slaughtering the hens.

Josefine Klougart
Translated by Alexander Weinstein

HEATHER

Not only is there heather, there are roses, not only are there roses and heather, there's my mother's brother, Anders, who plays violin in the church. He's also broken, the whole church with him; the voice of the violin is a ball kicked into movement, it crashes around, collides with the white-washed walls and tears the church to pieces in this way, crosshatches the air with angry incisions; or the ball stitches the devastated room back together with thin threads from wall to wall—both halves in a continuous single-voiced movement.

The organ is silent, the organist sits hunched over, chin to chest, stooped over his own lap, inspects his fingernails with a surveyor's thoroughness; scrapes dirt from beneath the left hand's shorter nails with the longer ones of his right hand, sits slumped like a weeping willow over the lake, the arc of the sky in the rocking chair's runners, his body is rounded like a whirlpool around the drain when we later let the water run from the bathtub, and my mom remains lying there like an island in the tub.

I don't know how, but we get ourselves up from the pews. We are a herd of cattle that seek their own way from the stable and settle themselves on the open fields, like the fields of Himmerland, when we are there and I point, ask if it's Himmerland, because I recognize it from Jens in the ranger's cabin, his story of the sheep and the fields in Himmerland. My mother, who nods, for it is in fact Himmerland we're driving though. I add it to my list of places I want to return to, and after, in parenthesis to my list of flowers that are named for what they resemble:

Blue Bell
Bishops Hat
Foxglove
Queen Anne's Lace
Cottonwood
Basket of Gold
Cockcomb
Snapdragon
Bird of Paradise
Lamb's Ear
Lady's Slipper
Bleeding Heart
(Buttercups)
(Himmerland)

We sing again, this time the song sounds smaller, but in return stretches itself further to all sides. We're outside. Or: We're standing at the graveyard. One sees us from above as two dark rows around a black square. Lips. If I'm ever going to leave someone again, I think, many years later, then I want it to be with this same restlessness: the song's unease from the lips out into the town and restlessly towards the countryside; it will be like walking alone on a beach and suddenly changing one's mind, cutting diagonally over the beach meadows, through the dune grass' bay-leafed tongues. Naturally and restlessly; then there's suddenly parting within everything, with that disturbance which is the farewell and the song's unrest.

Besides the pine boughs, which are laid like a collar around the hole and the coffin, the face that is the earth's pocket, then there's heather. Placed here and there in the low privet hedge. It's the same way that the moor around Herning is for her, my grandmother's region. In the time it takes from the end of the song to when they begin throwing roses down onto the casket, I manage to see the grave sealed by the earth tossed on, to see the gravel raked evenly over her,

hear the sound it has, a scratching of a beard, baskets being crushed, I manage to see flowers being put in funeral vases, lilies first, later roses, and even later: candles—it's Christmastime—and flower bulbs, watch them sprout in front of the stone.

There are three letters in decorated envelopes, one from my little sister, one from my big sister, and one from me; we toss them down into the grave before we sing again—those of us who still can sing.

I try.

I don't know if I sing, can't hear my own voice, but believe there's a kind of squeak at least, and a fumbling for the words.

It's October.

And again we're drifting through the town, have become cattle once more that stagger around thirstily, forgotten on the moor; moldering cardboard boxes with sprouted root vegetables, green potatoes on the cellar steps; a procession of bony men from the last tavern, we tremble like them. We're not searching, we're walking. We leave nothing. One sees: a herd that walks together through the town, the lips that mumble into black scarves.

Later, it's a Wednesday in the spring, I find a photocopy of my letter. It's had four holes punched along its margin and the page has been straightened with a flat palm, a warm iron, placed into our photo album.

I see myself throwing the letter, I watch it before my eyes over and over, can't get it to fit. And later, at dinner, I sit and still can't believe it, almost can't get myself to ask, but do anyway.

I manage to spit it out.

My big sister rises from the table, my mother gawks, how she continues to believe that we soon, at some point at least, will be happy that those letters still exist. And she smiles humbly when she admits how it all fits together. It's as if she comes bearing a wallet for me or a bunch of keys I thought I'd lost, had nearly given up all hope of finding again. She keeps returning to how many flowers there were in the church, all the way from the organ up to the alter, all that heather.

Josefine Klougart
Translated by Alexander Weinstein

SATURDAY MORNING MY FATHER BAKES BREAD

Saturday morning my father bakes two round breads, he makes six cuts in a grid over their backs, drinks from his Faxe beer, carries the bottle with him around the kitchen, back and forth for salt, for olive oil; the bottle is round like a baby's hand, has the same rust and amber color like the chipped medicine bottles we later dig from the earth near the quarry by the land's boundary. He can have flour in his hair, in his eyebrows, it sits like threadbare white lace borders around the bottle once he's touched it. I watch how he turns the dough in the cream-colored mixer, see it tumble against the metal bowl, how it slings itself around the dough hook in the middle, like a clumsy animal in the spring with a crooked neck in the fields; the dough becomes more and more supple, threads pulled long, and soon they resemble unraveled rope, the fibers becoming soft and supple, release, and once again look like currents in the water around the stones by Hellingkilde, resemble that landscape completely, the ravine's sweep between Trehøje on the one side and Tinghulen on the other, the landscape's current which gathers in the eye of the natural spring. He tilts the bowl and in the moment from when he feels the dough slide from the bowl till it hits the tabletop, he manages to imagine the two finished sourdough loaves on the baking rack, watches them cut into thick slices, sees them slathered with yellow butter and dipped into homemade tomato soup. I watch how he kneads the dough with his dry, floured hands that insistently seem to push the dough away from his life, like a mother who pushes a three-year-old child forward into a horde of foreign children there in the parking lot in front of the school busses; and the dough, like tidewater, pulls itself back

towards my father's stomach in a magnetic homesickness. Finally my father lifts the dough, tosses it a couple times down on the tabletop, punches it together, as he likes to say, and the smacks have a hollow echo, like a wooden chime, a padded bell, the dough which looks like a breast. I sit on the table; the surface of the vinegar, the olive oil on the table, the trees outside which tremble, and the ripples within the bottles, small rings of light flowing toward the middle where they're sucked down, is an eye continually closing. He hands me the scraper and I hold it while he sprinkles whole wheat flour over the lump of dough that lies like an egg yolk in a mountain of flour, watch him turn the flour into the dough, knead it shiny again; or, I hold it while he lights the stove, takes the oven rack out and places it on the ground edgewise against the cabinet over the cat's food; or while he answers the telephone, recommends a patient put ice on his lower back, frozen peas in a damp kitchen towel, fifteen minutes at a time. The skin can't handle more than that, he says.

The breads rest on the sideboard, beside the wood-burning stove, and rise beneath a damp dish towel. He calls, I should see how they're growing, how beautifully they rise, how they resemble puffballs. It's when he carefully lifts the cloth, pulls me close to him, and the air is thick, heavier now, like inside a tent on a summer morning, a half-empty glass of warm elderflower juice, sound and light pressed together, the sun which presses the canvas down around us like a tight cap. And it's sad, nearly unbearably sorrowful. Because it's Saturday. Because there are only these two breads and all the exhaustion around them, the weeks, because there's no end to them.

He's a herd of cattle driven too hard.

The responsibility he lives with, the obligation to always help people, their abject gratitude, one bottle of red wine after another; and yet still all the reproach.

All that he neglects here at home.

My father takes a stack of yellow, shiny white, lined and gridded scrap papers from his trouser pockets, smoothes them and arranges them in a neat stack, explains to me that decency is so crucial, to be a

decent person. My older sister listens attentively, her left eye droops slightly, like Venetian blinds can hang, opened a bit crookedly, it's her concentration and she interrupts, reminds our father that it's the health department he works for, a system, she says—a department, I think—that there are others to go to, she says fixedly, that people aren't lying on our doorstep in front of the house. I visualize them with outstretched arms, reaching towards our door on their knees. She takes my little sister's plate, places it in the dishwasher; and in the same motion wipes down the table and, with her free hand, gathers her thick, blonde hair, in a ponytail. f

LAURA READ

YESTERDAY

Yesterday I wondered why everyone is always writing
about how wild they were or were not in the brief years
before they weren't. By everyone I mean me.
All my poems are about the boys I wanted to kiss
and the ash I flicked off that one cigarette.
One may be an understatement. Shouldn't I try to be
more exact? Yesterday at 10:00 a.m., Henry would not
quit barking at the front window and I thought
Stop bragging about what you think you're capable of.
Just lie down. It might not have been 10:00 a.m..
And Henry might have barked even if I wasn't home.
The way I'm writing this poem because I'm awake
and shut in this body and a little angry and I want you
to know. Or I wanted you to. Yesterday. I see why
The Beatles believed in it. It's over so now it's real.
Like my mother-in-law who just died so her things
are strewn all over our living room. Her box of scarves,
her painting of Jesus, her clock with the broken hands.
No wonder Henry is barking. Isn't she suddenly
here again in the chair, smoking and drinking
the way we all did when we were young?
She hasn't been this alive in years.

Laura Read

LET ME BE THE MAN

Let me stand on the ship's deck
in a storm
keep my face quiet
walk carefully
because I'm carrying too many things
in my hands.
Let me spray paint my name
on the side of a train, let me
smoke weed in a field
of sagebrush and freeway and pieces
of stars, let me smoke anything,
let something come out of me.
Let me ride through the mud,
let it be dark and wet and then
dry and flake off and I didn't
think and I didn't
stop. Let me be angry, be silent,
slam the door, slip out quietly,
be cold, be hot, be hard.
Let me be the thing you work at,
the knot you try to untie, let me not
be undone, let me go every day
without breaking this quiet
then let me finally fall
like a heavy rock into water.
Let the water cover me, let the hole
close, let there be no hole.

Let me be the sound water makes
in my ears, that screaming that goes
everywhere, rushing down hallways
and stairwells and elevators,
filling the whole hotel of my body,
vacant for years.

Carolina Hotchandani

OCEAN UNDER OCEAN

Parenthood.

We stop tending to our little hungers,
the ones that don't command
attention, action. They don't intensify.

Or we don't know.

Stingrays flatten themselves
waving the ocean floor
till they vanish.

Or seem the ocean floor.

It is only when the *new*,
darting in,
cracks the camouflage,

we see we were fooled.

The dark rays in the ocean
never set, the water,
always crashing into foam,

and we too were never one

our longings,
opening, closing, opening
their little fish mouths

Brenna Womer

ANATOMY OF A FATHER, OF A MOOSE

Dad didn't like guns. He was a military man and a decent shot, but he didn't like their weight, their potential. He preferred the hollow ones attached by a tube to the front of Area 51 in the base arcade where we killed aliens and shot off screen to reload. During his two deployments in Bosnia, my ages seven and nine, he had to sling an M16 across his back every morning before he left the barracks. He deployed to Iraq when I was thirteen and Kuwait when I was fourteen, and during that time he holstered a 9mm at his right thigh. He never had to shoot, though. Never even reached for the guns. His job kept him behind a desk and away from any combat, but he had to carry one anyway, part of the uniform. Dad was a quiet man, strong and honest—gentle, and I loved him for it. We didn't know each other well, which is odd to say about a father who wasn't absent in the usual sense. He provided, never willingly abandoned, but was absent nevertheless.

When he got back from Kuwait I was fifteen and we received orders to an airbase in the heart of Alaska. It was a two-week road trip from the Virginia coast, just the three of us. I watched movies in the back seat, picking new ones at Wal-Marts in every state we crossed or clipped—each of us in our own little worlds. Mom wasn't a mystery to me, and I didn't wonder what she thought about or have questions tucked away I was too nervous to ask. It was a mutual discomfort between Dad and me, father and daughter. We were both at a loss and Mom was there floating between us.

When we arrived at our new home in August, the first snow of the season had yet to fall, but the days were cool and the nights already cold. The nearest town was North Pole, which was home to The Santa

Claus House (open year-round), a Blockbuster, a McDonalds, and a grocery store that was open from eight to eight. We attended Pioneer Baptist—a small, wooden church painted white and carved into a grove of birches. At a glance it looked like a one-room, but it was two stories with the Sunday school rooms on the first floor and the sanctuary in the basement. The foyer was carpeted, and during the eight months there was snow on the ground and for breakup in spring the carpet was a sponge you couldn't ring out, one big mudroom. Downstairs the floors were tiled in white vinyl and there was a kitchen at the back with an industrial Bunn coffee maker from the eighties. Every Sunday there was a morning service, a potluck lunch, and an afternoon service so no one had to brave the roads to come back in the evening.

The first time I tried moose was in a potluck chili Pastor Jack's wife, Linda, brought for lunch one Sunday in late September. It was good chili, and I never would have known except she asked me how I liked the moose meat. We were still new to the area, and I'm sure she guessed I'd never had it. She said it was the last from the church hunt the year before.

"The men go every October, take the older boys and do some father-son bonding," she said. "We'll have to see if we can't get your dad to come along this year."

Mom was home sick that Sunday, so Dad let me drive home after second service. I navigated the sheets of ice with caution in our white Ford Expedition, the one we'd driven across the States and up through Canada.

"Miss Linda said all the church men go on a moose hunt next month," I said to Dad, who was in the passenger seat. "She said they're gonna try and get you to go."

"Yeah, Jack invited me last week. I was thinking about it."

"But you don't hunt," I said, turning my head to look at him. A warm sensation gripped the nape of my neck at the thought of him

coming home with blood on his boots, on his gloves. "You don't even own a gun."

"Eyes on the road," he said, pointing us into the white ahead. "It's what they do here, and Jack said I could use one of his. They're just trying to keep the population down in the woods near town. Moose cause a lot of accidents." He considered this a moment, and then said—more to himself, it seemed, than to me—"It's actually more of a moral obligation."

At home Mom had soup on the stove—bouillabaisse in the Dutch oven her mother let her take when she left home. Its red enamel coating had chipped some from the lid and the handles, and the white inside was stained and burned from decades of roasts and curries and sauces. Dad kissed Mom on the cheek and went into the living room to watch football, and I hopped onto the counter next to a sticky cutting board that was pungent with garlic and onion. Mom drank from a bottle of chardonnay before measuring a cup for the pot and then added a pinch each of fennel, celery seed, and saffron.

"I think Dad's going on a hunting trip with the men from church," I said, ripping at an onion skin.

"Oh, I doubt that." She slid her finger down the list of ingredients to find her place. "You know he doesn't care for guns."

"He said he was thinking about it. I don't like it. I'm not sure why, but I just don't. Miss Linda said it's some father-son thing, too."

"Well, I'll be surprised if he goes, but if he does, he knows what he's doing. Are you afraid he'll get hurt?"

"No." I ran a hand through my hair before realizing it smelled like onion. "I don't know. What if he likes it?"

"Would that be so bad? He's never really had a hobby. Just sports," she said. I could hear the referee's call echoing in the other room. "Neither of us has many friends here yet. It could be good for him."

"It doesn't freak you out, the idea of him killing something?"

She stopped stirring and thought before answering.

"I guess I'm not crazy about the idea, but I wouldn't say it freaks me out. I trust your father. He's a good man, hon, he really is. I know you don't feel very close to him right now." She set the spoon down, turning to me. "You know what? You should go with him."

"What?" I asked, glancing at his flattop bristling above the back of the lounger. "I can't go hunting. Besides, it's a guys' trip anyway. He probably wouldn't even want me to go."

"Well, you never know until you ask," she said, taking up the spoon again.

The soup was boiling.

Dad and I hadn't talked much since he came back from Kuwait. Really, we hadn't talked much since I got that stomach ache in Barnes & Noble when I was eleven and then wiped red in the bathroom stall. I could remember a time when he was my favorite person, a time when my problems were easy to solve. A scraped knee asked a few splashes of peroxide and a Popsicle to ease the pain, and a ride on his shoulders let me see high above the crowd at the Fourth of July air show on the flight line behind our house.

When I was thirteen and my first boyfriend broke up with me, Mom sat on my daybed and let me cry into her lap, Dad downstairs in the living room. She stroked my hair, and I wiped at the snot bubbling from my nose with the sleeve of my hoodie. After about twenty minutes, I heard him walking up the stairs and thought he might be coming to hold a few of the pieces, to teach me something about boys and the ways of love and call me sweetheart. He pushed the door open but didn't come in, only stood there and asked, his voice gentle and a shade higher than its usual pitch, if I wouldn't like to come downstairs and play a few hands of Gin Rummy.

The Sunday before the hunt, Pastor Jack brought Dad a .270 Winchester. During potluck, when the boys usually pulled parkas

and boots over their Sunday best to chase each other through the woods, instead they all gathered around Pastor's tailgate as he handed the rifle over to Dad. He pointed out its various features, telling him to smooth his hand over the walnut stock, selling him on the hunt less than a week away. I sipped lukewarm Folgers and watched from a window in the foyer, the carpet squishing under my feet. I hadn't asked if I could go with him, still wasn't sure I wanted to. I watched him with the rifle, turning it over in his hands, pulling at knobs and levers, glancing through the scope. He handled it so naturally, there with snow clumped in the tread of his boots. My father who didn't like guns for reasons he never gave, but maybe because he knew what bad men were capable of, how much they could take without asking. Maybe he thought it was something in the blood.

Dad's father was an Army man and a drunk. I learned this from my mother, as I did most things I know about my father's life, at the kitchen counter after she'd poured her second drink. His father received a Bad Conduct Discharge when Dad was thirteen. This was the grandfather I never met, who died of lung cancer when I was a baby. Dad spent his teenage years up late making sure his father made it to the couch, but keeping him out of his sisters' room and away from his mother, who had taken to washing down her sleeping pills with gin. There was a time, Mom said, that he sat at the top of the stairs and watched his father work the doorknob under the back porch light, watched his hazy form through the window; he'd learned it was best not to try and speed things along. He heard the key ting against the ground and then saw his father's fist come through the bottom pane of glass, reaching around for the twist lock, blood on the white gossamer curtain. It chewed up his hand and wrist pretty well, nicked an artery; Dad wrapped his hand in a dishtowel before driving to the urgent care. On her third glass of wine she added to the story

that sometimes Dad said he wished he'd just gone to bed and let his father bleed out on the kitchen floor.

My breath fogged the glass as a little boy tugged at Dad's coat as he considered the rifle. He smiled down at the boy as a father would to a son, in a way he'd never smiled at me, with a different kind of love in his eyes. He held the gun out for the boy to run his little hand across. He would have liked to have had a son, would have been better with a boy than he was with me; Mom has said so too. Dad nodded to Pastor and then walked to put the gun in our trunk. They shook hands and came back in together, past me at the window.

"Young lady, we're turning your father into a true Alaska woodsman," he said, and clapped a hand on my shoulder, spilling my coffee. Dad smiled at the thought.

When we got home he unloaded the gun from the trunk and I clapped my boots in the mudroom. When he came through the door, I asked without thinking, with just a picture of the little boy from church in my head, "Can I go on that hunting trip with you?"

He was quiet, which wasn't unusual, and hung up his coat.

"I know it's a guys' trip and more of a father-son thing, but you said it's what they do here and I could probably learn something, you know?" I said, nervous, rambling. "I don't really want to shoot anything, and I know you have to have a license for that anyway, but I'd like to come along and watch. I could help carry things. I promise I won't talk this much."

"Well, I think that'd be fine," he said, and laughed.

"Yeah?" I smiled because I couldn't help it. "You don't think anyone'll mind?"

"I guess we're kind of bucking tradition." He paused. "But I'll talk to Jack. If they're all bringing their sons and you want to come along I don't see why it'd be problem." He brushed at the back of his neck.

"We'll butcher the moose afterward, though, back at the church. I guess you could help the ladies back in the kitchen with lunch?"

"I think I'd be okay, maybe," I said, trying not to think of wet fur and serrated knives, of dead eyes and dry tongues. "But I can come?"

"You can come. We leave 7am Saturday."

I can remember only one story from Dad's childhood that he told me himself. It was a hot day during summer vacation and he was nine. He and his brother were biking home from the pool and they stopped by the air-conditioned bank where they knew the tellers put donuts out for customers in the afternoon. They leaned their bikes against the bushes and peeked through the glass as they strategized. They located the platter on a lobby table and walked quietly through the doors when the tellers looked occupied. They grabbed two each from the table and ran out, one of the ladies yelling at them from behind the counter. They stuffed the donuts in their mouths and took off on their bikes, stopping a couple blocks away to enjoy them properly.

This was the story Dad told. When I asked him for another, a family trip or his first date or what he was like in school, he said he had a bad memory, couldn't remember much else. My guess is there were many nights of drunken accidents and broken glass; nights spent herding his parents to soft places they could sleep off their respective stupors. My guess is he remembered plenty more than chocolate donuts on a hot afternoon, just nothing he wanted to burden me with at ages eight or ten or twelve. Eventually I stopped asking.

The morning of the hunt I layered long underwear under sweatpants under snow pants and stuffed the pockets of my coat with extra hand warmers. We had neck gaiters and thick caps and gloves so stiff with insulation I could barely move my fingers. Mom filled a green Stanley thermos with hot black coffee and wrapped up two toasted Pop-Tarts for me. We rode with Pastor Jack and his son and

one of the deacon's boys who snorted when he saw the pink frosting and sprinkles in my paper towel. The boys were a little older than me—seventeen or so. They talked locations, guns and bullets. Dad and I were quiet, new to the game, and so it seemed, for at least a moment, two points on the same line. I sipped coffee from the thermos lid and passed it to Dad who took it with a small smile and a nod. I looked out the window, at a place still so new to me. The early-morning Alaska cold was like a pause, like something that was already a memory.

When we got out of the car I shouldered the bag closest to me and Dad took up the Winchester. As men piled out of other trucks and loaded guns I watched the fluid surrender of civil twilight to sunrise. We set out on the hunt and I kept stride with my father, the swish of our snow pants falling in and out of rhythm. As we walked I thought of blood pooled in clear plastic stretched across the white tile floor where Pastor Jack gave his sermons and read verses from a worn leather copy of the King James. I thought of the red satin sash draped over the wooden cross behind the pulpit. I thought of the grandfather I never met and how his blood was Dad's blood and that blood was mine. I thought of the gun strapped to his back, holstered at his thigh, the one he held then with two hands, the one he'd use for killing, that would make it easier to kill.

It was an hour before he took a shot. The other men had scattered with their boys and it was just the two of us in a clearing. When he set himself and took aim for the bull's lung cavity, I paused with the cold and breathed heavy against wet fleece. I'm not sure why, I still don't know why, but he flinched. The bullet missed the torso entirely, hitting instead the bull's jaw. From Dad's mouth came a white cloud, a piercing, anguished cry louder than the crack of the bullet, the crack of the moose's jaw, and he took off after the thing which had run back into the trees. I tried to keep up, but with the boots and layers and a bag bouncing at my hip, I didn't make it far. I stopped, out of breath,

with the red trail at my feet; the moose would bleed out, or starve to death if it didn't. Dad had disappeared, and with none of the other men in sight, I waited. I dropped the bag at my feet and took two hand warmers from my pocket. I peeled open the foil and slipped the white packets into the palms of my gloves. Another shot cut through the silence. It felt so much colder standing still and time seemed to stop with me. There was no wind, no movement in the trees or on the ground. The snow was bright, blinding, but I couldn't see the sun, no blue in the sky. I'm not sure how long I had been waiting when I saw Dad emerge from the tree line; it could have been two minutes or twenty. I walked to meet him. His mouth was exposed, and when we were close I saw his eyes were red and wet.

"Did you find it?" I asked, pulling my mask down too.

Our breath met between us in a puff of white and I saw little icicles had formed over the hairs of his mustache.

"Yes," he said. "Put your mask back on. I need to find Jack. Let's get you to the car and see if there's any coffee left."

Back at the church, as the men unloaded two moose from their trucks, Pastor Jack sent a few boys and me into the surrounding woods for sturdy branches to prop open ribcages when it was time to pull the insides out. We brought back a bundle of birch boughs and removed a few thermal layers in the mudroom before heading down to the sanctuary. Miss Linda and some of the wives were back in the kitchen with pans of noodles masked by congealed layers of cheese, but I was the only girl. I wanted to do right by my father, for us to experience something new and hard and good together, to be reminded of the blood we shared. And though I didn't know if this—the killing and hacking to bits—was the right thing, I knew it was a start.

The sanctuary floor was covered in plastic painting drop cloths, and there were tall wooden slabs they'd brought for cutting stations that were covered too. They got right to work. Pastor Jack cut one of

the moose from stern to stem while another group of men started on the other. He asked Dad to stand on one side of the body; they curled their fingers inside and counted to three. I stood against the wall beneath the high basement windows, looking up at the white Alaskan light streaming in, highlighting the curls of hair and righteous dust in the air. There was a pop, and the boys I'd gone into the birches with were ready with branches. They wedged a couple inside, and Pastor began hefting out what was never meant to be seen by us or the fluorescent lights. Dad reached his hands in too, and as he removed a weighty organ—I wasn't sure which—with such care, I was surprised at the intimacy of the action. The red mass overflowed from his two palms and strained at the gaps between his fingers. He placed it on the covered wood, and I stepped away from the wall, walking toward him.

"Can I?" I asked, gesturing to the cavity.

Dad looked to Pastor and asked, "Mind if she helps me with the heart?"

I put on gloves and reached in with him; we cupped our hands around the thick muscle, and once we began to lift I knew he could have done it alone. I thought that from the inside, death would be more obvious, like the slick stillborn I'd seen delivered in a movie, clearly cold and gone, but the moose's heart was still warm and so red you'd have expected it to beat. We set it next to the other parts, and Pastor kept on until it was empty. When it was time to skin it, he made the cuts, peeled back a lip of fur, and asked me if I'd like to take a side. I looked to Dad, who gave me a nod and what I think was an almost-smile he decided was not appropriate given the circumstances. Pastor counted down again from three, and we jerked at the skin together until it separated from the white membrane coating the bones and muscle, like the thin layer beneath the shell of a hard-boiled egg.

"Not bad, young lady," he said to me. "Your dad and I've got it from here. You and the boys go get some food."

Dad and I drove home in silence with a trunk full of meat, parcels wrapped in butcher paper. When we pulled into the driveway he put the car in park and turned to me.

"Do you think we could keep the hunt between us?" He looked earnest and a little afraid, though I wasn't sure what there was to be afraid of. "I didn't mean to yell like that or to leave you behind when I went to chase down the moose, and, if it's all the same to you, I'd prefer you didn't tell your mother."

"I won't," I said, then added, "and I wasn't scared. Of you, or anything else."

"Good, sweetheart." He popped the trunk, and we carried the meat, piece by piece, to the deep freeze. f

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ELIZABETH HORNEBER's work has appeared in AGNI, Hunger Mountain, PRISM international, Chattahoochee Review, and elsewhere. She earned my MFA at Minnesota State University, Mankato, and was a 2015-16 Loft Literary Center Mentor Series Winner.

CAROLINA HOTCHANDANI lives in Omaha, Nebraska. She has taught literature and creative writing as a Visiting Assistant Professor at Northwestern University and the University of South Dakota. Her work has appeared in Modern Poetry in Translation and is forthcoming in North American Review.

DEE NELSON is originally from Hermantown Minnesota, graduating class of 2011. She attended the Minneapolis College of Art and Design and graduated in 2015 with a Bachelors in Fine Arts, her major being Illustration. She's studied fashion illustration in New York, and also

had the pleasure of illustrating a children's book that was finished in 2016. Dee has also recently finished working with another company in New York called Marcie Designs creating textiles for gift bags and gift wrap. Dee currently resides in Superior Wisconsin and is deeply inspired by Lake Superior and its natural tactile surroundings as well as pattern that she finds from traveling the world. Her biggest love is Culture and looks to incorporate that more and more into her work as the years come.

JOSEFINE KLOUGART is the bestselling author of the collection Rises and Falls and the novels Hallerne, On Darkness, and One of us is Sleeping. She is regarded by critics as one of Denmark's preeminent new postmodernists, and her first collection was nominated for the 2011 Nordic Council Literary Prize.

PETER KRUMBACH was born in what used to be Czechoslovakia. Shortly after graduating with a degree in visual arts, he left the country, and began a journey that eventually took him to New York. He worked in commercial art, and later as a translator and broadcaster. His poems have recently appeared or are forthcoming in such places as Alaska Quarterly Review, Columbia Poetry Review, Dunes Review, Phoebe, RHINO, and Salamander. He currently lives in La Jolla, California.

MARY MANDEVILLE lives in Portland, Oregon with her partner, surviving son, and two rescued pitbulls. Her essays have appeared or are forthcoming in Voice Catcher, Nailed!, Role ReBoot, Brain, Child, and Hip Mama. Mary is busy working on a book-length memoir.

MOLLY OLGUIN is an MFA student at The Ohio State University. her work has previously appeared in Quarterly West, Betwixt, New Millennium Writings, and the London Library Magazine, and is forthcoming from The Normal School, River Styx, and Zymbol. She was awarded the 2015 AWP Intro Awards Prize in fiction

CAITLIN SCARANO is a poet in the University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee PhD creative writing program. She was the winner of the 2015 Indiana Review Poetry Prize, judged by Eduardo Corral, and Conium Review's 2015 Flash Fiction Contest. She has two poetry chapbooks: The White Dog Year (dancing girl press, 2015) and The Salt and Shadow Coiled (Zoo Cake Press, 2015). Her recent work can be found in Granta, Crazyhorse, and Ninth Letter.

LAURA READ has published poems in a variety of journals, most recently in Rock and Sling and Crab Creek Review. Her chapbook, The Chewbacca on Hollywood Boulevard Reminds Me of You, was the 2010 winner of the Floating Bridge Chapbook Award, and her collection, Instructions for My Mother's Funeral, was the 2011 winner of the AWP Donald Hall Prize for Poetry and was published in 2012 by the University of Pittsburgh Press. Her second collection, Dresses from the Old Country, will be published by BOA in fall of 2018. She teaches English at Spokane Falls Community College and currently serves as the poet laureate of Spokane.

RUBY TUROK is a keen writer of poetry and music, and an MFA candidate at Boston University.

ALEXANDER WEINSTEIN is the Director of The Martha's Vineyard Institute of Creative Writing and the author of the short story collection Children of the New World (Picador 2016). His fiction and translations have appeared in Cream City Review, Hayden's Ferry Review, Pleiades, PRISM International, World Literature Today, and other journals. He is the recipient of a Sustainable Arts Foundation Award, and his fiction has been awarded the Lamar York, Gail Crump, Hamlin Garland, and New Millennium Prizes. You can find his fiction at: alexanderweinsteinfiction.com

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