2023 / Volume 29

THIN AIR magazine

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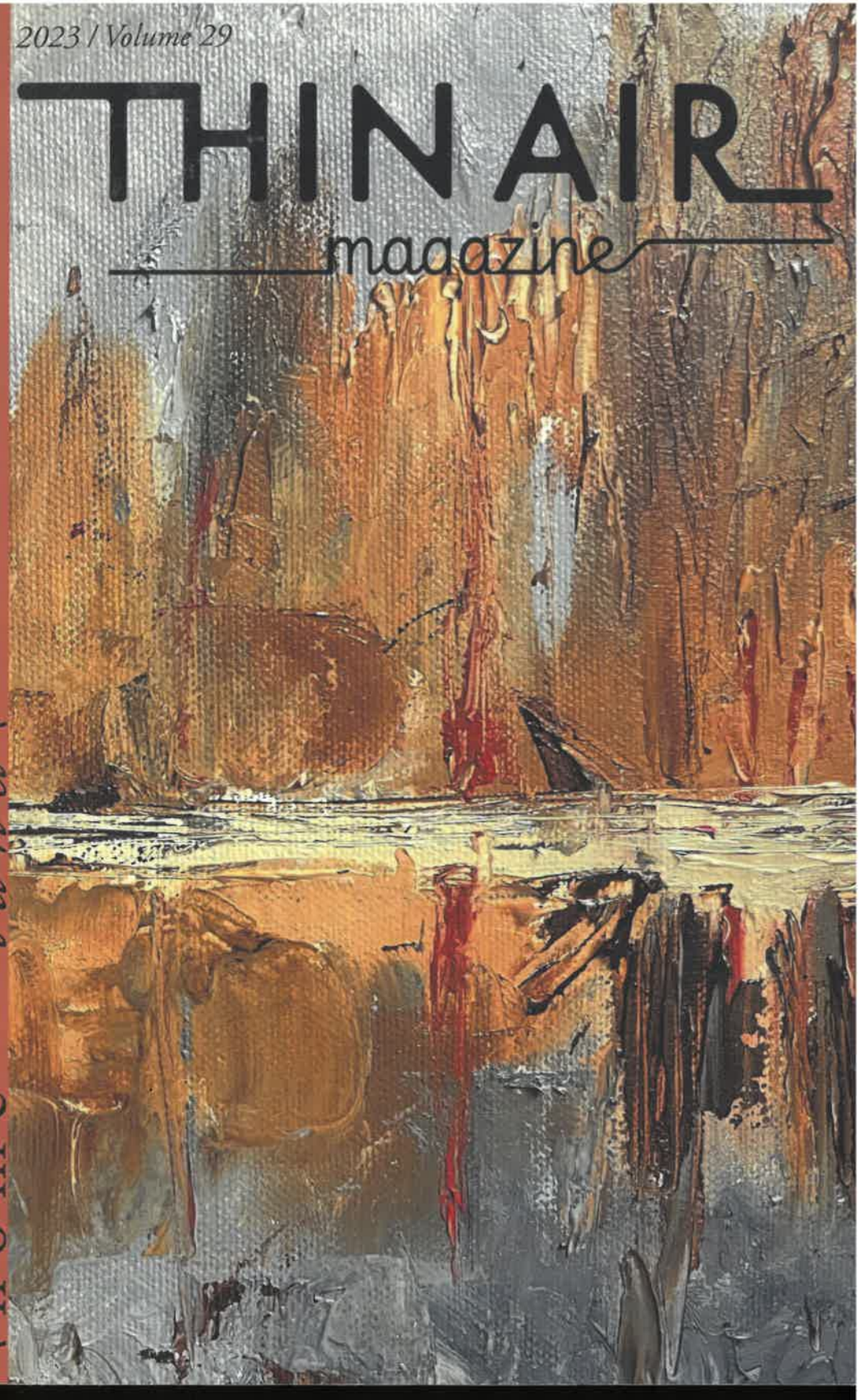

THIN AIR MAGAZINE

\home · *land*\

What defines a 'homeland?'

For this issue, we sought out work that explores the complex and malleable nature of homes, lands, and all that they encompass.

Thin Air selected a variety of submissions in fiction, nonfiction, and poetry—as well as pieces that defy categorization.

We hope you enjoy what you discover.

Founded in 1995, *Thin Air Magazine* is a non-profit, graduate-student-run literary magazine published annually by Northern Arizona University's English Department and NAU Printing Services.

A special thanks to Allen Woodman for his generous support of Thin Air Magazine.

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LETTER FROM THE EDITOR

As erratic impacts of the pandemic continue to ripple throughout our world, our editorial staff remains grateful and humbled by the ability to offer another print issue of *Thin Air Magazine* to new and returning readers alike. Despite supply chain delays, paper shortages, and the movement of more publications into solely online spheres, you hold within your hands a hard copy of our team's dedication and our contributors' generosity. We cannot thank you enough for taking the time to review our editors' picks of poetry and prose, to appreciate our readers' tenacious decision efforts, and to engage with this product of our Flagstaff community.

Issue 29 is the first themed edition of the magazine since its conception, and one that we are proud to present as an emblem of team collaboration and cross-genre coherency. What you will find within this issue is a variety of stories, places, and people all intertwined under the guiding concept of "home • land." We asked submitters: what defines a 'homeland' to you? We invited pieces that engaged with questions of displacement and belonging from all over the globe—how we experience and become translations of place. The work you will thus encounter expands the definition of home to encompass familial ties, excavations in memory, loss for language, and comfort found in each other.

But I want to thank again our readers and interns as listed on the previous page, in addition to our editors, specifically—Katie Tonellato, Zach Semel, Razi Shadmehry, Oliver Scofield, and Bree Burkitt—as well as our Social Media Manager, Anahi Molina, for making this space a home to me.

A deeply felt thanks must also be extended to: our beloved and benevolent faculty advisor, Nicole Walker, who has supported our efforts as the issue bloomed into existence; Allen Woodman, whose donations have helped carry these pages through the press; and this year's Bird in the Hand Prize judge, Dr. Samir Talib. We are honored to be named among other representatives of Flagstaff's literary community, specifically the Cinder Skies Reading Series and Northern Arizona Book Festival. I also would be remiss not to recognize Bree Burkitt's contributions as our layout mastermind, Judith Skillman's artistry featured as our cover design, and NAU Printing Services for making each copy a reality.

As we present to you the 29th issue of *Thin Air Magazine*, I would also like to thank the 2022-2023 editorial staff for inspiring the continuance of this important work.

And lastly, to our wonderful contributors, each of whom have entrusted us with their writing and treasured spaces: we remain indebted and welcome you to our *Thin Air* family. May you feel at home. And may you, dear reader, recognize, discover, and empathize with the homelands of your fellow human beings.

Sincerely on behalf of the 2023 editorial staff, our many thanks,

Alli Mancz
Editor-in-Chief

TABLE OF CONTENTS

FICTION

Rena was to have her bat mitzvah at the age of twenty-two. Ten years too late, and right on time, Rena would ascend the stage, read the Torah portion of the week, descend the stage, and be somehow changed for it. There was more significance than she would have liked in her assigned Torah portion: Metzora. Leprosy laws. Outsiders and what to do with them.

Her thoughts turned to the reservoir outside her window: a wide, white, fish-less basin, neutral in its mid-day stasis. Her freshman year roommate Lylah had died after swimming drunk in that reservoir. A complex system of tubes traveled beneath the still surface of the water, some that pushed and some that pulled. Lylah had been pulled.

The upcoming bat mitzvah hadn't been her idea, but she had decided to roll with it after a couple glasses of Manischewitz at Shabbat dinner, the cough syrup sweetness disguising the drink's true alcoholic content. She was a semi-committed member of her university's Hillel: a background actor to the Jewish-American "Sarahs" and "Bens"; a complement to the rare but revered, heavily accented "Ayelets" and "Ophirs." Every year, the club put on a bat mitzvah for a graduating senior, and once she inadvertently revealed that she hadn't had one as a child, the Hillel's board volunteered her.

When Rena called her mother to tell her the news, anxiety set in; butterflies flicked around like razors in her gut. Rena and her mother spoke on the phone often enough, but the last time they had seen one another was when Rena's mother dropped her off at college nearly four years ago. Rena spent her summers working unpaid internships and barista jobs in Boston, her spring breaks on school-sponsored volun-tourism trips to Nicaragua and Appalachia. Devorah worked seven days a week as a waitress at a high-end restaurant on the Las Vegas strip and spent the rest of her time doing her best Hemingway impression.

"Rena!" Devorah answered the phone on the first ring. "What's wrong? Is everything okay?"

"Yes, Ima—"

"I'm at work right now."

"I know."

"What's going on?"

"I'm having a bat mitzvah."

"What?"

"I'm having a bat mitzvah."

"You're having a bat mitzvah?"

"Yeah," Rena said.

Devorah laughed. "You're not having a bat mitzvah."

"It's in April. You can come if you'd like."

"Of course I'll come to your bat mitzvah. You're not really having a bat mitzvah, are you?"

"I am," Rena said. "It's in April."

"OK, OK. And what are you doing for winter break? Is that soon? Maybe you can come visit me," Devorah said. "At my new place. You haven't seen it yet, have you? I have a guest room. Why don't you come for Hannukah?"

"I—"

"I'll pay for your flight," Devorah said. Her mother had moved out of her childhood home nearly a year ago and had been begging Rena to come visit. She paced over to the window in her dorm. Snow had fallen hard this week and was piled in misshapen lumps, graying tumors of different sizes.

"Sure," she said. "OK."

—

The night before she went to her mother's, Rena dreamt that she was with Lylah again, smoking weed out of their dorm window. Smoke mixed with the meandering clouds of their breath as they leaned out as far as they could and divulged their secrets to the moon. They weren't necessarily "close friends," but there were moments like these and that was enough. Lylah's voice when she spoke on the phone with her friend in Lebanese was musical, mellifluous. Rena wished she could decipher the strangely familiar syllables.

After Lylah died, Rena slept in her roommate's abandoned bed, ate in it, masturbated in it. For an entire month her sheets smelled like peach facial scrub and sandalwood incense, and then they smelled like nothing at all.

In her dream, Lylah put her hand down Rena's throat and withdrew a great lump of sodden clay. "Speak," she whispered and Rena vomited up the entire reservoir: fish and seaweed and silt. She woke up starving.

—

Rena's body began to freeze back in November—toes, fingers, nose, and inward. She was desperate now, a few weeks into December, to be unfrozen. A brief vacation in sixty degree weather wouldn't be so bad. It's not like Rena and her mother ever got into screaming matches, it's just—well, it was complicated. They had grown together for a while, and then they had grown apart for a longer while, until they were altogether different species who had lost the ability to communicate with each other.

Every employee on the plane wished her a Merry Christmas, which Rena didn't mind. She said "Happy Hannukah" right back and smiled. A whiskey-stained Santa walked ahead of her as she disembarked and this too seemed perfectly amenable, as if there was such a natural, organically occurring phenomenon as a drunk Santa at the airport.

Rena found her mother quickly at the arrivals gate. Devorah was five-foot-ten and asparagus thin with long, articulate fingers. She went in for a hug, scooping her hands under her daughter's armpits in an affectionate wrestling maneuver. Rena smiled with great effort.

"Elohim yishmor," Devorah said. "Look at you!" She put her arm around Rena and guided them both out to the parking lot.

"Are there a lot of Jews in Las Vegas?" Rena asked. She had meant to ask a question, but not this one.

"Yeah, sure," Devorah said. "Loads." She answered, as if it were the most normal question in the world, because it was. In Rena's experience, Jews were always asking after each other in these ways, confirming their existence from day to day, city to city. "Not as many as in Miami though."

—

Devorah pulled into the driveway of a long, low single-story home hidden from street view by a mess of trees weeping pink desert life. Her new home was bigger than the one that Rena had grown up in, but it wasn't nicer. This new house had an overwhelming amount of white space; ungoverned and liminal.

On the first night of Hannukah, they ate dinner at three o'clock in the afternoon because Devorah worked from six in the evening until two in the morning. They ate leftovers from her mother's shift the night before — fatty, lukewarm food that pooled at the top of Rena's stomach and gave her heart burn. They lit the candles and sang together to celebrate the evening. The lyrics had been passed down for generations. They knew them and always had, even if they had to relearn them every so often.

—

Rena dreamt of the reservoir. Its basin opened up in front of her like a toothless mouth. Lylah floated to the surface like an egg yolk; she spoke but Rena couldn't understand the language. Rena dove into the water and swam towards Lylah. She took the girl in her arms and tried to drag her back to shore, but Lylah wouldn't budge. Where did you- How are- Is everything- Can we?

Rena woke up alone in a strange bedroom. Her jaw was clenched tightly and her head hurt deep in her left temple, adrenaline sticky in her throat.

—

On the second night of Hannukah, Rena decided to cook dinner for her mother. She walked to the nearby Walmart and picked up eggs, canned tomatoes, onions, and parsley. It was cool outside, the sun a shiftless tadpole in an earl grey sky. When the food was ready at dinner time — three o'clock — her mother was still in the bathtub where she had been since noon.

"I'm so tired," she pleaded, "Can we have coffee first?"

Rena obliged. Her mother's nakedness was both ordinary and unsettling; she looked fragile, childlike with her legs curled up against her chest. Rena brought in coffee for the both of them; she held the mugs up to cover her eyes as a joke but also not as a joke. She danced to dispel her awkwardness, and pretended to slip which caused her to actually slip, mugs upturned rowboats in the browning, sudsy bathwater. The hot liquid pooled low, coffee grounds shifting lazily at the tub's ceramic bottom.

"Shit. Shit," Devorah said. Her hair was wrapped in a paisley towel and her knees were exposed above the surface of the water like bald spots. Rena offered her a hand and helped her up, wrapping her shivering mother in a towel.

"Are you awake now?" Rena laughed.

Devorah picked the mugs out of the water and held them up like castanets. "Au lait!"

—

Rena slept in an unfurnished guest room, an air mattress flung against

the wall, her suitcase spilling open on the floor. The color of the wall was an off-putting, unctuous white, thick and lumpy as cream cheese. But all things considered, she felt comfortable at her mother's, in a semi-awkward but tender way — like a simultaneous flush with a stranger in a public restroom.

For the fourth and fifth nights of Hannukah, the two crafted Judaism out of nothing: latkes were frozen tater tots; sufganiyot were jelly donuts from the gas station. Jeopardy provided their prayers and they sat shoulder to shoulder on the couch, rapt and moved by the technicolor sermon.

On the sixth night, Devorah arranged a morning shift at work so she could take Rena out to dinner. After a long day at the restaurant, Rena expected her mother to be exhausted and rude as brine, but that wasn't the case. In fact, it was Rena who soured. All she did that day was fiddle with the house, touching things, opening and closing empty drawers. She tried to prepare for her bat mitzvah but grew angsty and threw the Torah back into her suitcase. She sat in the backyard and watched the neighbor's cat paw sleepily at a brood of ants. Everything exhausted her.

"This place is too nice," Rena said when she arrived at the restaurant. "I'm underdressed."

"No you're not," Devorah said. A hostess led them through the crowded dining room to their table.

"Yes, I am. I'm wearing a college sweatshirt.."

"Well, that's okay."

"You should've told me," Rena rolled her eyes.

"What did you think, we were going to Applebee's?"

"Kind of."

Devorah laughed. She looked tired from her shift, but only in the eyes. The rest of her was all shifting-weight and excitement. "So tell me about your bat mitzvah. How are preparations going? Do you want me to help you practice this week?"

"No, it's okay."

"Really, I could. My Hebrew isn't so bad. I could switch another shift and we can—"

"Can we not talk about it?" Rena looked down at her menu, ignoring her mother's gaze. "The steak tacos look good."

Rena looked up. Her mother was crying.

"What's wrong?" she asked, embarrassed. A full-on cry, big gulps of breath,

shaking shoulders and everything. Devorah shook her head and opened her menu, but her eyes were streaming.

"Ima. What is it? I just don't want to talk about my bat mitzvah. It stresses me out."

"You never want to talk to me about anything," Devorah said, too loudly. She was attracting attention to their table. "You don't let me into your life."

"Ima... I haven't seen you in years. Give me some time to warm up."

"We don't have time. You're leaving in a few days. When are we going to have time?"

Rena put her head in her hands. This was the mother she knew, the one she was avoiding. Over-dramatic, prone to crying, guilt-ridden and guilt-wielding. It seemed the tragedy of Devorah's life that she loved her daughter so much and that made Rena want to... run towards? Run away? It made her lose her appetite.

"Do you want to go home?" Rena asked.

"No, no," she said. "I took the night off. We're not going anywhere."

"You're just going to sit here and cry into your salad?" Rena said. Devorah laughed. They both did.

"Yes. Is that okay with you?"

"That's fine by me."

—

On the seventh day of Hannukah, Rena and her mother went grocery shopping. During the drive they listened to Johnny Cash and yelled the lyrics at passing cars. She pictured Lylah in cowboy boots and spurs, riding a horse alongside the car. She pictured her nude except for the boots, brown back and long hair draped over one shoulder like a dryad. She realized she had forgotten to put on deodorant that morning.

"I'm a terrible driver," Rena said. Her mother laughed, but it didn't feel like a joke or like small talk. It felt important. "No, really. I am. No one ever taught me."

Devorah didn't answer right away. She watched the road and hummed along to the music. "I taught you how to drive," she said. "We used to go to the mall parking lot every weekend for months."

"I don't remember."

"Well, I do. I remember everything."

—

Rena wanted to leave, and yet, going back meant the true start of her studies; it meant burying her nose in that musty tome for the rest of the semester. Throughout the week she'd only had one panic nightmare about her bat mitzvah; her mother's presence, though irritating at times, had been a powerful distraction. Devorah didn't want her daughter to leave either.

"What if I refuse to drive you to the airport? What would you do then?" her mother asked.

"I'd hitchhike back to campus."

"Well, fine. I guess I'll drive you then."

That morning, she woke up with a pounding headache that started from her left jaw and worked its way up and behind her eyes. Devorah's car also had a pounding headache that caused it to moan and groan and ultimately give out only minutes into their drive to the airport. They pulled over onto the highway shoulder. Cars shrieked past them. Devorah got out of the car and disappeared behind the hood. Rena zipped her sweatshirt up over her head and closed her eyes.

"Shit," Devorah said. "I think it's the alternator again."

"This has happened before?"

"A couple times."

"Are you serious? You need a new car then."

"Oy vey, Rena. So dramatic. We just need someone to jumpstart us." Devorah waved her arms at oncoming traffic.

"Ima, no one is going to pull over on the highway. My flight is in two hours. I need to call a cab or something."

"You can't call a cab on the highway."

"Yes you can."

"Just trust me," Devorah said. But Rena didn't. The sun clung impotent to the white sky. It made Rena nauseous. Her headache spread to her clavicle, her spine. She found that she could breath out but not in; the air was greasy, too thick to swallow.

"Call a tow truck," she croaked out the window at her mother. "Call an ambulance."

Devorah only laughed at her. She helped Rena out of the car and under a tree on the highway shoulder. Rena got on her knees on the cool asphalt, pressed her forehead into the trembling surface and prayed.

"I'm sorry," she said. "I'm sorry."

Devorah rubbed her back with one hand while she waved down cars with the other.

—

Rena made her flight in time. It seemed like the sight of someone doubled over on the side of the highway was enough to make someone pull over and help jumpstart their car. At the airport, Rena got out of the car quickly and withdrew her carry-on from the trunk. She leaned in the window and said goodbye to her mother.

"I'll see you in April," Devorah said. Rena rolled her eyes. "It's going to be great. Trust me. Elohim yishmor."

There were two Santas on Rena's flight this time, weary from their trips around the globe. Christmas had passed, New Years was only a few days away, and then her bat mitzvah would come barreling towards her.

—

Her first night back in the dorms, she had the last dream about Lylah that she would ever have. In it, Rena ascended the stage at her bat mitzvah but all of the pages were blank. She looked out at the audience but only Lylah was there.

"What do I do?" Rena asked, but Lylah wouldn't tell her. Furious, she hurled the book at Lylah. It unraveled in the air and the pages crinkled themselves into birds that circled and dove at her ankles, threw themselves down her throat, and gave her paper cuts in her esophagus. She was stuffed with words, filled to the brim, and she still didn't know what to say. She began to cry. She cried until the room flooded and she had to swim, swim out to save Lylah.

"What do I do?" Rena begged the drowning girl. "What do I do?"

Lylah's hair billowed out like live wires, the water around her buzzing electric.

"Please tell me."

Lylah only winked at her, and her laugh was like the crackle and spark of

a fuse. She laughed and drowned, drowned and laughed.

—

When the time came for Rena's bat mitzvah, she was prepared. She knew the words by heart. She even felt their force a little, in the pit of her throat and in the base of her brain. Some words shone, some throbbed, some itched, and some tasted sweet, like halva. Others had no effect whatsoever. They all came out of her mouth at the right time, exactly how they were supposed to. There was a momentum to the event — time seemed to speed up as it went along — then it was suddenly done and over with. Everyone clapped and said mazel tov and goodbye! goodbye! goodbye!

Later that night, there would be a party, but in the meantime Rena and her mother went for a walk. They sat on a bench at the lip of the reservoir. It was a cool day but the sun came out from behind a cloud and announced itself with a moment of perfect heat.

"Mazel tov," Devorah said.

"Thank you."

"Of course."

"I'm going to remember everything from now on," Rena said.

"Well," Devorah laughed. "Maybe not everything."

Rena got up and walked to the water's edge, gazed down at her image mirrored in the clouds. The reservoir sat perfectly still, gilded her reflection with sky. From above, Rena thought, the reservoir would look like a neat oval—a perfect bird's egg, vibrating with potential.

The day Fergal took me into the woods, my parents were fighting. He'd knocked on the kitchen window, causing an unintentional ceasefire. Mum shouted up to me, 'your friend is waiting on you.'

'He's not my friend,' I answered, pulling on my new red hoodie and heading out the door.

No one liked Fergal. I only played with him because now there was no one else. Cara used to be my best friend. The last time she'd come over, she'd said she'd outgrown me, what with the arrival of her monthly visitor and the fact some people mature faster than others; not to mention she wore a bra. I had nothing.

Back then she'd said I was being babyish. Said we could still be friends but not best friends. I'd focused on the sunflower patterned wallpaper in my bedroom. Abstract representations of the real thing. Petals disconnected from seed discs, leaves detached from stems, vibrant oranges and yellows, dark and pale greens. Cara had been putting on eye-liner, she'd looked over at me and said, 'you understand, these things happen'.

Fergal said he wanted to show me something in the woods, something special. 'You coming?' I nodded and went to get my bike. Fergal rode a silver chopper and I had a second-hand *Rayleigh Heather.*

It was the end of summer, a long nothing summer, spent mostly with my grandparents. Second year of secondary beckoned. I was an August baby, youngest in the year group. We hadn't had a holiday. Mum said money was tight. Dad lost his job in the power plant and my baby brother was teething.

We left the housing estate and cycled up to Laughlin's Cradle. Fergal said to follow him and not ask questions. We cycled in silence, set our bikes by the edge of the road in a ditch and crossed Blakey's field, the one with the well. Mum said Blakey put it there on purpose and every year he'd hoist up a bucket full of misplaced wishes. The woods lay on the edge and we ran through the dry furrows. The last of the hay had been harvested and a few bales were dotted round. If Blakey saw us he'd threaten to set his dogs on us.

Fergal walked ahead. He found a stick almost the size of him. He stopped and looked at me, like Moses with his big staff. 'You scared?' he asked, jamming the end of the stick into the dry, cracked earth.

'Not too far now,' he said, but it felt like ages. We went in deep. The outside world peeled away, everything became muffled. Finally, we came to a small clearing with stones in a circle, burnt logs, fag ends, empty coke cans and crisp packets. Fergal told me this was where everyone came, Martin, Diarmid, Jonno, Paul, and Nuala. Said he'd even seen Cara. 'I've watched them,' he said, 'do it.'

'Do what?'

He raised his brows and spelt it out, 's-e-x.'

Nuala was Cara's new best friend. They wore big baggy jumpers and shortened their school skirts to their thighs. Nuala wore black eyeliner every day and then Cara started wearing black eyeliner, too.

We walked further until Fergal slowed down and pointed his stick toward a bush. 'It's in there,' he said crouching down, 'D'you want to see?'

I shrugged my shoulders and offered Fergal a stick of gum. He unwrapped it from the silver foil then rolled it up before biting into it. Fergal didn't think like other people.

He had red hair except for a circular white patch like a fairy ring. Everyone knew he ruined his mother. Tore her apart on his arrival. He was stuck for ages and that's why he was soft in the head. He was kept back in school, the oldest in the year. His mother never had another baby after him.

I remember when Cara said being a woman was hard at times and I wouldn't be able to understand until I became one myself. Then she'd said I'd stinky breath, showed me how to catch it in cupped hands and test myself. Now, I chew gum, spearmint flavoured. We were in my bedroom, Dad had rapped on my door, 'how are the girls getting on?' I'd been chewing the inside of my mouth staring at the wallpaper pattern.

Fergal said he'd found an alien up in the woods, said 'Aliens' heads are bigger than their bodies. That's a fact.' I would be the second person in the world to see it. His Uncle Roddy had sent him books from America on extraterrestrials and swore to Fergal he'd seen a UFO.

'Reckon it fell from the sky and splat.' Fergal pulled a tiny body from out under the holly bush.

'It's a baby,' I said aghast, hands clamped to my mouth, looking from the body to Fergal and back again.

'Looks like an alien to me.'

'Fergal, it's a baby.'

'Do you want to touch it?'

I shook my head, I was trembling all over.

The body was blotchy with blue and purple marks, smears of white, the cord still attached, eyes closed. It lay—the baby lay motionless. My heart was pounding.

Fergal was poking it with his stick.

'Jesus, Fergal stop.'

My voice changed, high and shrill. Fergal looked over at me.

'This is serious Fergal, we've got to take the baby home, show someone.'

I tried to untie the Levi's red hoodie from around my waist. It was only a couple of weeks old, my birthday present. I'd waited ages to have one. I'd made a double knot; my hands were shaking.

'This is bad, very bad.'

I squatted down and covered the tiny body with my hoodie. Closed my eyes as I tried to roll it up. It reminded me of my dead cat, Ginger. The weight of it.

I gathered the body into my arms, the head flopped over the edge of my hands.

'Will I be in trouble?'

Everyone knew Fergal's Dad beat him. He beat his mother too. He beat anyone he didn't like.

'Maybe we should leave it here.'

'No, Fergal.' I turned to walk back through the trees—firs and pines, the floor a carpet of needles and cones and careful not to trip.

'Where you going?'

'Home.'

He called after me, 'Am I going to get in trouble?'

I held the baby carefully as an offering in my arms and my mouth was twisting from side to side, striding fast, rushing back through the dense woods.

'Answer me, will yah… am I?'

'What?'

'In trouble?'

'When did you find it?'

'Last night.'

'And you didn't think to tell anyone?'

'I thought it was an alien.'

'It looks nothing like an alien, it looks like a baby.'

'There were alien noises coming out of it.'

I stopped abruptly, 'What?'

'When I found it, it was squeaking.'

I thought of the stick and the prodding.

'I don't want trouble,' he sounded agitated. 'Will I get in trouble?'

'Jesus, Fergal what have you done?'

'I did nothing.'

I ignored him, walking forward back down through the wood, past the teenage debris.

'Nothing, I didn't do a thing.' There was anger in his voice, 'Nothing, you hear me?' He ran up behind me, snatched my ponytail from the back and yanked my head hard. My arms retracted protecting the bundle, clamping it to my chest, 'Let go of me Fergal.' I tried to twist free, 'let go.' He didn't. Instead, he twirled me round to face him, pushed me up against a tree and clasped his hand to my throat, 'Don't dare say a word. Promise.'

'I…'

'Say we found it together… we found it today… say it.'

'I…'

'Swear on your life.' His fingers tightened and the breath fractured in my throat. 'One word … just one and….' He raised his stick up above my head as if about to crack my skull.

In the distance, Blakey whistled for his dog, 'here boy, here boy.' He was in the upper field heading down toward us. Fergal dropped the stick and grabbed the baby wrapped in the hoodie from out of my arms. He began running back to the field.

'Fergal wait! Fergal…' I kept shouting his name and went chasing after him.

He didn't answer, sprinting fast toward the edge of the field.

When we were friends, Cara and I would sneak onto Blakey's field and make well wishes. We'd throw pennies and halfpennies. My last wish was to have her as my friend again.

Fergal raced toward it. I tried to catch up.

'Don't Fergal, don't…'

When I reached his side, he dropped the baby in, as if he'd waited until I was there.

There was a moment of stillness, then a thud.

Fergal cuffed the back of my head. 'Not a word.'

We cycled home in silence.

Mum was livid I'd lost my new hoodie. I told her Fergal had snatched it and threw it down the well.

I told her, 'Mum I didn't mean for it…'

But she barked, 'you think money grows on trees?'

'Mum, I ..'

'Jesus, I've had it up to here with you,' She was shaking with rage, 'haven't I enough on my plate with your father, the baby, and now...' She sent me to my room, 'and stop your sniveling.'

The last time Cara came to play she'd said, 'No one plays with dolls anymore. Dolls are for babies.'

Dad had told Cara's mum on the phone earlier, 'I'll drop her home on my way to football practice. Not a bother at all,' He'd opened my bedroom door, clapping his hands together. 'Right so Cara, let's be having you.'

'Look-it,' she was squeezing the top of my shoulder as she jumped up, 'these things happen. You'll understand one day.'

I sat on the bed sobbing, the tears kept on till the colours of the wallpaper merged, a mess of yellow, orange, red.

Cathy greeted her in the lobby of Mercy Grove Home. Jessica smiled, wondering why the nurse insisted on escorting her, even though she visited almost weekly. Maybe it was simply Cathy's chance to talk to someone who wasn't a colleague or resident.

"How are your classes going? Did you pass that test?" Cathy asked. Jessica had been worrying about a Scandinavian history exam last time she'd visited.

"We haven't gotten our grades yet, but I think it went well."

"And were those minnung...menning...whatever those men were called on it?"

"The *minnunga mæn*? No, but I think I might write my final paper on them."

They came to his door and Cathy knocked.

—

This is what happened to you that night:

You went to Margot's room to celebrate her birthday. You had drinks with Margot, Jake, and Chad, three shots of vodka then three Blue Moons. You played Cards Against Humanity. You were brought back by Chad and Margot afterwards and left on Gina's futon, where you woke up the next morning.

—

They opened the door. It was entirely possible no one had heard their knock.

"Good afternoon, Henry."

Jessica came into the sun-washed room. The flowers from her last visit were still in their vase on his bedside table. Despite showing signs of wilting, they managed to brighten the white walls and dull brown carpet and bedspread. She hadn't brought new flowers this week and now she wished she had. On the windowsill, a radio played music softly. Henry was sitting at his table, a newspaper out in front of him, a pencil in his hand. He looked up when Cathy went over to him and touched his arm.

"You have a visitor, Henry."

Henry looked over at Jessica, who smiled warmly back at him.

Henry smiled politely, his brown eyes curious. She felt her face twitch as she fought to keep her composure. Cathy noticed Henry's lack of reaction. "This is Jessica, Henry. She's going to sit with you a while. Call if you need anything." She spoke to him, but looked at Jessica. She nodded and Cathy left the room.

Henry asked, "Do you like crossword puzzles?"

—

This is what happened to you that night:

You went to Margot's room to celebrate her birthday. You had drinks with Margot, Jake, and Chad, three shots of vodka then two Blue Moons. You decided to go to Robert's party but you ended up not going. You were brought back by Chad and Jake afterwards and left on Gina's futon, where you woke up the next morning.

—

Jessica swallowed and moved to sit down next to him. She told him she did enjoy crossword puzzles and asked for the clue. She hadn't done a crossword on her own in years, though she'd enjoyed helping her parents with them at breakfast in middle and high school.

Henry looked down at the newspaper. She could see that a lot of the puzzle was already filled in. "Club dance, five letters, starts with an S. And it's not salsa..."

"Swing."

She'd learned it long ago, before college. It had been her first partner dance and remained to this day one of her favorites. After plowing through local ballet classes and demanding more, her parents had paid for private lessons with a retired dancer and his wife who lived in the neighborhood. They taught her tap and jazz and ballroom. She performed at her school and local talent shows. Now in college, she still danced between her classes and exams. Whenever music turned on, she counted the beats and could almost feel herself flying across the floor. When the old songs played—the ones for which she'd had routines back when she was little—her body still knew the motions.

Henry wrote swing into the crossword. "My wife loved going out to dance. We could spend hours dancing together, just the two of us."

Jessica nodded, but remained silent. Henry's wife had died a short time before he'd moved in here—over a year ago.

—

This is what happened to you that night:

You went to Margot's room to celebrate her birthday. You had drinks with Margot, Jake, and Chad, two shots of vodka. You went with them to Robert's party. You danced with Chad, then Robert. You drank two vodka and ginger ales. You danced with Jake and drank a Blue Moon. Jake wanted to bring you to his room and you said yes. You left Robert's party with Jake. You walked back from Jake's place afterwards and fell asleep on Gina's futon, where you woke up the next morning.

—

Henry asked for her input on the rest of the puzzle and she supplied what she could.

"The clue is 'Men of memory homeland.' What does that even mean?"

Jessica smiled, surprised and pleased to know an obscure clue. "Scandinavia."

"Well…it does fit." Henry wrote in the word.

"It was the men of memory's sole job to remember vast records for their communities. They're called the *minnunga mæn* in old Nordic."

"I guess you learn something new every day."

Jessica nodded.

There were long moments of quiet, as Henry pondered his answers and Jessica sat with him. Their shared silence stretched, but she didn't feel uncomfortable, probably because of the radio. The music glossed over any awkwardness; they weren't silent because they had nothing to say—they were absorbed with listening.

Henry paused every once in a while, when a new song played on the radio. Jessica perked her ears up then as well. She watched to see if there was a spark of recognition in those brown eyes. But the song, whichever one it was, played on and Henry returned to the puzzle. She swallowed sharply every time.

The puzzle was almost complete when one song came on and it was her turn to look towards the radio first. Henry noticed.

"Do you know this song?"

—

This is what happened to you that night:

You went to Margot's room to celebrate her birthday. You had drinks with Margot, Jake, and Chad, three shots of vodka. You went with them to Robert's party. You danced with Chad. You drank two rum and cokes. You danced with Harry and drank two Blue Moons he brought to you. Harry brought you into Robert's room and you said no. You left Robert's party by yourself. You walked back afterwards and fell asleep on Gina's futon, where you woke up the next morning.

—

She hadn't listened to it in years, but she knew every note, every lyric, every pause. It had been a favorite of her teacher's wife. The song had often played when she'd been taking lessons, and she had asked her teacher to choreograph a dance. He said it would be her Happy Dance.

"Everyone should have one," he had told her. "It doesn't require anything or anyone else. Just you and the music. And if you dance it, no matter what else is happening, no matter what you were feeling, all your worries, your troubles—they will all go away. Because that's what true dancing should do. That's what a Happy Dance is for."

Now, Jessica nodded and smiled at him. "Yes, I know it. I was taught a dance to it."

Henry's eyes lit up. "Really? Would you show me?"

She stood and stepped away from the table. She struck the opening pose and waited for the chorus. Henry sat patiently, his eyes intent. She watched his face.

The chorus came.

A step to the right, twirl to the left, her right hand waved overheard, flick of the foot, twist of the head, a skip forward, a jump back, twirl the right, left hand waved overhead, right hand waved overhead, a twirl, then stop. Pose.

The chorus ended. The song played on.

Her body remembered the motions. They felt natural and good, her heart pounding.

Jessica watched his eyes as he looked at her. They were kind, yet scrutinizing.

"Your kick could be sharper."

She held her breath.

—

This is what happened to you that night:

You went to Margot's room to celebrate her birthday. You had drinks with Margot, Jake, and Chad, two shots of vodka. You went with them to Robert's party. You danced with Harry. You drank three vodka and cokes. You danced with Margot and drank a Blue Moon she brought to you. Margot brought you back to her room and you said maybe. You walked back afterwards and fell asleep on Gina's futon, where you woke up the next morning.

—

Henry nodded slowly. "You dance very well. Whoever taught you must be proud."

Her face twitched. Later, she would be proud that she had managed to smile as she thanked him.

Someone cleared their throat. She turned around and saw Cathy standing at the opened door. Jessica didn't know when she had arrived and how much she had seen. The nurse came forward and told Henry it was time for him to rest. Henry nodded and rose from his chair and stood in front of Jessica. Their eyes were level now.

"Have we met before today, young lady?"

She swallowed. "No. I'm here visiting a friend, an old teacher of mine in fact. Cathy mentioned you hadn't had any visitors in a while. I thought you might be lonely."

He thanked her for her company and shook her hand. She smiled and left with Cathy.

She would have gone straight home, but Cathy wanted to talk and brought Jessica to her office. Jessica had never been there before, but she didn't take any notice of the room. She didn't care. Cathy made her a cup of tea, and she accepted gratefully. She felt very cold all of a sudden.

"It's not personal, Jessica. He only remembers me because he sees me every single day. I won't let him forget who I am."

She sipped her tea, not caring that it burned her tongue. She lowered the cup from her lips, enough to speak but not to take away its warmth. "I

danced for him today."

"I saw."

"He and his wife taught me for eight years. They came to every performance. I was at their house all the time. It sometimes felt like I lived there. And now…"

She remembered a time when his brown eyes had towered over her, smiling down as she tried to learn the steps. She'd crane her neck to beam at him when she got it right. She had no difficulty looking at him now, finally at equal height.

Cathy didn't reply and Jessica was grateful. They sipped their tea. Jessica heard people passing in the hall outside, the rest of the home going about their days.

"It's not fair."

—

This is what happened to you that night:

You went to Margot's room to celebrate her birthday. You had drinks with Margot, Jake, and Chad, three shots of vodka. You went with them to Robert's party. You danced with Chad. You drank two rum and cokes and one vodka and ginger ale. You went into Robert's room by yourself. You left when Robert came and woke you up. You walked back afterwards and fell asleep on Gina's futon, where you woke up the next morning.

—

Cathy nodded. "I understand."

Jessica wasn't sure she really did. "Why doesn't he remember me? We mattered to each other."

"Why are you angry?" Cathy asked.

It was only then Jessica realized she was angry. She'd been holding it back.

"Because it hurts. It hurts that he doesn't know me and he doesn't even know that it hurts and it hurts that I can't even tell him that it hurts."

"Why can't you tell him? It's not like he would remember later if you told him or even yelled at him."

Henry wouldn't remember, it was true. But she would never consider actually saying anything to him. She barely felt comfortable saying this in

the confines of Cathy's office. Telling him, even if he would never remember, even if she could pretend it never happened after the words were out of her mouth, didn't seem possible.

"Because I would remember it. And that would make it real."

"It would be real, Jessica, even if no one remembered it. It would have still happened."

She sipped her tea. "Can you prove that something happened..." She paused, took a breath. "If no one remembers?"

Cathy thought for a moment. "It would be hard, but even forgotten events leave their marks on the world and their scars on us."

Jessica stared at the floor.

"Do you think that just because he can't remember you, you aren't real to him?"

Jessica looked back at the nurse. She could see in her eyes that Cathy had seen this before: the family, the friends, the students, trying to make sense of being erased by the person they cared about.

"I'm real only when he sees me and it's not me he's seeing. I exist in a part of him that he can't reach anymore."

They finished their tea in silence. "I'll be back next week." Cathy led her back to the lobby and watched her leave.

—

This is what happened to me that night:

I went to Margot's room to celebrate her birthday. I had drinks with Margot, Jake, and Chad. And then I-

—

Jessica lifted her pen from the diary page. Her hand was shaking. She still didn't know how to finish that sentence. Looking at her previous entries, she knew the possibilities were actually endless, but she'd forced herself to confront some of them, even if she couldn't know them all. It had been so hard to write any of them, made only slightly easier by writing in the second person, pretending for a moment that she wasn't the 'you' she wrote about.

The day after Margot's birthday, her roommate Gina had asked how the celebrations went. Jessica opened her mouth to reply and nothing came out.

She'd never understood before what it was really like to have a panic attack. She was lucky Gina had been there to help. With her encouragement, Jessica went to the college health services. There were no signs of assault, but that did little to comfort her. She still couldn't remember anything.

She glanced over at her Scandinavian history textbook. She felt it staring at her. She'd read about the *minnunga mæn* weeks before and the idea of the men of memory captivated her. She marveled at the idea that men had lived as memories for entire peoples, that a brain could hold so much and not let go.

Before the birthday party and this last visit to Henry, she had thought about writing her final paper on the subject. She felt like she needed to study these men even more so now. But no amount of study and research on dead men would change the reality in front of her: Henry would never remember her again, and she would never remember that night either.

She took slow deep breaths, like Gina had coached her to do. She looked at the unfinished sentence glaring at her from the diary page.

—

This is what happened to me that night:

I went to Margot's room to celebrate her birthday. I had drinks with Margot, Jake, and Chad. And then I don't know what happened.

—

Margot came by the next evening on her way to Chad's room to hang out. She wondered if Jessica wanted to join. Jake might stop by later as well.

Jessica nodded and told Margot she'd get her keys. There was something she needed to ask them.

●

EVAN MORGAN WILLIAMS / CRENSHAW, 1983

The bus rumbled off, expelled a dirty cloud. Erica, standing on the curb, breathed it, tasted it, swam in it. Moments later, the bus screeched hard. A mother was yanking her child from the street. The woman cursed the bus, cursed her child. The bus pulled away, chasing the indifferent sun.

Erica glanced up the boulevard to see if she had been followed. No white Camaro, no blue Mercedes, no green LTD. The traffic was all motion and color and stink and noise. She, at its unguarded edge, was none of these.

A police car slowed. Erica walked with her briefcase. She could feel the officer's gaze following her: young woman in a pink blouse, pencil skirt, high heels, gripping a man's briefcase, knuckles clenched. The officer drove on.

Erica slipped into Crenshaw west of the boulevard. She passed bungalows, courtyard apartments, brown lawns. The tall and spindly fan palms gave way to date palms, squat and wide. A few rosebushes fought for life. If the homeowners were Japanese, a Mimosa tree graced the yard. If the Japanese had moved away, a dying one. Cars lined every curb. Erica trudged into this world like wading into the ocean, water rising to her ankles, her calves, her thighs, warm and familiar, her mind letting go of flight and fear. The boulevard faded. A single siren wailed on the way to Baldwin Hills.

—

When Erica was little, her grandpa operated a grocery one block off the boulevard. It was a tin shack—all he could afford after the war. He stocked vegetables and fruit, but he trafficked in candy, cigarettes, and gossip. The shack had a telephone, and people paid a nickel to whisper secrets they didn't want heard at home. Grandpa Tak didn't sell much produce, but he accumulated nickels and news. He helped Erica's family pay the bills.

—

Crepe myrtles bent from August blooms. Aphids dripped sap on cars. The 6 p.m. sunlight tilted shadows long and slender. Erica wanted to believe that to slip into the neighborhood was to disappear. A fish, pursued by an angler, hid in familiar shoals. But there was nothing familiar about the scuff of Manolo heels on Crenshaw concrete. Erica stopped and removed her heels. She hooked them on her fingers and walked on.

—

Erica grew up in a duplex three blocks from the produce stand. When she turned eight, she was allowed to walk to the stand alone. Her mom refused to go near, saying she had done her time handling produce. She gave Erica a list and made her recite it in English and Japanese. Erica liked being on her own, gripping the list, bearing someone else's words. She liked to speak Japanese with Grandpa Tak as he filled the grocery bag. All the old words. *Yujo*. Young mistress. *Onegaishimasu*. Do me the honor. He called her *Esa No Sakana*, Little Fish, and he gave her a roll of Lifesavers. Erica lugged home the bag of lemons, cucumber, ginger, pears. The pack of cigarettes for her dad felt like contraband. She hugged the bag to her left hip, the fingers of her right hand pushing up a Lifesaver candy from the roll. Mrs. Furakawa, reclining in her chair on her front lawn, always asked what the bag contained and who had used the phone today. The questions troubled Erica, and her mouth went dry. The candy stuck to her cheek.

—

A man paced his yard, tethered to his telephone, the cord stretched from the house. He watched Erica pass. He muttered into the phone "Uh-huh." He eyed Erica's briefcase. He muttered again, "Uh-huh." When he muttered "Lord have mercy," Erica figured he was following her legs, her ass.

—

Becky Nakamoto's house had been on this street. Erica knew how to get to Becky's house because it was twelve palm trees from her own. Becky had dolls with Asian eyes. Erica's mom wouldn't buy them because they were made in Taiwan. Running to Becky's house, clutching three blond Barbies to her chest, Erica counted the palms in Japanese. Becky's Taiwanese dolls played with Erica's pale Barbies. The girls made them kiss the Ken doll to get pregnant. Three kisses did the trick. Running home, she counted palms in English, pondering which language left her more breathless.

—

Palm trees wore yellow ribbons, even though the hostages in Iran had come home two years ago. Yellow ribbons faded and frayed. Erica saw a loose ribbon and cinched it tight. She walked on. She felt observed. She would not tighten another ribbon.

—

The Hashimoto duplex had a breezeway. For Nisei Week, Erica and her dad strung paper lanterns at the entrance. They joined the crowd at the Holiday Bowl and waved tiny American flags as shiny convertibles rolled by. College girls in white gowns and upswept hair waved back. Veterans from the 442d threw salutes. Where was Erica's mom? That night, Erica and Becky played in the street, twirling sparklers, tiny stars prickling the skin on their arms. The morning brought a rare splattering of rain. Erica found her dad in the breezeway smoking a cigarette. The lanterns had been ruined by the rain. Erica wore a pink dress and white patent leather shoes, and she splashed in the breezeway to be near her dad. He pulled her from the rain. She stood on the tops of his wet black shoes, and they held hands, swayed, and called it dancing.

—

A police car rushed past Erica at full speed. The action wasn't just in Baldwin Hills anymore.

—

Seventh grade, Erica was helping at the produce stand. One day, she lifted a pack of cigarettes for herself. Grandpa Tak would never know. Besides, he smuggled them from Tijuana to dodge the tax, a crime greater than hers. Walking home, overcome with guilt, Erica weighed dumping the cigarettes along the way. How about Mrs. Furakawa's garbage can? But people would see her detour from the path. A girl was never invisible. She took the cigarettes back to the produce stand. Maybe Grandpa Tak would notice. Maybe he wouldn't. Often his truck was gone. He had his secrets too.

—

Another police car roared past. It was going to be a hot night. Crossing the street, Erica watched the taillights fade. She said, "I'm the one you want, right here."

Briefcase, high heels, torn cuff. I'm the one you want.

—

When Erica was thirteen years old, she was followed home from school by some teenage boys in a car. It was ten blocks. Maybe she was trying to walk like a beauty queen girl. The boys drove a white Impala and they whistled at her. She hid in the breezeway until they drove on. She could hear her dad inside, wheezing and coughing.

One evening, she went out alone, but she was followed by her mom. She had been planning to meet a boy. To spite her mom, she came home with a bag of sour lemons from the stand. She talked to the boy on Grandpa Tak's telephone, adding her nickel to the jar.

One time, coming home from Grandpa Tak's, she vomited. Fell to her knees and puked on Mrs. Furakawa's lawn. Said she had eaten something spoiled from the stand, but it was from smoking a cigarette. After she got home, she lay in bed, stared at ceiling sky, and waited for the nausea to pass. Her mother's attentions included rubbing her stomach and singing the oldest songs while her father mouthed the words.

—

Erica's long walk brought her finally to her street, a dead-end of dirty yellow bungalows. A courtyard apartment rounded the horseshoe shape. The street was her shadowed shoal. Erica was a sunfish in shadows glimmering.

—

Like many Japanese in Crenshaw, Erica's family moved to Torrance. Her dad's asthma was getting worse, and they went for the clean sea air—anything to help. He blamed his cigarettes. Erica's mom blamed camp, the wind lifting dust from the dry lakebed, thick choking clouds. Erica's dad was Charlie Hustle, how he ran the bases, even in the dust, he ran. It was the only detail from camp that Erica knew. Grandpa Tak refused to move to Torrance. Forced out in 1942, he wouldn't go again. When he died of emphysema, he didn't have to go anywhere. The tin shack was torn down.

Erica called Becky Nakamoto from Torrance on her new princess telephone. She had kissed a boy at Torrance High.

Becky asked, "What's it like?"

"Your lips on a plum," Erica said.

"That sounds stupid."

"No, on the inside, juicy, where you break the skin. Your tongue is like—"

Becky said, "Ew."

Erica's mom asked who was on the phone.

"Plum," Erica said, the word still handy in her mouth.

Her mom frowned. "Plum?"

Ume.

Becky said they were moving to Gardenia. Too many blacks in Crenshaw

now. Erica had never heard it said before, only the clean sea air. She didn't know what to say. She never saw Becky again.

—

Nosy neighbors, shy shut-ins, old Japanese couples who hadn't made the move, a few students from USC, a young family. Children riding Big Wheels. One or two green thumbs who kept their gardens ship-shape. A drug dealer. That was the talk, anyway. His customers were regular and few; a stranger's car up the dead-end street would get a glare. There were guns on this street. Public and private intermixed like oil and water, formal speech and enraged yelling, English and Japanese. Windows were left open. Doors were slammed.

Erica and her briefcase had nowhere else to go.

She put on her high heels. Smoothed her skirt. Tucked her blouse. Glimmering sunfish in familiar shoals.

—

Her dad's asthma got worse. So much for the ocean air. Fifteen-year-old Erica kneeled on the sofa to pat her dad's ribcage, loosening his lungs. She thumped out the rhythm of The Doobie Brothers' Black Water. They liked that song because it ran long. Patting her dad's back was the loving touch between them. Erica patted his back every evening. She went on a date with a boy—she went on lots of dates with boys—and when she came home her dad was always on the sofa, and Erica would kneel on the sofa—sugary perfume, red fingernails, blue jeans—and pat his back. Beer on her breath, the taste of a boy's tongue in her mouth. The windows were always open to the clean air. Oh, black water.

Erica watched baseball games with her dad. It was always the Dodgers versus someone. A pitcher whipping his long, liquid side arm, her dad's raspy voice, "He's Dominican," Erica asserting, "They should get a Cuban." Her dad breathed as deeply as he could to muster, "That will never happen!"

Six syllables. Erica patted his back and counted them.

—

The corner house was where the Samoans lived, five mighty brothers in one tiny bungalow. They operated a concrete business. Their pick-up truck and mixer took the driveway. They had a side hustle fencing stolen LPs, and as Erica passed by, their mighty arms were hauling crates from the trunk of their Monte Carlo into their house. One of the brothers saw Erica and whistled long and low. He went back to hauling crates. Erica was getting off

easy.

The youngest brother was on the lawn, hosing down shovels. He always called Erica his Downtown Girl. He didn't know her name. She didn't know his. Gray dust coated his skin, t-shirt, shorts, flip-flops. Tall as a horse, strong and scowling, he sprayed his legs and arms until gray skin went brown. Dirty water puddled on the sidewalk. He yelled, "What's wrong, Downtown Girl?" He added, "You don't look okay." He pointed the hose and sprayed her downtown clothes. Erica squealed and turned, and the prickle of water down her back tightened her squeal to a gasp. Her wet shirt stuck to her skin.

He did not know her name. She did not know his. These were missing words.

—

Summertime in high school, Erica stayed with cousins in Japan. She got homesick for Los Angeles and called once per week. Her dad on the phone probably wanted to hear her voice, but she wanted to hear his. Long silences punctuated failed phrases. "I'm fine. I'm having fun. The Dodgers, how are they doing?" Her mom wouldn't talk to her. Long distance was expensive! She put her thoughts in thick letters to which Erica never replied. She wasn't supposed to. She was the vessel. Her mom's words filled her, told her all about her dad, his tired breath, the things he couldn't say.

—

Next door to the Samoans, Mr. Sho labored in his front yard, fighting his contraption—a Frankenstein mess of rebar that was finally starting to resemble a Ferris wheel. It squeaked where iron rubbed iron.

Mr. Sho yelled to his wife, "She's moving! Just in time, too."

Mrs. Sho pruned her crimson roses. She had her beauties, he had his.

Nisei Week had come to Los Angeles. In Crenshaw, a week-long celebration had dwindled to one festive evening. Blame it on Torrance and the clean Pacific air. Nisei Week had shrunk to a potluck on a dead-end street, hot dogs, sparklers, and a rebar Ferris wheel tall enough to give you a view a block away. Erica was going to bake an apricot pie. And she hoped to revive the beauty contest. The girls could stand on folding chairs and smile.

Mr. Sho gave his Ferris wheel another whirl and laughed.

—

Twelfth grade, Erica came home from Torrance High School to find her

dad sunken from the sofa to the floor. He was drowning in his sticky lungs, his breath squeaking. Erica knelt beside him. She patted his chest. She couldn't help him breathe. He grabbed her wrists. He held on hard. She watched his skin turn red, purple, gray. He didn't have the words. She knew from his eyes he was waiting for her words. She didn't know what to say. He let go.

—

Erica had never told Akihiko Noguchi about her dad. Every day, she sat in his office, behind him, on her leather stool, lips to his ear, interpreting English into Japanese and back again. There was no room for her words. Making love on his desk, there was no room for her words either. And today, she had stolen his briefcase, and what did it contain but only his words?

—

Her mom asked. "You were there, sweetie. What did he say?"

They were kneeling at the shrine, sorting her father's ashes with chopsticks. Erica wore a black shift dress with a Peter Pan collar and cuffs. She told a beautiful lie. "He said, 'Oh, black water, keep on rolling.'"

Her mom said, "That's not true!"

Erica carefully took a chunk of ashes from her mom's chopsticks to her own. She said, "Wait, those were my last words to him. I get confused. It was very painful for me."

"An impertinent girl, you are." She took the chunk of ashes back. Then she got on with the details of the day. "I need you to shop for me, so forget about going out with that boy." Then her words looked farther ahead. She said, "It's going to be tight from now on. You'll need student loans. No more summers in Japan. And don't talk about your father's illness. It was shameful and very sad."

Erica offered hopefully, "We could plant a vegetable garden."

Her mom said, "No, we won't."

"Well, then, we could fish at the piers."

"Maybe we could do that."

—

Erica passed the home of the ones she called the Wild Bunch. Children spilled out the front door but just as suddenly charged back in. Bright-colored plastic toys littered the sidewalk. Erica stepped around them, leaving wet footprints. They stared at the soaking-wet woman meandering through

their mess of toys. A stray ball rolled into the street, a child chased after.

Across the street, the drug dealer ran down from his porch and tossed back the ball.

He called to no one, "Somebody's gonna get killed someday!"

He caught Erica's eyes. His gaze drifted to her briefcase. Mr. Noguchi's briefcase.

She asked, "Why me?" She felt cold in her wet clothes.

He said, "I wasn't talking to you."

Erica said, "Who else would there be?"

The drug dealer returned to his porch.

—

Her mom was ironing the pink blouse. It was Erica's first day of work at the Noguchi Concern, a shipping company with offices in Nagasaki and Los Angeles and berths around the world. Her mom had bought her the blouse at Bullock's, a rare splurge. Erica stood in her skirt and bra, waiting to slip into her new clothes, her new life.

Her mom said, "You were raised speaking the familiar register. You must unlearn it and acquire the most formal."

"But my professor said—"

"Context. I'll bet he said context, yes?"

"She. But context implies familiarity not formality—"

"That's different."

"I really don't think so. Dad and I used to—"

"Honey, turn the page. We—I—didn't pay four years to USC for you to dwell on the past. And Akihiko Noguchi is no familiar."

"I found an apartment, Mom. I have enough money. It's in old Crenshaw. There's some girls and an old couple and it's not so far from Tak's Shack and—"

"His store is gone, sweetie. Just try this on. And why on earth would you go back there? You should stay here in Torrance."

"Torrance is way too far from work, Mom."

"But Erica, you talk for a living. You listen and you talk. Your voice needs the clean sea air…"

—

Turning up the path into the courtyard apartments, Erica wanted to cry. No one should have to see her cry. Hell no. No one should wonder about the woman, soaking wet, lugging a man's briefcase. Erica wiped tears on her cuff and remembered: her cuff was torn. No one should have to see that, and no one should ask.

Mr. and Mrs. Ito lived in the first apartment on the left. They were laboring under the courtyard's apricot tree, knocking loose the ripest apricots with a pole and putting them in a bucket. This was robbery. Erica was supposed to bake the pie.

The next apartment belonged to Daphne, a theater girl from USC. Her door was closed, blinds drawn. She was always in and out, bustling to a party or stumbling home from one, smoking a clove cigarette, exhaling smoke without words, her eyes reflecting your own self back at you. Tonight she was out. Or she was in? You couldn't tell.

The first door was open on Erica's side of the courtyard. Rachel, the kindergarten teacher, sat on her porch, plucking slow, careful notes on her guitar. Silences lasted longer still. Twelve months Erica had lived here and Rachel had made zero progress, stuck on the opening riff to the Suzuki Method's Lightly Row. She bent over her guitar. Her black hair spilled around her face. She didn't see Erica trudge by.

Erica's wrist was sore from carrying the briefcase. Her Rolex felt tight over the swollen skin. Mr. Noguchi had given her the money, but she had bought the watch herself. Just thinking about his sweaty hundred dollar bills, she wanted to vomit. As she stepped to her porch, Erica saw her miserable self in her front door's sixteen panes, and she knew: she was a little fish in the shoals, all right. Her swirling thoughts: no one had noticed them at all.

She turned to the courtyard and spoke. "I'm home. And what a day I've had. But you didn't ask, did you? Don't worry. I have things I would not tell. But it's all right, all of it. For Nisei Week, we'll light paper lanterns for good luck. Of course, if we invite good luck we also invite the bad, but it won't find me, won't find us."

Erica looked around the courtyard. Rachel had taken her guitar inside. The Itos had gone inside with their apricots. Daphne was gone. The drug dealer across the street was smoking cigarettes, watching Mr. Sho's Ferris wheel turn. The Samoan brothers were piling into their Monte Carlo, riding low with the weight of five giant men. The children were playing tag, chasing each other in mad circles. No one heard Erica Hashimoto as she began to sing, "Oh, black water..."

•

I sang in the children's choir.

We learned many songs about Russian nature, love for the homeland, and for some reason Ave Maria, which, unlike other songs, was never sung at concerts.

"Anna, why are you singing like you don't love your homeland at all? Louder, clearer, cleaner!" the choir teacher rebuked.

I didn't understand what I was supposed to love.

After the choir, at 5 pm, I would go out to Malaya Konyushennaya and wander in the eternal winter twilight toward Nevsky, in the crowds, sometimes going back because I forgot my shoes or scarf or sheet music, sometimes hurrying so that no one would scold me for being late. In the warm subway, I had time to sleep and read.

Later, at the terminal station, I would take the bus to my suburb on the bumpy Moscow highway. It was so dark outside I couldn't see anything except my own reflection. But I knew the local landscape well. Dreary black fields, slightly covered by dull greenery in summer; five-story buildings, built not so long ago, but shattered by bad weather and aged before their time; then a bridge, advertisements, a traffic police station, another bridge and a turn to the highway with trees, already close to home.

The most interesting sight in summer was to see houses the size of street toilets, built on small garden plots; adults called them "sotka" and "squat."

People came, built themselves little houses where they could only stand, and plowed the land. All the time they worried that it would be taken away from them. These sotka were taken away when I was an adult and all the fields along the highway were built up with warehouses and depots. This landscape did not arouse any love in me. Like a diligent student, I honestly tried to feel love for the skinny, crooked trees, but the mud on the side of the highway and the controller's scolding thwarted my mood. In the summer, observing the southern steppe, a majestic sea of grass, I felt it might be like something that needed to be sung in chorus.

Anyway, it was too hot to love. Maybe I just don't like nature?

I didn't like the choir, its songs, except Ave Maria, although I could barely reach the top notes.

Russian was an easy subject: I rewrote texts, solved brackets, learned a couple of spellings, and knew where to put punctuation marks from the teacher's pauses in dictation. The Russian teacher smoked a lot, so her voice became strident over the years, and a pause for a dash began to produce a whistling sigh. When you've been singing in the choir for so many years, other people's breath gives you some secrets. She also taught literature, and as I progressed toward my final exams, Russian literature became more and more serious and complicated—the teacher became sterner and gloomier. It is possible to love a language.

One day I unsuccessfully compared Princess Maria Bolkonskaya to the tortoise of legend on which the world rests. The teacher exhaled not only a cigarette smell but also a spit of brandy on me and said: "My God, and even you don't understand anything, what a stupid generation you are."

I listened carefully about how good her previous students had been and how bad her current ones were. In retaliation to her, I could only fall out of love with the two subjects she taught: Russian and literature. I went to choir, sang about my love for my homeland, jostled in the subway, drove in the dark along the highway—it only got easier when I sat down to study German. On the pages of a textbook the girl Uta rode her bike to school, her parents were doctors, just like mine, and she too lived in the suburbs, only they had their own house.

Uta had a dog and dreamt of being a veterinarian and loved Germany. "What do you want to be?" Uta asked me.

"I wanted to be a doctor." But my dad came home from his third night shift this week and asked me so sincerely to not be a doctor, that I agreed and now I don't know what I want to be when I grow up. And I guess I love Germany too, not my country.

Now I am in Germany. The question is not whether I love Germany, but whether Germany will let me stay here.

It's hot here, snakes crawl out of the bushes right under my dog's paws, even the bitter espresso attracts wasps. I wish the Germans would speak more slowly to me, but even if I asked, they would not. Or maybe I'm using the wrong verb. My documents have been gathering dust at the bureaucrat's office for two months now, he is in no hurry to review them, and my lawyer suggests I look for another, she has many other, simpler, and more straightforward cases. I am politely wished good luck.

Russia is cursing me in the back, calling me a traitor, because I call war a war.

Indifference is nicer than hate: I can build a home on it.

NONFICTION

Arriving on the fringe of Phoenix, I was horrified by the endless urban sprawl, repeating chain stores, barreling truck traffic. The dense, endless, cement-ness of it all. It was a relief to finally pull into my aunt's driveway and collect her embrace, the one I'd focused on for the past 1,500 miles. Exhaling, I looked around the crescent. My aunt's front yard was a simple arrangement of crushed rock, boulders, and one young saguaro cactus with a single trunk.

She said, looking up, "I hope I live long enough to see it grow an arm."

—

Each time I walked with my dog, all I could see were the hazards: jumping cholla, prickly pear, unidentified spiky plants. So many sharp barbs to slice open a paw, rip a sleeve, tear flesh. Standing on safe islands of pavement, my displaced pup and I would stare out into the flat expanse of red dirt with its infinity of electrical towers and feel a pang for home.

But one morning, I spotted a roadrunner darting through the utility corridor. What a beautiful creature, its tail pointing up, like a giant wren! Another early walk, I spied a coyote slinking through the retirement village paths. Then, a black-chinned hummingbird darting in and out of flowering vines. I had to acknowledge there was life here—a rich plant and animal biodiversity. And within this place, a stillness, a calm peace. But I didn't come here to appreciate the desert. I came to seek solace, for an undetermined length of time, with an elder who intimately understood.

—

Introversion combined with widowhood affords you endless opportunities to spend time alone.

I went for my first desert hike in the White Tank Mountains—photographing new-to-me birds, getting closer to those magnificent saguaros with arms. I admired ancient petroglyphs etched into rocks. Listened for faraway voices and always stayed on the trail, keeping a watchful eye for lurking snakes and scorpions.

According to my aunt, my Uncle Tom walked daily in the Sonoran Desert to commune with nature. A transplant from his birthplace of Michigan, he'd adopted and affectionately called this place "his."

I imagine he found his own sacred spots: a picturesque bend in the trail, a rock spirit face, a sentinel saguaro casting a long, cool shadow in the day's heat. In my mind, I can see him making a quiet daily pilgrimage to his favorite spots—much like I do at home on my daily sojourns by the sea. Our common ritual helps me forge a connection with the uncle I never knew.

Before leaving for my hike, my aunt had shared a photograph: my uncle recovering in a hospital bed, his face painfully lacerated and bruised. He'd fainted from heat stroke during one of his desert walks. Flashing back to his injuries sharpened my focus on the park's caution sign: *When your water is half gone, your hike is half done.*

My water bottle still felt heavy. But, in the glinting sun on an unfamiliar trail, leading into the dry loneliness of the serrated rock, I decided it was a good time to turn back.

—

My uncle and I had something else in common: a love for old houses.

When the opportunity arose, my uncle purchased my great-grandparents' original homestead in the Upper Peninsula of Michigan. The home's restoration became his great labor of love for the next twenty years—a calling to steward the place where our elders had settled from Finland.

I never knew this chapter of his life; he never knew mine. We'd both been fully occupied in our respective worlds, in an era before the Internet made geographic distances easier to bridge. But I could relate to his determination—the Finnish sisu required to take on such a project in retirement.

Unfortunately, the homestead also came with stairs and Michigan winters—both increasingly difficult for my aunt, suffering from progressively painful back issues. Twenty years was enough; the Arizona sun was calling.

—

The second time I visited the Sonoran Desert, I was dating a widower from my online grief class. We'd already hiked in Spain together, visited each other's hometowns. He'd been the one to comfort me when I learned my youngest son had died of an overdose. It seemed destiny we'd found each other in the aftermath of loss. Our long-distance relationship continued. On this occasion, we'd met in San Diego to spend time with his family, then rented a car and headed to Arizona.

I was in love again but didn't fully realize it until we were somewhere in the moonscape along the I-8 through Yuma. I'd asked Gary what he wanted to do in his retirement. Build another Habitat house, play golf, hike another Camino trail? His answer lassoed my heart: *To keep loving, giving, and growing. To become a better person.*

The external world reflected surging emotion back to me. We entered Buckeye city limits inside the painted backdrop of a rippled, rose-pink sunset. Another evening, a panoramic rainbow too wide for my camera frame. He took me for a romantic trail ride. My gentle horse's name was Peaches.

We forged memories in this place, so my heart latched on and made the desert mine.

—

He was supposed to pick up my aunt at four o'clock after her bridge game.

There was a dangerous heatwave in Phoenix. It was 108°. The day before, on the summer solstice, the mercury hit 116°, shattering the heat record. The public had been warned to seek air-conditioned buildings, stay hydrated, and avoid outdoor activities. My uncle had promised: he would not go walking that day.

Fifteen hundred miles north, I was hunched in a private corner of the hospital courtyard, hands trembling, making phone calls. My husband was being admitted; the cancer was throughout his body. I don't recall the weather or much else about that day. I only remember that when I phoned my father to deliver the terrible news, he spoke first to share his own about his brother.

—

My Uncle Tom died in the desert somewhere between Mile 125 and 126.

Around Mile 131, there's a saguaro "couple." The two cacti have grown together over the past hundred years, intertwined, obviously in love. Standing arm in arm, sharing their happiness with passing traffic on the Sun Valley Parkway. Whenever I drove by, they always seemed to be waving at me.

A reporter later interviewed my aunt, part of a local story on the surge of heat-related deaths. She framed her responses around gentler times: my uncle hiking for hours, learning the names of desert wildlife and flora. He loved the poppies when in bloom. Although he wasn't religious, the desert felt spiritual and brought him peace. My uncle also once declared: if he ever died in the desert, he would be doing something he loved.

Still, he made the fatal choice to hike in extreme heat — two days before their 55th wedding anniversary. My aunt was angry at first but, in time, forgave him. Realistically, somebody will be left behind when the other is gone.

She fulfilled my uncle's wish to be buried next to his parents in Michigan. Still, she feels his presence in Arizona. My aunt affirms, "I know this is where his spirit is."

—

By my third visit to the Sonoran Desert, Gary and I were married.

I finally saw my first scorpion, dead and harmless on the tile floor. Then a beautiful California Kingsnake, run over by a golf cart, curled in an elegant serpentine as if asleep. Examining them without fear made me wish to see them alive.

In Tucson, I was enchanted by a pipevine swallowtail resting in dewy morning grass, then a brilliant red vermilion flycatcher hopping between branches. My desert "life list" was expanding, offering joy.

I learned the value of a patch of shade. The temporary, soothing relief offered by gnarled honey mesquite trees and dappled shadows from all the fringed-leaf trees, including the prickly uninvited arms of the Palo Verde, grabbing me as I walked past.

And I was anxious to see my saguaros. There they were, still holding hands, but a little less vibrant in the pale December light. The couple

seemed to have aged, somehow.

—

My father recently shipped me several boxes of ephemera—old postcards, travel brochures, family letters. Among them, some written by my uncle during his years in the Upper Peninsula. His final dispatch was penned inside a photo card featuring the Marquette lighthouse, perched by the dark blue of Lake Superior at twilight:

"The warm weather even here in the UP has brought all the late-blooming and late-ripening flowers and berries to their peak well ahead of schedule. I will pick raspberries today, though not many, only five feet from the stumps of large cedar trees that were removed a few years ago.

"This is a good time to live in the UP, but for me a sad time. The old, grandly refurbished house I still call 'Grandmother's House' is being emptied and will soon become only a memory."

In my body, I feel the bittersweet farewell.

I was a transplant once, too: plucked from the seaside I loved so deeply and placed for nearly three decades in the northern prairies. It only felt like home when I bonded with the land.

Over time, I came to appreciate the northern latitude where light stretched and compressed with the seasons. The blowing grasses, luminous moons. There was a similar calm and peace, a comforting solitude, standing alone under that expansive sky. That human feeling of being a small part of everything. Something I remembered, standing alone in the desert.

I am still afraid of it. That desolate, arid, inhospitable land.

I keep trying to understand a place—and a man—that exist outside my reach. My uncle lives only in my imagination. The best I can do is grasp a sense of the influences that impacted the arc of his life.

My Uncle Tom and I shared a love for nature walks, writing, and soulful old homes. We are Finns by ancestry and kindred spirits by our quiet observations. Someday I'd like to make a pilgrimage to the tiny hamlet of Champion, say hello to the family homestead. Smell the pines and sauna smoke, taste a few wild raspberries. Leave a desert pebble and a kind word on my uncle's grave, and ask him to guide me to his favorite, sacred places.

●

I. Trail

I have a deeply ambivalent relationship with traveling. Part of it is the getting wherever I'm going. Part of it is the being wherever I am. Both the going and being are disorienting, novel, full of possibility. They decontextualize and recontextualize regular life.

In regular life, I tend to follow the trail. Like an ant. When my husband and I are in the car together on weekends, we sometimes drive to the university where we both work. Usually one of us notices the blunder shortly after we should have made our turn, but sometimes we stay on auto-pilot until we're embarrassingly close to campus.

Traveling to new places is as un-automatic as a thing can be. It raises an endless spate of questions to be answered; nothing can be assumed—it's real work. Following a new route in a car requires constant vigilance. If flying, there's making it through security—did I put the right items under the plane versus my carry-on? And then: Am I at the right gate? In the right spot for boarding? Did I miss the flight call? Contemplating whether the plane will crash is also a concern: wind shear, faulty equipment, sleep-deprived pilots, bombs in backpacks. The plane might even be a target for ground missiles—I mean, anything can happen, has happened. I should stop listening to the news.

I do love to travel, risk and all. Yet the part of me that doesn't like to rearrange the furniture in my house finds the ant trail consoling.

II. Travail

The American Airlines plane is larger than any I've boarded before, which seems fitting since we're about to hurdle through more airspace than I've ever encountered—over the Atlantic, six hours into the future.

I'm a nervous flier. My husband and I cannot sleep on the plane, brains on overload, imagining disaster, imagining London. We elect to play cards for hours; it helps distract us from turbulence and the bending of time.

When we arrive in London, it is July—a new month appeared mid-air—and it's sweltering, hotter than it was in Nashville, hotter

than London has ever been. We muddle our way through Gatwick and locate our bags, which now seem gigantic. We survive the harrowing taxi ride, arrive at our lodging in Central London. *Drowsy* is not the word for what we feel as we arrive at our lodging in Central London and try to enjoy our first meat pie and soda in an upstairs pub. *Comatose* is more like it. How can we possibly stay awake until evening?

But also, more stultification: England is covered in a brown skeleton of turf, trees withering where they are not being watered.

Travail: "All that *ails* while *traveling*"—as plain to parse as an American in a London throng.

III. Ravel

The word *ravel* (did you know this?) means precisely the same thing as *unravel*, which you would expect to mean the opposite due to the *un*. Turns out, both words actually mean "to separate or disentangle the threads of a knot, etc.," though some connotations of their usage differ slightly.

Ravel is what traveling often feels like to me—coming undone. Unwinding, relaxing, being separated and groomed, which can be wonderful. But also the destabilization of life, its knots and tangles—the decisions and options that travel entails. Too many things colliding into one another, no sense of priorities. An overwhelmed feeling that I need to see and do everything. All at once. Now.

IV. Real

In London, we do all the things—Tower of London, British Library, St. Paul's, Westminster, Parliament, The Tate, Tate Modern, National Art Museum, National Portrait Gallery, Victoria & Albert, Kew Gardens, a few plays in the West End.

And Trafalgar Square. Its panoramic splendor jolts us: Pigeons, lions, fountains, people, more people—all against a backdrop of The Natural History Museum.

We launch into day trips. Oxford is so choked with July tourists (like us) that, caught in the suffocating wave of bodies flooding High Street, we exchange glances and board the bus to Blenheim Palace, then on to Canterbury, Rochester (in search of Charles Dickens sights), and finally to Dover.

We set aside a whole day for Dorset, eager to visit the Thomas Hardy locations featured in his works and biographies—homes, churches, cemeteries, markets, landscapes. The day's greatest lesson? Don't trust the locals' directions. *It's just a piece through that field, a right at the sheep fold, a jaunt up over that hill.* It turns out to be five miles. At the very least. One way. Our calf muscles throb, but we persevere, then board the day's last train from Dorchester back to London, which stops repeatedly; this is definitely not the fast train.

These destinations often disclose a reality that unsettles my expectations, that question how real anything can ever be before I experience it, even how real anything is once I have—because the next experience of the very same thing might be quite different. Research is a poor substitute for experience, surely, but a particular experience is also a poor substitute for the reality of the actual place, for whatever *real* really is.

V. Rave

In one of these small towns between Dorchester and London, a man boards the train with his German Shepherd, full grown and bucking. The man is clad in black leather, an imposing spiked collar around his neck. The dog wears an identical spiked collar and pulls hard at its leash. And the man is angry about something having to do with his train ticket. He *raves*: "to utter as if in madness."

The whole time the man is snarling at the conductor, his dog is tugging vigorously. Like a cartoon man and dog. Even with our heads down, we can see the dog heaving the man forward, rendering him almost airborne. We dare not let him see us chortle.

And then, as the man finally takes a seat, his dog not quite settled in the aisle, the train stops in the middle of nowhere. No platform, no town. Just pitch night penetrating the train's dirty windows. We sit with the other riders, taciturn and waiting. Only the man with the dog mutters under his breath. Five minutes, ten—our puzzlement grows.

The engineer apologizes over the crackling speaker, says we will be waiting another 30 minutes, maybe 45, because a man at the next train station has stepped in front of a train. A suicide. We sit in silence.

VI. Reveal

How perfect that the word *travel* contains the word *reveal*—with a sleight of hand that procures a second *e*, but so close.

The memorable spectacles in our lives pale, shrink, when compared to the enormity of a man desperate enough to stand in front of a moving train in a small southern town where he was surely known, maybe even loved. This man's death is the most startling experience I have ever had traveling, yet it is forever linked with, folded into, a mildly hilarious story about an ill-tempered man and his muscular dog.

I feel as if this story should reveal so much more. About humanity. About the nature of life. About my character, sensibilities, insights. But this is clearly not about me. And still, I'm not sure what it reveals. Yet it seems to matter. Or it should.

VII. Leave

Fraught with endless leave-takings, I play two games with myself every time I travel. The first is "What if I moved here?" I think: *Maybe I will live here when I retire.* This game helps mitigate the sadness of knowing I may never see this place again. In another version, I play the "When we return here on a future trip" game, listing in my head all the experiences we didn't have time to crunch in, plus all of the experiences I loved most and want to repeat. (Even though no experience can ever be repeated, and I know that, but still, it seems worth imagining that it's possible. Yet, would the repetition change the initial event?)

VIII. Cleave

Cleave is another paradoxical word. It literally means to "hold fast and bind together" on the one hand—"to split apart or put asunder" on the other. How is that even possible? Opposite meanings, same word, not even an *un* involved. This is more peculiar than *ravel* and *unravel.* Nothing changes, but black means white—and white, black—which leaves me in a gray haze, feeling unstable. *Cleaving*, as it turns out, is the knot that severs, that joins asunder. It simultaneously fuses and refuses.

When traveling, I sometimes think I'm connecting with the people I encounter, though I am not. For example, in the station in Preston, a man in his twenties emerges from a train. He is the image of my son back home, walking toward me with a group of friends. Excitement rises in my chest. I inspect him, hopeful: height, weight, hairline, beard, gait. Just the same. I know it cannot possibly be my son, and yet I believe—just for an instant—that it is, and I am smiling at him as if I'm awaiting the inevitable reunion. Instead I let him pass, exit the train station.

Or, a sixty-something hiker bound for Windermere strikes up a lively conversation; we are both headed for the Lake District. He clucks about my misbegotten American president. My friendly Brexit rejoinder meets a sharp rebuke, thuds on the platform. I pivot to remark about the clouds, wax rhapsodic about the mildness of English showers. Almost immediately, lightning razes the blackening sky, which belches drumfire, and everyone dives for cover. I turn away from the hiker, stare at the blinking train schedule from under my dripping hood.

This is how it happens. A connection severed, an expectation undone. A cleaving.

IX. Tear

The word *tear*: as a verb, it means "to rend or wrench; to pull or rip apart by force," while as a noun, it refers to "a drop of salty, watery fluid secreted by the lacrimal glands between the surface of the eye and the eyelid." Of course, the definition that pertains to crying can also be a verb, as in "the child teared up when his sibling snatched the toy." More often, though, the verb indicates ripping something apart or into pieces. Not paradoxical, just dissimilar.

In England, I am eager to visit Poet's Corner in Westminster Abbey—to see all the writers' and artists' markers, one iconic personage after another. The two most important writers to me are not in Westminster, though: Thomas Hardy and George Eliot (Mary Ann Evans). Actually, Hardy's body is buried in Westminster; his heart, however, is interred at St. Michael's Church in Stinsford, Dorset, next to his first and second wife, all three surrounded by a tribe of Hardys. A bit macabre, but Hardy's writing is peppered with the lurid and ironic, so this seems apt.

My experiences in visiting these two graves—Eliot in the once-swanky Highgate Cemetery in north London; Hardy's heart in a provincial churchyard in Dorset—are somewhat startling. I'm not sure what my expectations have been exactly. Maybe tears. Maybe not wanting to tear myself away after long anticipating these events. Maybe having my picture taken beside their

tombstones, looking downcast but gratified. I'm not sure.

I know the pictures of the gravestones well. Hardy's is a stack of books carved from stone, engraved with his name and dates. George Eliot's is a clean gray obelisk.

When my husband and I reach Stinsford and Hardy's grave, after hours of trudging through fields of tall grass that conceal piles of manure, maneuvering over and around fences, and looking several cows in the eye, I read the material concerning Hardy inside the church, then head out to the churchyard. There is Hardy's monument, flanked by his first and second wives' headstones. All as expected. I begin to settle into a somber response but notice a slate, relatively modern monument: the headstone of the poet C. Day Lewis, adjacent to Hardy's, which I had not anticipated. Then, the realization: Daniel Day Lewis, one of my favorite actors, has stood where I am standing. Or nearby. By the time my husband emerges from the church, I am elated. He cannot understand my idiotic grin. Back inside the church, I read a placard about Lewis' intense admiration of Hardy, the arrangement he made to be buried as near to Hardy's heart as possible.

There are no tears. And the reasons I want to linger, not to tear myself away, are mingled, pertaining only in part to Thomas Hardy and his heart. Yes, Hardy, certainly, but Daniel Day Lewis has provided a fantasy I had not thought to dream of. Not that he is here, or even buried here, but that he has been here—I presume—to lay his father to rest. Plus, my feet are sore from the long trek; I don't want to leave most of all because my arches hurt and I know how far it is back to town.

When we visit Highgate Cemetery, there are tears but not when I see George Eliot's obelisk and read its reference to her as Mary Ann Cross, which is unsettling.

As I walk around Eliot's monument, I see that just behind hers stands George Henry Lewes' marker—the cement, rectangular, casket-life edifice of the love of her life, the man she could never wed. I stand beside his gravestone and the tears fall. Again, my husband, who has been off examining Karl Marx's grave, is baffled. He looks for me at Eliot's monument, but I am not there. Eventually he finds me, puffy and red-nosed, beside another tomb. Even when he reads the inscription, he doesn't understand. Finally, I find the breath to say, "she believed her life was over as she stood right here." And it essentially was. Eliot lived two years after Lewes' passing but never found joy or meaning in her life again. She married an adoring, young man after 17 months of debilitating loneliness and died seven months later.

Tear isn't a strong enough word to describe how I cleave to this place, how I never want to leave, to abandon her in the spot of her breaking, her brokenness. This is what I have traveled, most of all, to do: to pay homage not only to Eliot the writer, but to Mary Ann Evans the person. I'd spent months, years, studying her work, biographies, life, writing about her writing, but never fully realizing how attached I had become to her. Never anticipating the weight of this moment.

X. Revel

The word revel invites me to soar across a silver ocean—to dance, unmasked, by the water's edge, to step lightly into memory's wake. It hums a hazy tune about what has been, what will come; its refrain swells like surf.

Perhaps I will return to Highgate Cemetery at some point. Even now, more than 25 years later, I'm not sure I'm ready. It was visceral, a moment I'm not sure I want to cheapen by repeating.

Yet I know it can never be the same; it would be a new experience, a reveling in its own key, of its own shade.

Am I willing to change the memory, the point of origin? Because no matter how intact, how crystalline it is, the going back—the re-experiencing—will modify it. When I return to these places, repeat these sacraments, I inevitably, unavoidably, alter what has come before.

Traveling removes me from the familiar, strips away suppositions, capsizes the raft of expectation. It affords a giddy, sobering freedom from the regular life that binds me. And I am marked by it.

I stopped to catch my breath and adjust the heavy pack that hung from my shoulders. It was full of Arctic grayling caught in Daggett Lake. The day had been rich with the excitement of beautiful scenery, rumbling thunderstorms, and good fishing. Now, we were going back to our camp in the meadow by the creek. Fool Hen Park was halfway home.

The others were a few hundred yards ahead of me, walking slowly through the tall grass in the middle of the park. The old blaze poles that mark the trail across the clearing cast lonely shadows in the evening sun. To the west, the Burrow Peaks had become black shadows against a blazing sky. Dad, Mom, and my little sister seemed far away, out there in the broad meadow, as though they were crossing into another world through a misty veil, and I was too late to join them. They were leaving me!

It was not a fear of being separated in the darkness of the forest, but a prophecy of parting slowly in the mistiness of life. I could have caught them if I ran, before they reached the black wall of trees, but a more profound separation could not be crossed. As I stood there on the edge of my childhood, I saw the glowing coals of evening wither and die above the distant peaks, and I watched our good life together walk through the veil of time, out of the brightness of the dying sunset, and into the darkness beyond.

The light was almost gone and I could hear them call to me from far across the meadow. The two lonely blaze poles were hardly discernible against the trees. An evening breeze emerged from the forest and scurried through the grass toward me. I zipped up my jacket against the chill that had crept beneath my shirt. As I hurried across Fool Hen Park, they grew farther away. I felt that I was whispering goodbye to more than a place.

Many years have passed since that moment of reluctant apprehension, but the message that grew in my heart has not gone away. Instead, it spawned reality and placed eternity between us. They went back without her, and so did I, but it was only Fool Hen Park, and we were not together. Often I sit at the edge of the meadow watching the sun disappear behind the peaks while the same old blaze poles cast growing shadows toward me. I feel the chill of the same restless breezes and the weight of a good catch of Arctic grayling on my back.

But no one waits for me where the trail enters the forest. I cannot hear their voices calling to me from the other side, though I have often seen their shadows against the trees.

"The sea is another story."
- Adrienne Rich, "Diving Into the Wreck"

I've never quite known how to describe the start of my mother's life. Which comes first, Germany or Judaism? What gets prioritized? Do I say my mother was a German Jewish child with centuries of ancestors who were patriotic Germans as well as devout Jews? Or do I say she's an American, like I am, dismissing the impact of her motherland's most hideous chapter? She endured the oppression and sanctioned terror of the nationalistic, racist laws of the Third Reich. Do I not say she is a Holocaust survivor since she was never deported to a camp, but instead incredibly lucky to emigrate as late as she did—a year after Kristrallnacht, three months after Germany's invasion of Poland set World War II on its torturous course? The unconscious ocean of escape and trauma has swirled inside her all her life. Its tidal rhythms are invisible and intergenerational. I inherited this sea before I was born; although raised in landlocked Wyoming, the ocean lives inside me.

Heimat means home. *Heimatgefühl verloren*. Lost sense of home. We are survivors of diaspora. My mother was raised in a foster home as America spiraled into another war against Germany. She learned English quickly. Once in the States, she didn't identify with either the German or the Jewish cultures. She adapted and forgot most of her formative beginnings. She raised me to know only the stark, essential facts of her transit, crossing the troubled ocean with her widowed mother and sister. She keeps only a few, selective memories.

My mother ended up in Wyoming only because she fell in love with and married a field geologist. Beneath Wyoming is an ancient ocean known as the Sundance Sea. I grew up searching for arrowheads and fossilized mollusks in shale and Chugwater outcropping. Wyoming, a dry fault-formed, wind-grass sea that was life-ground to several Plains Tribes—Sioux, Crow, Arapahoe, Shoshoni, Cheyenne—before they were forcibly removed to reservations in the latter phases of westward expansion. Oregon Trail ruts are still visible outside my hometown of Casper. The cultural and physical genocide of the indigenous tribes was so accomplished as a sidebar of America's glimmering Manifest Destiny that it is practically unaddressed, invisible, and unintegrated—not unlike the Nazi's Final Solution of Europe's Jews. Beneath my mother was an ocean that churned with her displacement and survival. She baked fruitcakes at Christmas with a group called Geo-Wives, women married to geologists and oilmen. She wept at Frank Sinatra tunes, identified Beethoven Piano Concertos by their opening measures, giggled at tongue twisters. She lathered herself with tanning oil at a reservoir that had no trees out near Independence Rock. She never looked for fossils or faint wheel-ruts, never learned Wyoming's history. She did not come from this place.

I first saw the ocean when I was eight. The Atlantic, my mother's ocean. I gazed out and tried to see the shoreline she came from. I learned how to jump waves and dodge the helmets of horseshoe crabs bobbing near the shoreline. I plucked a conch shell from its brine, breathed the ocean in the air, swallowed land-bent waves. Every night I felt its inrush rhythms still sloshing inside my legs. I lay on cots with siblings and cousins on a screened porch and listened to the ocean, some nights roaring like the wind did in Wyoming, and other nights purring back and forth, gentle as a baby's heartbeat. Eight-year-old me became its student.

My mother treasures a black and white photograph from the summer she turned nine, her first in America, her first year of living with her foster parents. She's long-legged and running barefoot away from the waves. She's a happy child chasing her willowy shadow on the Rehoboth sand as the ocean chases her. She's laughing, probably already forgotten that she crossed this same ocean the previous December, vomiting with seasickness. It's summer now; she's come to the other side.

When I first saw the ocean I was the same age my mother was when she crossed it on the freight ship *Vulcania*. There were only 28 passengers aboard, all permanently leaving Europe. Our immigration attorney finds the passenger list in the archives at the U.S. Department of Labor. It's one of the documents we need to verify our eligibility to naturalize as German citizens under Grundgesetz criteria. Grundgesetz, or Basic Law, was instituted in Germany in 1949. The disturbing ironies of such a law hurl over me like the Atlantic's forceful waves. The Law essentially says come on home (not we're sorry!) to the millions of German Jewish (and other misfit citizens) who were stripped of their citizenship during the Third Reich, deported into camps, and murdered. The Grundgestz is saying *come back, all you ghosts of the homeland—Grundgesetz will make you legal again!* I view the *Vulcania* passenger list as a PDF screenshot on my laptop. My stomach churns when

I study this record of those fleeing as we contemplate return all these years later. What became of them all? I run my fingertips along the computer screen as if to feel the rough, uneven braille of the typewriter letters pressed into such fragile yellowing paper. The list sharpens the reality of my mother's passage.

The lateness and luck of being an Alien Passenger, as the form calls them. *S. S. Vulcania, Passengers sailing from GENOA, NOVEMBER 25, 1939.* I stare at every column—names, ages, cities, occupations. The names become people with suitcases and extra coats draped around their shoulders. *Frankel, Muller, Schindler, Blau, Mahler, Wezasek, Warburg, Neuberger.* The home cities come from Germany and places east. *Berlin, Koln, Rothenberg, Weinheim, Munich, Freiburg.* My mother, aunt, and grandmother—*Inge, Doris, Hely*—are the only passengers from Freiburg on the ship. I stare at the "calling or occupation" column. Most of the men are listed as trader; a few are *farmer, enginer* (with one e), *laborer.* All but one adult woman is listed as *housewife,* spelled various ways. An unmarried woman is listed as *clerck.* All passengers have 'yes' typed into the two READ and WRITE columns. Literate travelers, refugees poised to read and write in a new language. My grandmother's age is 32. Her calling/occupation listed as: h.wife. But she has no house, no home, and she is a widow, not a wife. No family seems whole. Even the ship's name, *Vulcania,* the goddess of fire, suggests volatility and rupture.

My sense of home is formed by the vertical rise of the Rocky Mountains. To my eye the Atlantic Ocean looks flat and horizontal, but with submerged ancestral turbulences I want to better understand. It smells of life and death hidden beneath the surface. When I stand at its edge, I feel the tremendous energy of the gyre, a tension between ground and groundlessness, a push-pull of being rooted and rootless. *Heimat* sounds like an echo of *home (k)not.* My feet and legs wash in the foamy, briny swells of this great body. I feel this ocean tension on my skin long after I return inland. My mother's ship, the *Vulcania,* moved through this same water. Dizzying, ebbing, rising, growling breakwater. Mother Ocean. My mother's name, Inge, meaning Hero's Daughter, was chosen by her devoutly German parents in 1931. *Vergessen* means to forget. She's forgotten her mother tongue. Everything that formed her is on another continent, at the far edge of this shoreline.

"LIST OR MANIFEST ALIEN PASSENGERS FOR THE UNITED STATES," the Passenger Sheet states. In the "RACE OR PEOPLE" column, one passenger is registered as Holland, three are Croatian, and the remaining 24 are Hebrew. Sometimes the word Hebrew is capitalized, and sometimes not. There's a column for Immigration, Passport, or Reentry Visa numbers. All 28 are Immigration Visa numbers, indicated by the QIV at the beginning of the number. There are no Reentry Visa numbers. The final column tracks the date and place of issue. The Immigration Visas for the three who are my passengers were issued in "*Stuttgard*" (Stuttgart) on 13/11/39—November 13. "*Helly,*" my grandmother's name, was typed and subsequently slashed with ink to cross out the "e" and the extra "l." The name HELENE is hand-written after the mistake. My mother's name is typed as "*Yugie.*" Then slashed, a hand-written INGE above the misspelling. I think of all the little mistakes that could have cost any one of them their placement on the ship. Typos, errors in dates or birthplaces, visa numbers entered wrongly could have meant not leaving. I note these misspelled, corrected words from a typewriter that needed a new ribbon. It feels like evidence to verify *Vulcania* over gas chambers.

All the while, the Genoa harbor water is sloshing around her vessel, beckoning, inviting the 28 passengers onto the *Vulcania* as if it were a biblical ark. The *S. S. Vulcania* left Genoa on November 25 and arrived at the New York Harbor on December 6. Twelve days and nights at sea. History with its capital H happens two years later, December 7, 1941. Pearl Harbor will change the course of History; history with its lowercase h is Doris wetting her pants on the pier, an understandable regression all things considered. It is Inge seeing her first Black man on the harbor. She will remember this moment more vividly than the uncles waiting at the pier, uncles who resemble the father she never knew.

The 28 *Vulcania* passengers walk down the wide planks and merge onto city sidewalks where cut Christmas trees lean against each other, their scent reminiscent of German forests. The alien passengers disperse and begin again. History is murky and muddled. The 24 "Hebrew" of the *Vulcania* "Aliens" arrive and assimilate, three passengers on the list received an extra stamp: UNDER 16. Doris, age 10; Inge 8; and a boy from Berlin named Heinz Muller. Their occupations or callings are typed as "student" for the sisters, and "schoolboy" for Heinz. At 8 years old, Inge and Heinz are the youngest passengers aboard the *S. S. Vulcania.*

Symbiosis wants us to forget. We latch on to a breast and don't let go until we are full and falling asleep. Babies survive thus. We are meant to live inside this closeness but not remember it. No different than the waves that crash

onto land, roll back out to regroup, and crash again. She crossed this ocean to become my mother. She had milk but no memory to give me. Tidal and beautiful, mysterious with words and worlds beneath the surface, mother and ocean become my own synonyms.

I saw my mother undone by grief only once as a child, and it was over the loss of her German mother, Hely, the woman who got her out of Nazi Germany only to give her away to foster parents. My sister and I lay in our double bed, sandy from the lake and wide awake. We listened past the walls. We heard our mother's voice, a soft serious murmur, a rising wave. After she hung up, our door opened and there she stood, a shadow entering the late afternoon cloister of the room. A silent mother-shape smelling of Alcova Lake and Coppertone. She walked toward us. At the edge of me she wilted. She folded back into herself, heaped on the floor beside me. Waves of heaving cheeks and hands onto her lap. Salt and snot. A sobbing so deep I am sure the ocean made it. It was her foster mother who'd phoned. She called to say that Hely died in her sleep.

Helene on the Alien Passenger List crosses the ocean at the age of 32. She gets her daughters out, and then gives her daughters up. She puts them on a list for a permanent foster home. When I ask my mother why Hely did this, my mother gives a matter-of-fact answer devoid of any emotion: "She needed to find an American husband. She wanted us to have a better life." It's the same answer every time I ask. Hely finds work in the city, and quite soon, within the first year, an American husband. They live in the West Village. The girls take the train into the city one day a month to visit Hely and Morty. Hely never takes her children back to raise them. Nor does she ever legally relinquish them.

Part of history is also what gets left behind. What belongs in shadow. The sacrifice, grief, and trauma. Hely struggles. A festering depression, another kind of ocean larger than the lives she saved. My mother has nothing to tell me other than there was a time when Hely received electroconvulsive treatment. She took an overdose of pills, but Morty found her in time. These are the shadow pieces that my mother never speaks of. Whenever I ask her, she blanks, recalls something else, something sweet.

When Hely doesn't wake up at the age of 59, Morty doesn't request an autopsy. Or if he did, my mother seems not to know. My mother has never once said her mother took her own life or completed suicide. The Atlantic Ocean churns in a nauseous gyre between what is said and what isn't. *Ich weiss nicht*, I don't know. How German. The refrain of silence. Hidden under the tongueless bell of exile and trauma. I carry that muted memory of my grandmother's death and my mother collapsing into a grief-heap on the floor.

Silence-breaker, diver, weaver, I come along years later and years before asking who we are. Our story becomes mine to survive, excavate, and integrate. I speak into the silence. I return to Freiburg to interrogate Germany, but Germany is still silent. I ask what thing this is in the room where a mother drowns inside a grief that cannot be interrogated because it is too large and deep, like the ocean we cannot see across. In New York. In the middle of Wyoming. In Freiburg. In *Vulcania*, the crossing vessel. All ruptures and shards. All try-to-forget.

POETRY

The river will tie you to this country, to this land. My boy, my baby boy,
I was staked here unknowing, and I hand that to you. We have eaten

so many ghosts in this place, our cupboards are full of bones. I go to get you
cereal and find a magnolia, broad petalled and open—the slow fall, the wilt

in the simmering heat. You look up to the red pine, tall and narrow in our yard,
laying the bed of shards, giving little shelter from the rain. After rain comes the sun—

so they say—but the rain has stayed. Hard rain, heavy rain, blood rain, red rain,
this soaking of the earth and slickened skin. It has never stopped raining

and we've been walking around all drowned. This is what was given to me.
Passing through my fingers to you. This must be what they mean by headwaters.

Dig your fingers into the silt and loam, a washout where the seeds won't stay,
this inheritance of silos full of pulled teeth. Let me collect you up my boy, my baby boy.

Stand on my shoulders to see above these rising waters, wash the blood from my fingers,
Scrub the dirt off yours. Make the fields rich, harvest nothing you can't plant yourself.

I grew up in cities that were not my cities.
Not my language, not my mother culture,
other's cradles. A hermit crab, a cuckoo egg.

I grew up a long-term guest, I did what I could
not to overstay my welcome. Remained polite,
did dishes, brought rosewater candies, laughed at jokes.

Observant, paying attention to the shape of things.
Now I walk around cities like a civil mirror, seeing
who is sitting where and how, the way the crowds

sweep at rush hour, looking up at the buildings
and tracking where I might be on a map.
I get mildly lost. I get asked for directions,

and can usually give them, at least roughly,
with hands waving or a shake of the head.
Someone will always know.

A city survives because strangers
are comfortable with each other,
all of us little sparrows flitting around.

knock at the door opens she
looks up and smiles, stopped staggered erased
becomes a scream stuck at the base bottom of her throat
a bubble she tries to swallow sour glued down beneath
trapped tears drown her right where she stands frozen
hands up don't shoot she is a mother stares straight
through the eye of

the tank inches away from his face
unafraid holds a rock up high in the air ready
to not run no never again unwavering
dirty unshoed feet planted down like olive tree trunks firm

in the ground unmoving strong he was nine
walks for miles seems like minutes mouth
so dry rough sandpaper tongue heavy moving
tastes the air licking parched dust particles sun
beating down heat that crawls slowly like itching
someone is crying don't worry tell them we

will be there soon enough they will die

---

have you ever seen purple flowers grow from
an empty green grenade shell showering stone cold walls with
color bursting like a heart in an empty home without a father
neither brother around to tease a sister she is crying while her
mother comforts carrying on without that same smile

they took the moment they stole her heart her life her love

we just want to go home he says softly looking at me
through the rearview mirror piercing
green sadness infiltrating my soul without permission
just like they took his home his mother his life
it has been thirty-one years and I have put all my trust in Allah

I no longer have a home—it is with Allah
!

BEE LB / THE APPLES AND THE BODIES THAT PICKED THEM

apples & apples, green kissing red, sugar
& starch bleeding through

bleaching thin shirts. small hands grasping
& stunted fingers bruising

& the wooden crate or barrel tipping.
where is it these memories come from?

the drive through the trees passing the smallest
red bodies, the ground littered with life left to rot.

i pour into & out of myself endlessly.
sour pucker kiss of sweet.

the world dizzies itself around me. sweat
clings to the back of my neck

& the neck of the bottle & the rim
of my glass. sweat pools as heat licks my skin.

my body aches with the weight of itself trying
to crawl out. i've been writing these truths since i learned

how to speak. once i was a girl & then i was a ghost
& now i'm an absence waiting to be filled.

we all come from somewhere. i came from everywhere.
the tall grass & the water & the eviction & the boxes.

the salt air & the tall hills & the open rock & the path
down. the coal & the rails & the spikes & the mines.

the copper & the blood & the sweat & the grind.
the mouth of this life opened around me.

my mother sang of rain & hushing cries. life's
reminder came as blistering sun & the absence of bodies.

THERE ARE TIMES MY BODY LEAVES ITS SHAPE BEHIND

BEE LB /

after Ada Limón

there was a time i could tell you exactly how long it had been
since i slipped my entire body into the cold froth
of the Atlantic Ocean. now, i hold only the memory of
remembering.

blue lips. a small body brought
to the air. a levy of arms lifting. the air wrapping
around a small, blue body.

i remember the motion and little else.
or, i remember the cold and little else.
or, i remember the heat of thawing

and little else. or, i remember only the act
of remembering. i think it was dark. night or else early
morning.
or else the sun was there but it has since left my
memory.

the limits of the mind are many.
the limits of my mind are many more.

i was born far from water but i've come to realize
lake superior called my body to existence.
like a plea or a whisper from the lip of a wave

against the body of a rock. my body came into being
in absence of a plan. my shadow unfolded endlessly
ahead of me, so much larger than my body could grow
to meet.

the hours i live in stack like boxes against the wall of an empty room.
i wish to be clear but i am silvered glass holding no reflection.
i wish to be tethered and untethered at once; my body holds only itself

and is held only by the air around it. absence takes its own shape
a held form, a body free of its anchors and weighed only by air.
i find myself in too few worlds, alive only in one and trapped

in the memories of so many more. i hold only air and the absence of
reflection.
i am here alone surrounded by windows with no
movement. i long for a world in which i reach out and in turn am reached
for

and to and with and into.
by which i mean, i long for a world of reflection.

THREAD THE NEEDLE WITH THE EYE / *LOGAN ANTHONY*

when i think of home, i think of feathers. talons encrusted with blood. entrusted with ritual. a relentless itching gnawed up the insides of my limbs. there were bird nests of yellowed grass tucked in the eaves of every branch. lower, there were fence posts split through end to end like the beaks run over and left in the lackluster streets. and lower still, there were footprints encased in all the layers of the sediment where it bubbled and farther down where it dried out in the afternoon sun. still farther, winding down the path, there was lichen crusted on the upper lip of the ridge. fluid, like a river tucking itself into a mind, the suspicions simmered to the surface. the memories scorched the inside of my skull. heron bones sheathed in moss leaning in the rusted metal sink. i could not put them back together. those bones. i cannot reconcile their living and dead lives. the needlepoint bones remain alive so long as they remain in use, right? so, i use them to prick the skin, to string up a thread and stitch the mouths of all my wounds closed, coax my body to swallow the wreckage. it was long ago, beneath the smoke wisp clouds and a similar yellow-sapphire dawn, when i first learned to suffer long-windedly, like the river.

WHILE THINKING OF ANOTHER'S SUFFERING / *ELLEN JUNE WRIGHT*

(For Angela, enslaved, Jamestown, Virginia 1619)

I taste my blessings
secret them

on my tongue like
a red-striped peppermint

understanding
what she ate—

the grit of it
the foul of it

linger undre
the shower

the unending,
clean water

coming down
I think of her body

covered in sweat
and stench

unable to wash even
between her legs at will

or to wash her hair
as needed

I love my skin
the more I know

hers doomed her
to forced labor

and an early death
I even appreciate

my often-lost keys
knowing she held none

(For Angela, enslaved, Jamestown, Virginia 1619)

I used to love a British period drama

but now when I see stately homes trimmed

with silk brocade and gilded finishes

my awe is dead

thinking of foundations

built on blood of mine.

Even the mortar is mixed with

golden blood and bone of bodies

buried under the waves and bodies

that never knew what it was to live

freely. Once they touched this shore

forced pioneers.

Bodies—transplanted in virgin soil

perennials,

like peonies rooted.

(For Angela, enslaved, Jamestown, Virginia 1619)

Once there was a mania for tulips.
The more strangely striated, the more their value.
A single *Semper Augustus* was even worth
the price of a new home or piece of land.

Then like all mania,
the fever broke.
Prices crashed.
Fortunes lost.

When I think of tulip fever, I think of the price of a body.
Who's to say what a body is worth?
Lightning strikes, floodwaters, wild beasts, bullets—
anything can fell a body.

What kind of investment is it to trade in bodies, to traffic them?
They become so slim, so prone to disease, breakage, insanity.
One has to account for a high percentage of *spoiled goods*
like bulbs blighted that have to be destroyed, full of mold, unsellable.

All the names of the mammals
building monuments out of dirt—the only thing dead and always

in the ground, without desire, absent instinct,
as though the planet woke in a dream

of snow, everything quiet. Not a voice to disturb
what slowly begins, again, to move.

I am hungry to be interrupted
For ever and ever amen
O Person from Porlock come quickly
And bring my thoughts to an end.
—Stevie Smith

You hear the chainsaws and run outside. *Who made you boss of the planet?* An inconvenient canary palm, three stories strong and two embraces around. *Do you work for the city?* You work for the shade. You boss for the rustling in the wind. You are obstructive on a mess of cut fronds.

They want to feed the wood chipper. You want the city on speed dial. The city cares. The city comes out quick. The city is two guys apologizing—next month removal will recommence with permit. See, when you pit plants against power, plants lose ground. They comfort you with

saplings, that transmission not be interrupted. Inevitable as rock, paper, electrons the next time you hear the howl of chainsaws you scissor the curtains. A cat can ignore a drive-by shooting. Every species for himself, palms, crows, poets: even ants adjust, infuriated out of roots. By happy

hour your giant is finished, its smut re-skinning men and the land. The dander in your habitat is now more dead tree than beast, and the Roomba chokes up with grief. Though the young can't offset the axing of years, when a new *Phoenix canariensis* germs in the boneyard, you

indulge it. Though now you know how attachment ends. With interruption of service: full canticle of saws, wayward squirrel scrabbling down the chimney. The ants come later, an incessant sentence of ellipses scouting for some new discourse to nest in... yours.

You grew up by the side of one
bad river, a killer—
thirsty undertows
gloved in silver
and falls heard fibrillating
in the ground beyond your door.

But now this furtive trickle is all
a quiet bleeding out of moss
back into moss.
Is it enough? A subterranean
seep that ices old scars
at the back of your throat

consoling your feet
your gin-burnt eyes.
You who have known
broken boats from the inside
boulders of the drowned
gripped by glory.

You—who dared the rip
and race of unknown oceans
armed with nothing but wishes
and lies, but great ones,
stolen from the book of water
with its endless exclamations.

How can you bear this wall-
to-wall carpet life, this soft
and stainless shag? How can you

face the calendars, the savings
plans? How can you swallow
such blessings?

Like conch shells holding surf
hollering whiskey johnny
all the way to Kansas,
your ears, once shaped
for thunder, will receive it
no matter how hushed the land.

PORTRAIT OF HUNGER AS THE OPOSSUM WATCHING ME EAT THROUGH A HOLE IN THE WALL

CHRISTOPHER MCCORMICK

Who banished us to this life
nostalgic for an Eden we only dreamed?

Hunger, for me
was always a furred thing

bottomless eyes
and night's lengthening teeth.

So what if in my voice, the scrape of winter?
If my stomach walks
dusk-stained streets
searching for itself, so what?

The procession of ants I saw
carry a dinner roll
across the sidewalk

contains all the devotion
I need tonight.

In this stale hour, I imagine
you'd say something like:

Did you know I'm North America's
only Marsupial? Or

if you make me into a boot,
use my fat to cure arthritis.

Let life bury you like a landfall
of discarded lobster shells
you advise me

if you love something
carry it inside yourself
until it grows legs strong enough

to leave you
and beg its own food.

SECRETARIAT AT STUD

CARL BOON

After the first three years, I suppose
they all looked the same,
even the California mares
they flew in on airplanes.
They were handsome,
but they lacked flash and arrogance.

After Hollywood and glamor,
dignitaries and the sounds
of human women weeping,
it may be he didn't care.
His life's work done in twenty months,
his ascent cometic, his history closed,
he might've died instead.
No one wants to be
an aging rock star.

I think of him from time to time,
gazing out across the field
and track on a cool October morning,
the blood inside still swirling,
the muscles hot, the tendons
twitching. I think of him
and cry that victory concedes
to death, necessarily. I think of him
as human and invincible.

It was like spinning a globe, holding those
first bipedal skulls, pressing my fingers into
the foramen magnum sockets joining
skulls to spines, the socket of each skull
receding further and further under the atlas.
A mobile home for the brain that ripened like a
grapefruit from Lucy to Homo erectus to the form
Hamlet held as he questioned his courage to be.
The sacrosanct six-day universe I was raised
to believe in was melting in my hands—
the ice sphere surrounding the antediluvian world
that shielded the Earth from UV rays and let Noah live
for nine hundred and fifty years leaking like
a bad roof. My megachurch was a flooding ark.
The skull of my ancestor was a life raft I didn't trust.
When I went to church with my family
I couldn't stop thinking about the great chain
of being going back to nothing, about our ancestors
descending from the trees and searching
for fruits and nuts with two free hands.
My father led a congregation: thousands
from the suburbs of Phoenix with their hands raised,
reaching. It took millions of years to lift them like that,
to have a smaller shadow and less hair, to sweat
and cool the growing, hungry brain that would
someday build houses for something greater.
Sometimes after church, we'd drive up north to Payson
and camp. Sitting in a folding chair by the fire, I
counted the stars as they came out and felt the mind of God.
My mind was moving from the fall of man to our descent—
the dawn of waking with heavy brains instructing
feet to walk from tree to distant tree, dipping
our fingers in clay to tell stories of the hunt, tilting
back our heads at night to drink in the Milky Way.
The few remaining hairs on our necks rising
as we became more and more naked
before the garden of the world, the atlas
supporting the heaven-gazing temples of us.

I think abt how dinner service was not disrupted
when I undid ur jeans w. the zeal of a colonizer
This kinky role-reversal
& lovely roleplay
which u thought was only possible w. true love
How u looked at me like a malnourished calf eyeing a bottle
How I pulled & pulled & pulled on u like a Czech
I think that's ok to say
My feeling an irresponsible amount of fondness
equal to the time I was deflowered by Sharon's very large Boy
the one who owned everything, including my proud bresses
How I am the only one who knows him —still

It's when the train screams by that birds
I don't know how to name light up
from a field across the pave-and-boulder

banks of the River Des Peres. The flock
tornadoes first as something skull-like
but then magnolia tree—or were

those lungs?—and as the birds thin out
across the field, tracing the river,
their flock becomes the drainage pipe

coursing them south. It seems all winter
this C has burned on the underside
of my forearm, some organism

I've not been able to kill or see
but have. Unfazed, the geese and ducks
play in foot-deep water that eddies

beneath the railroad bridge, and here
I'm feeling this waterway, a river
engineered to drainage ditch,

as more scar than body of water,
but I don't get to decide. The rash
isn't ringworm like I thought,

my doctor calling it something else,
though she's not sure there wasn't first
a fungus. Like some host I've been

watching this flux and gathering
of shape, blighted by names, as though
my body's ever one thing alone,

when maybe it's this feeling apart
I have to treat. On maps, the river
resembles my left cornea

in profile, water winding southwest
before it curves east, deepening
as it collects the diverted storm

sewer runoff, then heaves forthright
through the south side of town, past drug
treatment centers, a brewery,

food chemical plant, and the casino,
letting itself into more water
we've been calling the Mississippi.

NUREYEV AT THE ORPHEUM. / MEMPHIS, 1987

ELLIS ELIOT

Two men sat in the row in front of me near
the aisle; one, in a yellow sweater, had his arm
around the other, pulling him close as they both
sobbed. We were watching Nureyev in Memphis,
who was nearing 50 then, and called one of the greatest
ballet dancers of all time. I was young, just out
of college, and didn't understand their tears. I thought
it could be because the famous Russian defector
was past his prime. His coil and spring less precise,
and the flagrant fling of his crimson cape imperceptibly
off tempo. Or it might have been the nearness of beauty,
the push and pull of greatness etched in every articulated
muscle. Now, as my body begins its own slow defection,
I join those 2 men. I rest my head on one free yellow
shoulder as we all feel the cape of our aging bodies
begin to slip to the scratched wooden stage floor,
and into a puddle of whatever lies between beauty
and loss. It is a place so beautiful, I weep.

JILL RUSCOLL / DROUGHT

it's the high heat of summer.
the river in Millerton has given up and
lies in small pools between the river stones.
across the road a light wind
gets the dried field grasses to talking
about their youth, not so long ago.
beyond the field, beyond the waterless marsh
dark green trees crowd the hills
cautiously drinking deep in their roots.
they stare at the naked limbs of
the maple below clawing the sky.
the leaves twist on their stringy stems
and whisper the dead are the wisest.
the trees wonder if it's true.

COMFORTING THE BULLY / *JAMES CIHLAR*

During a free period in the gym
the year we lived in my father's hometown
I knew I didn't have to play games

since no teacher was forcing me
so I sat on the sidelines and watched.
Mixed grades played together

because the town was so small.
A boy came over and taunted me
called me queer when it meant bad things.

I was small but he was smaller
so I pushed him just a little bit
and he fell backward and hit his head.

He was on the floor crying
and I felt bad so I held his head in my lap
and told him it would be all right.

Then the tears stopped and he snapped to.
He got up and ran back to the crowd
calling me faggot as he left.

Tell me you don't live this every day.

I. Remember as a child visiting your aunt and uncle's house on the lake. They had a green parrot in a large cage in the center of the living room. You studied from a distance the marls of his curved beak, the segmentation of his legs. You had always loved animals, but your aunt and uncle on this visit taught you to respect animals. After they engaged in a sequence of questions and answers with him, they pointed out that parrots are very smart and very long lived.

II. Imagine that parrot, wise and dignified in his burnished feathers, with his solemn glance and implacable voice, still alive, maybe outliving all of us.

III. Envision a planet on the other side of the universe, where it is always winter, your favorite season. You live in a mansion with breathtaking views of an impressive city skyline on one side, mountains and sea and forest on each of the others. Inside, there is room for everyone you love, from every part of your life. Curled on your window seat overlooking glittering skyscrapers and unaccustomed constellations above, you can hear everyone telling stories and laughing together in the great room.

IV. Think of the last house project you did. It was gathering all the dead branches, leaves, and vines that had moldered in your backyard for a season into a tarp, tying it shut, loading it into your hatchback, and taking it to the city yard waste collection site. It was an all-day project. You stomped and sat and lay on the bundle to get it to flatten. The bale was still so big you couldn't close the hatch, and you couldn't see through the back window, so your husband had to direct you out of the driveway. When you finally unloaded at the site, a city worker voluntarily came over to help. Didn't you feel good after? Wasn't it easier to sleep that night?

V. Consider the sadism that for years went unquestioned in many classic cartoons. In one, a cat and a mouse get even with a bulldog who stole all their food. At the end, the bully is engorged and spread out on an operating table in a vet's office. Every time you see the scene on TV, you are shocked when the cat and mouse sneak into the darkened room, stick a funnel in his mouth, and empty a can of gravy into it. As past personal injustices flash through your mind, let yourself think, momentarily: yeah, that's right, give him all the gravy.

THING THEORY / *JAMES CIHLAR*

". . . the house we were born in is physically inscribed in us. It is a group of organic habits."
—**Gaston Bachelard,** *The Poetics of Space*

We love nature, but we have to admit
that some of nature is ugly

an interstitial branch running
at cross purposes with other branches

the suckers sprouting from the trunk
draining energy from the buds at the top

weeds growing in basement window wells.
We cannot fault our houses their organic aspects

their inner workings of halls and stairs like stems
the doors their folding and unfolding like leaves

the gradual shift of the foundation as it ages
so that windows no longer fit their frames.

My house is a schemata of skull and torso
the walls imbued with years of breath.

I have filled my rooms with things I cherish
a lavender vase, a wax pinecone, a chipped mug.

This is how I learned to love my body
to treasure my spotted hands and dotted vision:

by witnessing paper tear itself, colors fade in cold storage
all things wind down to molecules between us.

THE LAST TIME I SAW YOU / *RISHI AGRAWAL*

Tonight, I fell asleep again with the television on, charting emotional collapse. A game show was on, your favorite last August, where contestants could win dates with other contestants. I liked it: love, conflict, and fabulous prizes. Tonight, I wondered if you were a minute late and a penny off, perhaps your way of changing the world. Last September, you talked of alchemy and the philosopher's stone. Then I bought a pet rock. Tonight, I swore that time is meaningless, an artificial construct to measure the scattering of memory. Last October, we watched as a tree, in a single night, shed all its leaves, yellow and fan-shaped. They covered the ground as if an army of ducks had lost their feet. Tonight, I fell asleep again with the television on, watching a documentary about architecture. The last time I saw you, we were on opposite ends of the room, trying to define the space between us: sharp and curved like a shattered bowl.

LYNN COHEN / TREEHOUSE

I want to know if I belong
inside the darkness
of this hollow trunk
echoing with questions.

I am set in some ways—
rooted, with scarred bark and
exploding foliage; violent-
minded, too, like a racoon
cornered halfway down, her kits
in a row behind her.

But I feel more like cabin than tree,
built with countless human hands.
My wild inner dweller is still here,
and she often wants me
out of the way. She's moved in
between my planks, nesting

and defecating and giving birth.
Thumping and scampering
they sound to me like a family
happy to have found a home.

PALIMPSEST AT 6 AM / BEFORE THE WAVES

ROBERT ROTHMAN

I sometimes think

that if I could be

still enough

long enough

that the invisible

tidings

in every living thing

would appear

rising from the confusion

clear and indelible

THE BIRD IN YOUR HANDS

After the Revelation of John, Coltrane

1996
a student @ Fresno City College
(Thank you, community college!)
I stumbled into Music 101,
Jazz Appreciation
(Thank you, general education!)
My teacher was a balding
white man
(Thank you for the B—BTW your math sucks.)

He sure did love black men,
mouths formed in perfect
breath, *Oh*
of an *O*,
long, nimble fingers plucking
strings on a dazzling brown body,
the holy relics of
cymbals thrashing,
drumsticks crashing,
eyes peeled wide or low,
depending on the poison.

It was raining the day
Mr. Whimsical Magician
(I'm sorry, but that's how I saw him)
shut his pink & white umbrella
& stood on stage
like Moses coming down
the mountain.

Then he produced a boombox & finally
a cassette
of *Giant Steps*
from a pocket close
to his heart.

I was high on meth that day
as most days.
Back then, I listened to nothing
but gangsta rap,
sick, angry shit,
X-Raided, Brotha Lynch, Triple Sicx
who rapped not only of drivebys
& home invasions,
but of cunnilingus
with menstruating women
& cannibalism—not symbolically—
eating dead babies & mangled genitals
& praying to & talking with
& sometimes stuffing a big, black,
9mm gat into the boisterous mouth
of Satan,
their words, not mine
(The Lord rebuke You!).

When that man put on that album, crackling
speakers indicating the need
for more public funding,
I was hooked. The music.
It touched like only prayer can.

Later in life,

when the Love of God
was a possibility
& I enjoyed my first teaching job
at the same college, writing poems
between developmental composition courses,
a miracle itself, I bought a CD
of *A Love Supreme*
& learned Coltrane's Revelation.

Sometimes,
after days of being awake
sucking at the end of an ugly
glass tube, inhaling
the energy of diamonds,
I had ecstatic experiences.

One night,
while my wife slept
& my kids dreamed of a father
who didn't hurt them,
I played the album
& was given a vision:
Music 101. Jazz Appreciation. *(Again.)*
A small, dark theater. *(Again.)*
I'm high. *(Again.)*

A light comes on
& there's God, barefoot
& dressed in white, a braid
as long as an angel's wingspan,
an eagle feather tied to his ear

(I'm sorry, that's how I saw Him),
& He's dancing!
& He's dancing
for Me!
The horrible mess I was/am/& forever will be.
& Mr. Whimsical Magician's there too!
his white feet,
pink & high-arched,
slapping against the floor
like enthusiastic praise
(O Glory!)

Imagine going to a concert
to see your favorite band play,
the anticipation, the joy, the ecstasy
(The Living God!)
waving His finger towards you.

He's inviting you on to the stage.
He's asking you to join Us.

For the sake of truth, listen—it was the morning that broke me, not you. I wanted to color everything grass-green. Knew my favorite color was grass-green before I knew the color, or what favorite meant. Anything that I can put in my palm belongs in this poem. But I do not wish to make this poem concrete. I want it to lay my feet off the ground. Want it to climb into elliptical smoke. Make everything translucent. Listen, love is not what I am asking for. Love is what I am asking with. All my desires are small & unachievable. I think of myself as the person who, if I had the moon, would still think it's majestic. I do not value distance. You are nearer to me than my jugular vein and I still love you. I am riddling my poems with lies. I am swearing on the Quran, the most poem of all poems. I am using its metaphors like a greedy traitor. Allah is excellent at internal rhymes. I just wish he taught me that.

SELF-PORTRAIT AS A GOD IN THE SHOWER

One need not even
say anything. I am
ashamed already.

Of my sex, of its
sexlessness. My
professor says

there is something
sacred about tercets.
I want to put my sex

here. In this sacrilege.
It feels unnecessary.
But I am only human,

with cardinal desires,
eros, a love of god.
I want to cup god

in my palms. Squeeze
them together until
mercy. In the shower,

I step over my fallen
Medusa-hair squirming
on the floor. And just

as coolly, watch them
flow down the drain.

there are different kinds of poor and we
are more than one, Mama said.

standing in line at recess
I counted the kinds of poor:

lighting candles at dusk poor,
standing in line for cheese poor,

cutting up our own squirrels
to eat, swim back to Mexico, wetback,

I heard you have lice and eat worms,
bet you can't even speak good English poor.

I didn't know.

I thought we were playing under rainbows
rich and Aztec warriors rich and watching

the sunset together, invisible superhero rich.
At recess I learned my place in line,

that I was a certain kind of poor:
little girl in a boy's snowsuit,

the wrong color, a bit too small.

-Davenport, Iowa

After *Abuelo's* funeral, the women went to the kitchen
and the men went out to the garden to sit and drink café.
The kids ran around the house: *arriba, abajo, afuera, dentro.*

As I rushed past the kitchen, I overheard the women talking.
They were making *mole, chile, salsa, tortillas* and *sopa de fideo.*
I heard a woman weep as she told the story of how the mortician

in Iowa couldn't believe the dead Mexican had such nice teeth,
real teeth. He thought they were dentures, used pliers and a knife,
tried to mask his mistake by sewing shut my grandfather's lips.

As I flew into the dining room, my cousins pulling me by the hem
of my blue dress, I could've sworn I saw *Abuelo's* missing teeth
fall from Heaven and land, one by one, in the *sopa.* Mama's face

was hidden in her hair as she turned from the elaborate table
filled with *arroz con pollo, enchiladas potosinas* and *pan dulce.*
Mama stared out the window to her father's flower garden.

"He loved *rosas, margaritas, violetas* and *begonias,*" she said,
and I knew she could feel her father beneath the soil preparing
to live again as his favorite flowers, grown tall, bursting with color.

Spanish translation:
arriba, abajo, afuera, dentro: up, down, outside, inside; *mole, chile, salsa, tortillas, sopa de fideo:* sauce, peppers, salsa, tortillas, noodle soup; *Abuelo:* Grandfather; *arroz con pollo, enchiladas potosinas, pan dule:* rice with chicken, enchiladas from San Luis Potosí, sweet bread; *rosas, margaritas, violetas, begonias:* roses, daisies, violets, begonias

-San Miguel de Allende, Mexico

Legend says a blind man
sketched the cathedral after
a vision from God. That he
had seen only one thing
in his whole life and it was this:
spiral staircase, colors of
salmon and rust, yellow tips,
rounded walls imbedded in the ground
reaching down into the rock
pulling up the sand and clay,
forming ovals where windows
one day would grow. And at the pinnacle
a cross, a hand over a hand extended
back toward God who first dreamed this
cathedral into being. Centuries later,
another dream, another man
with a vision. And so he climbed
the cathedral late at night, fastened
to the cross a string of neon lights,
plugged it in at the disco next door
just to be sure God could still see us.

LIOR • TORENBERG/ is a writer living and working in New York City. She has been published by *One Story*, *december magazine*, The Poetry Society of New York, and more. She was a nominee for Sundress Publications' Best of the Net Anthology and a finalist in *december magazine*'s Jeff Marks Memorial Poetry Prize.

LANA • CITRON/ is the author of five novels: *Sucker*, *Spilt Milk*, *Transit*, *The Honey Trap*, and *The Brodsky Touch*; two nonfiction works, *Edible Pleasures* and *A Compendium of Kisses*; and scriptwriter of the award-winning shorts: "I was the Cigarette Girl," and Hannah Cohen's *Holy Communion*.

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ANNETTE • SISSON/ writes essays and flash fiction but is primarily a poet. Her poems can be found in *Valparaiso Poetry Review*, *Birmingham Poetry Review*, *Rust and Moth*, *The Citron Review*, and others. Her book of poems, *Small Fish in High Branches*, was published by Glass Lyre Press in 2022. Find her online at annettesisson.com

GEORGE • PETERSON/ is a scientist, writer, pilot, great-grandfather, and former professor. He has written and contributed to dozens of books across a wide range of subjects, from economics to scientific literature to memoir and personal history. Most of the time, you can find George in the mountains near his home in Utah, hiking and making new friends.

LAURIE • KUTCHINS/ has published three books of poetry, including *The Night Path*, a Pulitzer Prize nomination for poetry. Her poems and essays have appeared widely in *Orion*, *Ploughshares*, *The New Yorker*, *The Georgia Review*, *The Kenyon Review*, and other places. She teaches creative writing at James Madison University and at the Jackson Hole Writers Conference. Her essay in *Thin Air* is an excerpt from her nonfiction manuscript on ancestral repair.

CARL • SWANSON/ is a poet and theatermaker whose poems have been published by *Crooked Arrow Press*, *Trouble Child Magazine*, *Meal Magazine*, and the Hennepin History Museum. He lives in Minneapolis, MN with his wife, two children, and two cats named Joey and Dee Dee. Find out more about him at catarlatiyaswanson.com.

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BEE • LB/ is an array of letters, bound to impulse; a writer creating delicate connections. they have called any number of places home; currently, a single yellow wall in Michigan. They have been published in *Revolute Lit*, *After the Pause*, *Roanoke Review*, and *FOLIO*, among others.

LOGAN • ANTHONY/ is an emerging queer writer, transgender artist, worshipper of nature and literature, and messy skateboarder. Hailing from an overgrown riverside in rural Indiana, Anthony received a BA in Creative Writing & English with concentrations in fiction, poetry, and screenwriting from Southern New Hampshire University and continually works towards a creative life lived in harmony with the land.

ELLEN • JUNE • WRIGHT/ was born in England and currently lives in Northern New Jersey. She is a retired English teacher. Her work was selected as *The Missouri Review's* Poem of the Week in June 2021. She is a Cave Canem and Hurston/Wright alumna, and received five 2021 Pushcart Prize nominations.

NICOLAS • VISCONTI/ is a writer living in Brooklyn with an artist and a cat.

ANNE • CHEILEK/ is a writer and editor living in the heart of Silicon Valley. Her work has appeared in *RHINO Poetry, Catamaran Literary Reader, Gone Lawn, Juked,* and other literary journals. She is a poetry editor for *DMQ Review* and past editor for *Reed Magazine,* garnering the latter their first Pushcart Prize.

CHRISTOPHER • MCCORMICK/ is an MFA in creative writing candidate at Bowling Green State University where he teaches English and is an assistant editor for the *Mid-American Review.* His work has appeared in *The Mill* and *Working Artist Collective* and is forthcoming in *Anti-Heroin Chic.* When not reading or writing, he enjoys cooking for his friends and walking in the woods.

CARL • BOON/ is the author of the full-length collection, *Places & Names: Poems.* His writing has appeared in many journals and magazines, including *Prairie Schooner, Posit,* and *The Maine Review.* He received his PhD in Twentieth-Century American Literature from Ohio University in 2007, and currently lives in Izmir, Turkey, where he teaches courses in American literature at Dokuz Eylül University.

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CLAYTON • CLARK/ lives in St. Louis, his hometown, where he works as a mental health counselor in private practice alongside his partner, Tina. His latest poetry collection, *Auscultate,* is forthcoming from Galileo Press, and his debut collection, *A Finitude of Skin,* won the Moon City Poetry Award.

ELLIS • ELLIOT/ is a writer, teacher of ballet, and facilitator of online writing groups called Bewilderness Writing. She has a blended family of six grown sons and lives in Juno Beach, FL. She has an MFA from Queens University, is a contributing writer for the *Southern Review of Books,* and an editor for *The Dewdrop* contemplative journal.

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ROBERT • ROTHMAN/ lives in Northern California, near extensive trails and open space, with the Pacific Ocean over the hill. His work has appeared in *Atlanta Review, Meridian Anthology of Contemporary Poetry, Tampa Review, Willow Review,* and over ninety-five other literary journals in the United States, England, Canada, Ireland, Wales, and Australia. Please see his website robertrothmanpoet.com for more information about him and his work.

KENNETH • CHACÓN/ (he/him/that vato) identifies as a 6ixth Sun Xicano from the city of Fresno in the great state of Califaztlán. He is a husband, father, and grandfather, and the author of one collection of poetry, *The Cholo Who Said Nothing*. His work has appeared in various magazines, including *Spillway, Blackbird, Palette Poetry, The Colorado Review,* and *Huizache,* among others.

JAVERIA • HASNAIN/ is a poet and educator from Karachi, PK. She is a Fulbright scholar at The New School, pursuing her MFA in Poetry. Her poems have appeared or are soon appearing in *The Margins, beestung, Superstition Review*, and elsewhere. She currently lives in Brooklyn, NY.

EMILY • LUPITA/ is an American Latina artist & writer. She earned a BA from Central College and an MFA from Iowa State University. Emily Lupita writes from her experience in different cultures, including her Mexican-American + Welsh heritage and rural Iowa roots. Emily Lupita is the winner of the Faulkner-Wisdom Creative Writing Competition Gold Medal in Poetry and the *Atlanta Review* International Publication Prize. Her poetry has been published in journals including *Poetry International, North American Review, Portland Review, The Chattahoochee Review, International Poetry Review,* and in the anthology *Poetic Voices Without Borders 2.*

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FEATURING

RISHI AGRAWAL
LOGAN ANTHONY
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CARL BOON
KENNETH CHACÓN
MICHAEL CHANG
ISRA CHEEMA
ANNE CHEILEK
JAMES CIHLAR
LANA CITRON
CLAYTON CLARK
LYNN COHEN
ELLIS ELLIOTT
NINA GORSKAYA
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EMILY LUPITA
CHRISTOPHER MCCORMICK
GEORGE PETERSON
ROBERT ROTHMAN
JILL RUSCOLL
HANNAH SAAL
ANNETTE SISSON
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