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THE OVERARCHING THEMES OF THE POETRY found within this Raleigh Review issue include the human conditions of messy relationships, parenting, masculinity, and mental health in settings that are both rural and distinctly urban. Just as the characters in this issue’s stories confront the unavoidable milestone of coming of age, so does our organization. The pressures for us to mature our business model frighten and excite us. There’s just something legit in growing from the endeavor stage to the “business” stage. It doesn’t happen very often that a literary magazine can become self-sufficient and still accomplish all the tasks we do: paying contributors, filing sales & use taxes, paying our printer, and paying our more practical expenses, including software price increases.

These are unsure times. There is no easy money out there, at least not the kind that can be obtained ethically. If a company is taking in easy money, then they are likely taking advantage of the rest of us. In the last year, we have seen increases in the prices of both our accounting software (a 30 percent increase) and our submission management system for a 600 percent increase this year alone. The need to cut back our expenses is there, though we will not trim the quality of our magazine. Instead of pandering to the wealthy or even catering to those entities who counter our mission as artists, we are expanding our circulation numbers thanks to an uptick of support from readers around the globe.

Raleigh Review was one of ten finalists in the Community of Literary Magazines & Presses (CLMP) Firecracker Awards out of New York for general magazine excellence this year. Yes, we are honored to be nominated for this award, though still we worry for our community of magazines.

With the cost to produce each copy of the magazine being about the amount we take in per sale, we won’t make up the cost difference any-
time soon. At the same time, as long as we continue to operate without any debt whatsoever while producing our issues, and therefore putting the art first, we shall continue to exceed our goals and expectations.

*Raleigh Review* believes art must challenge as well as entertain. We also believe great literature inspires empathy in neighbors everywhere in the world. *Raleigh Review* is a 501(c)(3) nonprofit that does not ask for donations. We’d rather our supporters subscribe to our magazine, or request copies of our issues from independent bookshops, and we hope you will.

Rob Greene, editor & publisher
EMMA BOLDEN

THE FROSTS WERE HER CONDITION

In the spare season my body became a tower
of ice and song. Six nights I abstained
from sleep, licking the street wet

with my lamplight, chanting to God that all
I had was want. God remained. Unchanged
I sewed with silvered thread a square

into my chest. I made it the door I hoped
to open. I hoped to find inside a heart
immaculate, drained white as the ridiculous

insistence of my own bad blood. God remained
unchanged. I asked the night if it was kidding me
and the night threw out its clusters of stars,
sweet as flowers, sweet as any bell we ring yellow
with our meanings. I asked the night if I was wrong
to ask and around me it threw a hush. And in it

I heard the sound of longing, sweet-flowered as any
answer, as a god whose purpose is to remain unchanged.
The doctor ups my meds, so I buy a new orchid. 
I now own four, each named after a Florida city:

white cream measles Tallahassee, hyperthermia indigo 
Miami, Coral Gables with the plum-singed petals.

And the one in my dining room, dying, my favorite:
Fort-Lauderdale-by-the-Sea. Butter-colored, purple dalmation

spotted, stars for blooms. There’s no way for direct sunlight
to hit the table. My fault. I like to eat dinner beside it. Today

I drink lemonade made with fresh citrus halves, then chase 
the dog with them. She hates anything acidic. Is that cruel?

It can’t hurt her, and I don’t want to be the only one trembling. 
Expensive habit, S said last night, pointing to the plants. I nodded.

I never gave that star-bloomed orchid water. Forgetfulness, 
maybe. Sometimes I just want to be in charge.
Yeah, it’s always about time. Strings of little lights and paper lanterns, the shimmering city over there, the sirens over there. All those lives in all those windows, a fearlessness.

We have to say this headlong into the night. Here is what we say: then she kissed me in the middle of my back. Why didn’t you call instead of getting in the pick-up in the storm?

And then he left. Really left. I still don’t know, a train, I think. She put her hand on top of my head, kissed my temple. Why did it take us this long? My children have filled me. They have filled me. I should have called you. I should have told you what a poet once told me: that it takes half a century to figure out who they are,

our real true loves. Kings and queens, at banquets, at dances do this, in unlit places. There’s a word that means homesickness for a home that never existed,

but I remember every room in your home. We burn into each other. Syllable, driftwood, beach fire, forest. We throw it all on. We talk until our voices scratch the worn wooden table,

until the ocean in our story is far away, girls racing headlong toward the magic and the hurt. No one could have stopped us. We had salt in our hair and we were fast.
A woman grates blood orange over rye,
her eyes like cool air coming through the door
of a motel room on a state highway
where two lawn chairs lean against a green wall.
A coffee can of wet cigarettes
at midnight in Des Moines. I am leaving
the small bathroom, undressing, lying
on the starch-stiff sheets with a beer
watching her slap her sandal against the heel of her right foot
where maybe she is singing in the doorway & waiting
for the starlight of her ash to die out,
or saying over the TV, *That was a long day*,
& with so much country on either side of us
we might remain here, rehearsing restlessness, forever
living lives by the hour
till whatever green language the room speaks
in the morning shows us where the world goes in waking.
If the streetlight is something I finger on her thigh,
then loneliness becomes a problem of forgetting—
the last four women I stood in front of naked,
their softness pressing into me like light into a curtain.

I am mid-life on a Monday in February; it is getting late.
She gives me what she’s made on the rocks
& her smile is a wine glass hung by the foot
of its stem, quivering slightly
after having been put away.
JOHN POWER | HAUNTED, 2016
38” X 26” | OIL ON LINEN
THE CAMPING TRIP was my father’s idea. He wanted my mother to meet Katerina and Vasili, and he wanted them to meet my mother. Why, I do not know. If I were my father, I would have kept these two worlds as separate as possible. But it goes without saying that my father was his own man and that there were many inexplicable decisions in his life.

The trip he arranged was to Hunt’s Island, a peninsula off the Carolina coast where visitors could see endangered sea turtles and piping plovers, alligators and great white herons. It boasted “the last truly undisturbed coastline in the country.” At eleven, I imagined Hunt’s Island as a serene place, a refuge from the hurt and turmoil of my home in the mountains. Could my family last in this place with no disruption?

I was not part of the original plan. An adult’s weekend, my father said,
but my mother wouldn’t have it. She guessed, rightly, that she would need an ally on her side.

“I ain’t leaving Becca here, to get into God knows what while we go traipsing off on some island,” she told my father the night he proposed the plan.

“Don’t you think we’d have more fun, just us couples?” my father asked. He rubbed her fingers between his, wheedled her with his eyes. I knew there would be no intimacy between them. He didn’t want me there as witness to his incredulous infidelity, my mother’s denial of it all. Still, she blushed.

“I won’t stop worrying,” she said, taking her hand back, turning her wedding ring nervously around the joint.

And so, two weeks later, we all packed into our tight sedan and headed east. We brought fishing poles and bourbon. Wire hangers to hang hot dogs and marshmallows over the fire. Tents and ratty sleeping bags and a cooler of ice and sandwich meats. Extra packs of smokes. Paperback novels and fold-up nylon beach chairs. I brought my bathing suit from last summer and my dead grandfather’s binoculars.

My father and Vasili sat up front, the three women sandwiched into the back of the car. I was stuck in the middle, my mother’s sweaty thigh pressed against one side, Katerina’s coffee-colored leg blissfully close on the other. Katerina smoked with the window rolled down, her signature cherry cigarette rolling into my hair, stinging my eyes and making my head spin. In the front seat, my father and Vasili played old cowboy mu-

We checked into the campground that afternoon. The air smelled of salt and sunscreen. The park ranger at the front desk was muddied by sunburn, except for a white strip where his sunglasses perched over his nose.

“Y’all be careful now,” he said. “We’re expecting some bad weather this weekend.”

My father grinned and shook the park ranger’s hand.

“Oh,” he said. “We’re ready for anything.”

I wasn’t sure that our tents were waterproof.

The campsite was shaded by tall loblolly pines, which had dropped a soft bedding of needles onto the gravel square. A rusted iron firepit and a charcoal grill squatted next to a picnic table. A previous party had left
the bodies of Coors Light cans in the ashes of the pit, and I poked these with a stick while my father and Vasili assembled our two tents.

“We’ve got the lady’s tent over here,” my father said. “And the guy’s tent over here. That way y’all don’t have to smell our nasty feet.” He laughed and Vasili smiled. Katerina took her bags into our home for the next two nights and set them down with a sigh.

“I cannot fucking believe this place,” she said. We were the only two in the tent. “I cannot believe I let him bring me here.”

“It’s not so bad,” I said. “They have a shower.”

Katerina laughed, a high ringing that set my ears ablaze. “Shower?” she said. “More like a hotel for bugs.”

**THAT FIRST NIGHT**, after we’d set up camp and cooked hotdogs, after the adults were sleepily drunk and I was exhausted from the day’s excitement, we fell asleep in our piled sleeping bags and pillows. I awoke three hours later, my bladder hurting from too much Kool-Aid and Sprite. There was a flashlight by my pillow. I took it and stepped over my mother and Katerina, who were curled fast asleep on either side of me.

Once out of the tent, I turned on the flashlight and sheltered the brightness with my palm. The campground was quiet except for the laughing of some far-off campers and the piping of tree frogs in the woods. I found the gravel path and, hoping I remembered the way, tip-toed toward the restrooms.

It turned out that Katerina’s judgement was correct. The showers smelled of mildew and something vaguely offal-like. An extended family of granddaddy longlegs seemed to have the run of the place, and my flashlight spotted on paper wasp nests and the long cones of mud dauber hives. The sound of dripping water echoed, and my flashlight shone back at me from the streaked mirrors.

Though the fear nearly rent a hole in my chest, I made it to and from the toilet without incident. No boogiemen jumped out at me from the dark, no silent killers were waiting in the bushes. I didn’t run into any alligators or bears or deer, which scared me just as much as tigers, with their large reflective eyes and sharp hooves.

Back at the campsite, I turned the light off and stumbled toward our tent. I was almost inside the door when I heard the noises, the moaning and grunting. I remembered these sounds from the abandoned house,
not long ago, when I’d seen my father bent over Vasili’s back, the two of them tossed into that strange dance adults called love.

I paused outside of the tent, afraid that my footsteps would wake Katerina and she would find her husband engaged in such an act with my father. I don’t know why I felt the need to protect her. She wasn’t gentle or kind. She was a monstrous force, capable of destroying our lives in a way my mother wasn’t. So I guess, in a way, I was protecting myself.

**IN THE MORNING,** I climbed out of the tent to find my father threading fishing line through the eyelets on his pole. The other pole leaned against the picnic table, already laden with the bobbers and weights and lures.

“Vasili and I are going fishing,” he told me. He whistled as he pulled the line to the top. He selected a bright orange float from the tackle box sitting in the gravel.

“Can I come?” I asked. I picked out a Pop-Tart and poured lukewarm Kool-Aid into a plastic cup. My mother and Katerina were nowhere to be seen. Maybe they had decided to brave the bathrooms and shower the salt and bug spray from their hair.

“Oh no,” my father said. “I don’t think so. You ladies are going down to the beach. That will be fun, right?”

I knew then that I was meant to act as mediator between my father’s wife and his lover’s. My father’s viewpoint must have been, *Well if she has to come, might as well make her useful.* I wanted to tell my father that I knew. That I’d seen him and Vasili, that I knew all the facts, that he wasn’t pulling the wool over my eyes, no sir. But I just shrugged and crammed the too-sweet pastry into my mouth.

Katerina and my mother came up the gravel road, barefoot and in sundresses, like women from some wild tribe.

“Go put your swimsuit on, sweetheart,” Katerina said. “We’re going to the beach.” She had a slight lisp around the edges of her S’s, a pattern of speech I wished to emulate. I knew it would only sound stupid on me, like her fuchsia lipstick and kohl-lined eyes. Small town girls couldn’t even fake sophistication.

My mother went into the tent to find my swimsuit, and Katerina lit a cigarette. She perched on one of the lawn chairs by the firepit and blew smoke into the ashes.

“You boys ready for your big adventure?” she asked in a teasing lilt.
My father laughed and winked at Katerina. “Oh, don’t you worry. I’ll bring your man back in one piece.”

Vasili emerged from his tent, disheveled from sleep. He walked over to Katerina and bent down to kiss her.

“Gentle,” she said. “Gentle. You’ll smudge my lipstick.” They pecked like birds sharing food, and Vasili drew back.

“Why are you wearing lipstick to go swimming?” he asked her.

“Swimming? I’m not swimming. No, sir. There are too many sharks and jellyfish. I am going to sit in the sun and read a trashy novel and get a tan.”

Katerina was already tanner than anyone in town who wasn’t black. Anything she wore shone, as if the world were a complementary color to her skin.

“And drink,” she added, as an afterthought. “I’ll probably drink.”

My mother came out of our tent and threw my swimsuit at me. I caught it, and she followed with a bottle of sunscreen.

When I came back from the bathroom, Vasili and my father had already left, taking the car down to the marina where they’d rented a boat. Katerina and my mother sat perched at opposite ends of the picnic table, not talking to each other. My mother stared into the woods beyond the gravel path as if waiting for some deity from the forest to emerge and tell her what to do.

“You ready?” Katerina asked me. She sprang up from her seat and handed me a bag to carry. We each had an over-packed bag and a lawn chair. Katerina wheeled a cooler of slushy ice and snacks and fruity drinks. The walk to the beach was only about a half mile, but laden down with the sun bouncing off of my back, I felt like a refugee from a foreign, sandy nation.

My childhood was not filled with vacations. This was one of a handful I could remember. While my mother and Katerina sat in their chairs and drank pink wine coolers, I ran into the surf and watched the sand catch at my toes. I went as deep as possible, salty water stinging the scrapes on my knees and the scratches from blackberry brambles and wild rose. I dove beneath the surf, rising with handfuls of sand and hermit crabs, bewildered alien creatures that skittered over my heart line.

I walked down the fault between sea and sand, picking up broken
shells and fragments of sand dollars. I found the tail-ends of painted whelks, slippery halves of shark’s eyes, golden slipper shells. I found a spiral egg case, the hulk of a horseshoe crab, the limp body of a ghost crab. Everything in this surf was either broken or dead. In tide pools formed in the sand, finger-length minnows sparkled, searching for escape.

When I got back to my mother, she and Katerina were sun-drunk and laughing. My mother rinsed my hands off with a half-bottle of water, and I made myself a turkey sandwich from the cooler. She handed me a slippery bottle of Coca-Cola and opened another drink for herself.

“You need to get a Brazilian,” Katerina said. She lit a cigarette. My mother laughed.

“Oh god, no, I’m too old for that. No, that ship has sailed.”


I nibbled on my sandwich and tried to be quiet, as if I could fade into the background and the adults would forget I was there.

“What? You get Brazilians? Where, in our town, have you possibly found a place that does Brazilians?”

I finished my sandwich and buried the crust in the sand. I was trying to figure out exactly what a Brazilian was, and why someone might want one.

“No,” Katerina said. “I do the whole puppy. Makes everything easier. Clean up, you know.”

My mother laughed so hard she scared a flock of gulls into the air.

“You don’t feel like a little girl?” she asked, still choking on her laughter.

“I haven’t felt like a little girl since I was a little girl,” Katerina said. “Besides, go to that place in the strip mall. The one that does eyebrow threading and black ladies’ hair? They’ll do it. Not all of it, but a Brazilian. Not bad, too. Plus, they’re funny.”

“I’ll think on it,” my mother said. She stubbed her cigarette out on the sand and picked up a romance novel laying face-down in the sun.

“I buy a kit online,” Katerina said. “It includes all the wax, everything. Got different scents and everything. Makes my pussy smell like raspberries.”

It all clicked into place. In fifth grade, in health class, we had learned about puberty and the things that happened to your bodies. Periods, hair in new places, boobs—which the teacher called breasts. We didn’t
talk about sex, but we didn’t have to. Most of us had enough older sibs-
lings or friends to have garnered a basic understanding. It started with
kissing. Then, you fell in love and felt warm. Then you got married and
had babies, unless you were like some of the girls in the high school, who
had babies and moved to the trailer park with their baby daddies.

But no one had said anything about shaving.

I thought about this phenomenon for the rest of the afternoon. I
knew men shaved—I’d seen my father in the mornings, his face soapy
and his low curses as he slipped and cut his cheek or jaw. I’d never seen
my mother shave before, so I guessed that this ritual was done in private,
which meant it must involve private places.

Still, I could not imagine bringing a razor so close to that.

Back at the campsite, my mother and Katerina walked to the showers
together, arm in arm like old friends. I stayed in the tent, wincing as my
pink lobster skin brushed against the nylon of my sleeping bag. Vasily
and my father still hadn’t returned, and the campsite was quiet. I took
off my bathing suit, and a sprinkle of sand littered the tent floor. I looked
down at my pale white stomach, pink belly button twisted in the center,
the red splotchy heat of my thighs and calves, my toes with purple-glitter
nail polish still chipped to them. My body didn’t look like my mother’s,
which was worn and wrinkled, spotted and lined like a map. It didn’t
look like the smooth brown canvas of Katerina’s, either. Little girl. Did
they mean like me? I didn’t want to imagine Katerina that way, but at
the same time, I did.

Once a woman took all her clothes off in the IGA parking lot. She was
wigging off, my father said, a phrase I didn’t quite understand but took
to mean that she wasn’t all here. Her stomach hung over her panties,
which were pale yellow and baggy. Her breasts swung as she danced. She
twirled, chaotic and screaming. A group of women came with a blanket
to swaddle her until the cops arrived. The skin under her arms hung like
vestigial wings, as if she kept flapping her arms she might remember to
fly. Her nipples were wide brown spots, like coffee stains on her breasts.

My body didn’t look like any of these women. I put on my underwear
and overalls and left the tent, just as my mother and Katerina returned,
their hair wet and shining in the sun.

By the time we had unpacked the coolers, the sky was hung low with
thick gray clouds, and the air had a static greenness to it. We sat by the
campfire, the women smoking, me reading a book about a prince who is turned into a fox. My mother kept checking the time.

“Those men need to hurry,” she said. “Or they’re going to get trapped in this. And this isn’t the type of storm you want to get trapped in.”

Katerina shrugged, nudged the firepit with her toe. “They’ll figure it out,” she said. “They’re adults.”

My mother lit another cigarette off the butt of her first one. She shaded her eyes and looked up into the clouds, which were hanging low and gray over the trees.

“Come on, Becca, let’s not just sit here,” Katerina said, standing and stretching. “There’s a little museum at the camp center—let’s go there.”

My mother looked up from her worry. “Don’t be gone too long,” she said. “It’s bad enough with Vasily and Keith out there.”

“We’ll be fine. We’re just going up the road,” Katerina said. She gave my mother a look. “I think it’s good for her to go do something, get distracted.”

My mother conceded. “I’ll stay here,” she said. “Wait for them to get in.”

We left the campsite and walked up the gravel path to the park center, which was crowded with tourists trying to decide what to do.

“My mom is afraid of thunderstorms,” I told Katerina.

“Really?” she asked. She looked concerned. “Maybe we shouldn’t have left her alone back there.”

I didn’t want to lose my alone time with Katerina. I shook my head. “No, no, she’s okay. She’s afraid of a lot of stuff. Snakes, spiders, cockroaches.”

I knew I shouldn’t be listing my mother’s secrets, but I wanted something to give away.

“Well, she’s lucky she has a brave girl like you to keep her company,” Katerina said and squeezed my hand. I squeezed back. You could see me shining, I thought, at Katerina’s words. Brave, like a soldier or a warrior or an adventurer in one of my books or games. Brave was a sword I now carried, a magical amulet, a fiery arrow.

The Touch Tank was crowded with children, most smaller than me, trying to touch the sand dollars and flounder and sea urchins and starfish. I didn’t want to approach the tank; it seemed babyish, but Katerina pulled me close.
“Oh, look at this,” she said, lifting a starfish to the edge of the water. I could see its millions of suction feet, all swaying and grasping to find purchase. I let her lay it in my palm.

“It tickles,” I said.

“Please don’t pick up the flounder,” said a teenage employee in the corner. “They have sharp teeth.” I watched a small boy drop the flounder, which zoomed through the tank to the shadows out of reach.

“Starfish have every single organ in each arm,” Katerina said. “It’s called radial symmetry. That means that if you cut off an arm, you can grow a whole new starfish from it.”

“That’s mean,” I said.

“Yes, but it’s good if you get in an accident.”

“Why do you know that?”

“Well, I wasn’t always a small-town girl,” Katerina said. She winked at me and placed the starfish back in the tank. “Come on, let’s look around.”

We walked around the education center and Katerina told me about the difference between salt water and brine water, how alligators carry their babies in their mouths, how sea turtles mistake streetlights for the moon. I learned that Katerina used to work as a mermaid at the aquarium in Myrtle Beach, and she was a good listener, and that’s how she knew so much about the ocean.

“Every morning, we’d slip on our tails and colorful wigs. I went on all the tours, saw every special exhibit. I could probably tell you about the feeding habits of great white sharks in my sleep.”

“I can’t believe you were a mermaid,” I said. “I want to be a mermaid when I grow up.”

“It’s not all fun and games. It’s hard work, and sometimes people are mean to you. You have to be really strong, too, to be able to swim all day.”

Katerina bought me a plastic sheet on finding birds in the marsh, and we walked back to the campsite in a misty rain.

**THE STORM GREW LOUDER** and closer, rain pelting the tents like hail. We ate turkey and ham and slices of white bread in the lantern light. The men still hadn’t returned, and my mother had grown even more anx-
ious. She kept stepping out into the rain to smoke, but her cigarettes were drenched and wouldn’t light.

“They’re fine,” Katerina said, rubbing her back.

“What if they’re not?”

“They’re probably just waiting out the storm in town. It’s dangerous to drive back in these conditions.”

I read my plastic bird guide and tried not to worry about my father. I’d already decided he was dead, so there wasn’t much else to lose. I felt strange and calm, like my mind was floating out of my body.

“The redwing blackbird can be distinguished by the bright red and yellow band on its shoulder, and its loud and lively song,” I read. My mother was crying and Katerina was rubbing her shoulders.

“Mom,” I said. She looked up at me. “Did you know that Katerina used to be a mermaid?”

My mother looked at Katerina, confused.

“It’s true. I swam in the show in Myrtle Beach,” Katerina said.

“I would have never guessed,” my mother said.

“It wasn’t for a long time. Just for a couple years after I graduated high school. My mother wouldn’t let me stay unless I got a job, and I didn’t have any skills. Swimming was the only thing I was good at.”

“Why did you move to the mountains?” my mother asked. “There aren’t many mermaids there.”

Katerina laughed and shrugged. She opened a bottle of whiskey and poured some into her plastic cup. “Well, I met Vasili, and I followed him home. Being in love trumps being a mermaid, any day.”

“And are you?” my mother asked.

“What?”

“In love?”

Katerina swallowed a drink of whiskey and sighed. “Who really knows anymore?” she asked.

I DREAMED OF MY FATHER and Vasili trapped on their little boat in cresting gray waves, white foam surrounding them as the boat swung and bobbed. I imagined the storm rolling over them, sheets of water so thick that you couldn’t see. The boat shatters, and my father and Vasili are separated, clinging to different sheets of wood. Then, Katerina appears
as a mermaid, her tail long and turquoise, her breasts full and smooth, nipples brown and tender. She swims in long powerful strokes and crests near her husband’s limp form. She gathers him into her arms like a child. In the dream, I am there but not there, and I scream for Katerina to rescue my father as well. He is clinging to the shard of wood, too small to support his bulky frame. She looks at him, her pupils small and slitted, and dives beneath the waves.

I was awakened by sirens. I’d fallen asleep while my mother and Katerina passed the liquor bottle back and forth and talked in whispers and the rain pelted the tent, a musical orgy of rain and thunder and lightning cracks. Now, the rain had quieted and the sky was dark. The tent was empty. I stepped out to see a herd of people milling around the campground, shouting and talking. A fire truck was parked parallel across the gravel lane, blocking my view. I squeezed through the crowd, looking for anyone I belonged with. No one noticed me. I arrived to the scene of the commotion barefoot, rain glistening off my skin and my clothes darkened with water and sweat.

The park center was orange and gray from the flames and smoke roiling over it. It reminded me of flamenco dancers I’d seen at the fair once, with bright ruffled skirts and twirling legs. Firefighters stood around the entrance, spraying chemical-smelling water into the windows and doors. Park employees in their khaki uniforms stood around crying or arguing with the fire chief. I didn’t see my mother or father and immediately knew that they had died in the blaze. I began crying. A woman saw me sobbing and knelt down to my level.

“Honey?” she asked. “Honey are you okay?”

I shook my head.

“Are you lost? Where’s your family, darling? Who did you come here with?”

Still I couldn’t bring myself to speak. What did I have to say to this woman? All the adults in my life were dead, drowned by mermaids and burned by lightning flame. I had nothing left but the mountains, and those were hours away with no map to get there.

The woman led me to a policeman standing idly next to his car. She explained the situation, and the officer spoke something into the radio on his shoulder. A moment later I was taken to an ambulance, where it
was determined I was completely fine. The ambulance workers wrapped a blanket over my shoulders and gave me a cup of water. The woman who found me stayed by my side, rubbing my shoulders.

“What’s your name, sweetie?” the officer asked.

I told him. I wiped the tears off my cheeks with dirty hands and felt stupid. I looked up at the burning center, where hundreds of animals were boiled alive. I thought about how none of us can be saved.

“Do you know where your parents are?” he asked.

I told him I didn’t. I told him I’d woken up when I heard the sirens and the campsite was empty and I was afraid. I told him my father had gone fishing and hadn’t returned, that my mother was afraid of thunderstorms, that I was in love with a mermaid.

After I’d calmed enough, the police officer drove me in his squad car back to our campsite. Most of the crowds had dispersed, and the fire was gradually dying.

“I’ve never been in a cop car,” I said.

The officer laughed. “That’s usually a good thing,” he said.

“I’m gonna be a mermaid when I grow up,” I said.

“That’s a good plan.”

“My dad is in love with his best friend,” I said.

The officer didn’t respond. We got to the campsite, where my mother and father were sitting out by the firepit, which was lit with a small and stubborn flame. I started crying when I saw the fire.

He let me out of the car, and I ran to my father, my feet bruising on the gravel, and leapt into his arms. My father caught me and held me. He smelled like sea salt, cigarettes, fish. He smelled like fire and rot. I cried on his shoulder, and he rubbed my back.

“Now where did you go off to?” he asked.

“I thought you died,” I said.

“Naw, sweet-bug, we just got caught in the storm. We’re all okay.”

My mother thanked the officer and he left. I didn’t let go of my father’s arms.

THERE’S ONE MORE PIECE TO TELL. In the morning we packed the campsite and drove away in silence. Bright yellow tape marked off the burned educational center. All that was left was some broken glass and the hulk-
ing stone frame. I watched out of the rearview mirror until the ruin disappeared. I thought about the animals, the flounder with his sharp teeth and the wavering starfish. Mermaids carrying the bodies out to sea. Katerina in her scales and fins pulled Vasili back to shore because he was the one she loved. Would she save me? My mother? Would I save any of them?

As we drove home, Katerina and my mother fell asleep, their heads lolling against opposite windows. I leaned back into the seat and watched Vasili run his hand through my father’s hair, his fingers pulling at the gray strands along his neck. Was he afraid, on that boat, in the storm? Did he cry, like my mother did, when the thunder clashed? Did my father hold him, arms around his shoulders, lips near his ear, as the rain fell? I imagined my father’s body, cold and wrecked in the surf, washed up on the sand among broken bits of shell and driftwood, sharks’ teeth and clumps of algae. I remembered the taste of his cheek, like charcoal and salt water, warm and beating and alive. I knew that for my father, there was no radial symmetry, no mermaids in the deep. As we barreled northward, I wished for my father all the sweet love he could glean from this world. ♦
I remember little else but the fear that turns M.’s eyes to moonstones. The dark room and the wind that keeps forcing the door open.

*  
Once, a man walked into me like a room. The colorless moon in my single window reminded him of loneliness.

*  
In T.’s dreams of our future we drink martinis all afternoon and the pearl ring on my left hand clinks against the glass.

*  
How, after twisting M.’s hand behind her back, S. forces his mouth onto her bolted mouth.

*  
Once, I was the window a man looked through, saw the moon and thought: you look lonely tonight.

*  
In T.’s dreams of our future,
we share a room
with two single beds.

* 
Like M., I have been known
to make myself so convincing
a ghost as to scream at the sight
of my own reflection.

* 
Once, when my loneliness was
as large as the moon, I let a man
walk me into a windowless room.

* 
In T.’s dreams of the future,
a man can consummate
his marriage whenever he desires.

* 
How to explain why, before
she goes, M. turns to give S.
a quick kiss?

* 
How to forgive the lies
left unspoken in those rooms?
More than once I kissed
a lonely man because he said
he could not forget the moon
in my hair.
Secretly you come home to me.
From those tilled fields. Your untiled nights.
Some kind of cloth
falling out from your back pocket.

You’re tired and sweating.
I’d wash your work shirt again
before morning.

I’d like you
to ask me anything.

Then, ask me this:
*What else could I work before sundown?*

You begin to gather my clothes
off the floor.

This, the shape of a boy bending
in a sunlit backyard,

gathering of so many flowers.
Things crawl over me here, no-see-ums and biting ants. They make me feel hospitable, like at last I am a good host. Stop itching, I tell myself, we have guests. What is a guest if not something that takes a little bit of your life? In the cemetery where I practice pedaling, sailing circles around the dead, iguanas sun bake and scurry the white slabs, the green length of them defiant drapery in death’s pale parlor. I’m told they’re invasive—even their taxonomy, iguana iguana, it’s too much, too many iguanas, the William Carlos Williams of reptiles, or the man my mother loved after my father, Jim James, who chugged caffeine-free Diet Pepsi and made his pecs dance, recited the three words of Italian he learned from Sylvester Stallone (Ti amo and andiamo). He once argued with me over my stubborn belief that ten thousand was the same thing as one million. I was never good with numbers. He was never good with kids. He built things and made my mother laugh. Maybe too much. Maybe for the wrong reasons. During cold snaps, the iguanas freeze and fall like stoned fruit from the trees, wake only once their core has warmed. I won’t be here to see it—it’s the off-season now, August, everything dank and hot-blooded, which is what I think my mother liked about Jim: something raw about him, the pink scars where his own mother’s
boyfriend stubbed out cigarettes on his arms or how he called *Here kitty kitty* nightly into the dark after the cat ran away. She was a stray to begin with—we lured her into our lives with milk, named her Fitty Fat the Kitty Kat, let her eat and fuck and kill as much as she wanted, litters of kittens and kibble and dead birds piling up. What else is there to say but everything we’ve said before, over and again? *Iguana iguana.* Italian Stallion. Here, kitty kitty. Andiamo, Jim James. What is a child if not something that takes a little bit of your life? He wasn’t a bad man. He made my mother laugh.
Suzanne Grove
Finalist for the Laux/Millard Poetry Prize

THE LAND IN BOTH OUR NAMES

This is what I count as ours:
morning eggs with their syrup
edges and smoke drawing long
away from your mouth’s tight lid.

god, what small triggers you’ve bred
into me—when your breath turns heavy,
when you don’t wash your face, when
your hair acquires its mammal smell—

we never change the clocks,
in this way we drown with each other.

Ours too: the casserole dish crusted,
swirled with the soap’s bright topaz,
also the name of the waitress we both
wanted last May, bound for Tennessee,

a name we squinted at for a daughter;
you said, don’t bring a child into this world.

the immovable car you bought at auction,
two goats, televisions we use only as mirrors.
Crack open my beer, lie your head on my belly, admire
the chickens eating our small kingdom of insects in the backyard.
I was worried about the Alaskan husky named Juno who was made to walk behind the truck. Me and the other kids bumped along the steep mountain road, sitting two to a tire well in the back of the pickup. Ascending slowly towards the butterscotch-scented Ponderosa grove, we were a small pack of after-church goers making our way to a winter’s store of stacked warmth.

I wore a shirt that must have been handmade. I loved the weight of the cotton, how the edge skimmed my terry-cloth shorts. It was from a second-hand shop where my mom bought fancy adult women’s sweaters for me, shrunken to fit a girl. I loved the neat buttons, the dainty periwinkle flowers small enough for a Barbie-sized print. For this and most
any occasion, I’d brought a few of the long-legged dolls in an old purse my grandmother passed on to me. It was thick, caution-yellow vinyl. It made a loud noise when I pulled the straps to cinch it shut. Inside I stashed some rope and my homemade dandelion and mud-water antidote for poison. Every girl needs an emergency bag.

Lately my Barbie sessions had begun to look more like late-night cable shows my parents never knew I watched. Just yesterday I was hiding a naked Ken doll and his girlfriends under my parents’ bed when I heard their voices in the hall. The hot spark of delight in stacking the bodies under sweet chants of love was immediately shoved away, replaced by owl eyes and bitten lips.

I was as tall as a cord of wood now and longed to mirror the teenagers in my neighborhood. Girls who tucked wide combs in their back pockets, girls with the sweet breath of cola-scented lip gloss. I often thought about Sam with her front-yard kiddie pool, her suntanned leisure, her breakfasts of bitter grapefruit heaped with sugar and half-drunken Tab. Sam read books on white magic and novels about children locked in an attic.

But this Sunday I aimed to stay out of the way and not be put to work, to avoid warm potato salad and the growl of Juno. The driver of the truck insisted Juno needed exercise, that he was used to going the distance. But I knew something about trying to catch up. I knew the sharp focus of eyes, of when to move fast and when it was easier to lay still.

I must have changed out of my shirt, didn’t want to stain it with sap or maybe I was hot, had a tube top underneath. I knew to stay out of sight of my father—the men in this crowd disapproved of girls with short-shorts and tops meant to distract boys. Maybe that’s why it was available in the truck’s cab after my father mowed through his foot with a chainsaw—a thick gash just beneath his big toe.

I remember my shirt between someone’s fingers against the autumn sun, torn into strips to wrap the gushing wound, how I focused on the rose
of blood blooming through the garden of my favorite top. I remember the niggling guilt as my sudden anger ignited but the horror of never wearing it again engulfed me. Nine years old, sawdust dizzying the air, the silence of the memory, though I’m sure there were screams. I’m sure there was the gunning of engines, all of us rushing into our vehicles, roaring down the mountain.

A week later there was a white bandage and a propped foot in my parents’ bedroom, an angry man under the covers, the bedspread a bramble of tea roses and synthetic quilting. There was never any doctor. My father avoided the ER, said he wanted to watch the Super Bowl instead. Laid off from the mine, no health insurance, we couldn’t afford the bills. This was not the first time I fell silent or felt nothing when I knew he was in pain.

I remember dreaming about the naked dolls piled like lumber on top of each other and myself bare under Juno’s bite. Knowing some dogs would never rest and that those dolls would never be retrieved made me burn. That spring when I turned ten I started making my own money. I’d walk past teenage loiterers and fly through the smoky corridor of our downtown’s bar and into the back apartment where I babysat the barmaid’s twins for cash and began teaching them all of my spells. ♦
Impossible to get out of the car in our driveway, to even pull in or turn down the street. Inside—waiting like water to fall as rain—everything I love. You. The children. Even the laundry. All the inevitability of loss. I love you so much I want to leave you. Before the days become long. Before your laughter curdles. Before our kisses sour. Before I yellow from obligation. This love is like water. The children are shiny, tentacled. I want to abandon them roadside, at the therapist’s office, forget, eternally, to pick them up from school. This is both easy and difficult to understand. I’ve been wrong about so much.
SEASON 11, EPISODE 7:
RETURN FROM PARADISE

After Jasper Johns’ Perilous Night, 1982

My father once opened his chest in the kitchen: his thin glass heart, the stuttering weep from his eyes. Even the neighbors could hear the splinter and groan—this is how grief looks, on a man, in the morning, on a man.

I am watching a man break behind dark sunglasses. He lost his family in a wet clouded night. I imagine his mother once numbered the times her own husband had wept—she told her child every story, counted them on his arms: one, two, three.

What is a child meant to learn? Today at the park, my son refused to drink from a pink plastic cup. How fragile their thirst must make them: drying and cracking under the weight of every brittle swallow.
I’m watching a woman. I’m watching a man take her picture. She stands still. Sprayed. Teased and tousled. He moves fast. This way, that. *Do a lot of women hate you?* She is watching me watch her, baby at my breast. Not her really. Not the her inside the mouth, behind the teeth. They are so white.

For weeks after the baby was born, I wanted my wife near, proud to display us: stuffed and silent as game, as dinner, as things painted and posed—cadavers—but that may be taking things too far. Now the walls are doing what they must—closing and crumbling. I’m struggling to keep up, pushing my face into stone. *When I come home, will you have hurt the baby?*

I’m watching a woman. I imagine her white teeth biting into the flesh on my smooth inner arm—almost baby fat new. I imagine how she must look prostrate under a sheet—I do mean hands and knees. Even a woman thinks this. The slow work teeth can make of clothing. Years ago, a woman fell asleep drunk between my legs. We laughed in the morning. I’m watching a woman. She is naked, pregnant. Does this change how you feel?

After the baby, I needed another person to mark me valuable. You’ve seen it in the movies. But on the screen, a man in the distance needs only a sandstone colored hat to prove his worth. Now, as if the screen has tipped, spilling seeds into that cupped and waiting void, my hands fill and fill and fill. I can’t keep up. I should tell someone that each night when the baby wakes, I hear my mother’s voice cry out my name.
The stream the buck took care to travel by
passed through a generation of pine rows
and down a slope I hadn’t known. So here
was water where on my topo map was none,
not even contours to show a dip in earth.
Wild hardwoods sprawled and let in the leadlight sky,
a lark bent over a stalk of marshy grass,
and deluge left an old stump thatched in straw,
as if this bottom somehow drained from a shire too.
The tracks fell lost into the flooded plain,
and I readied for the slog back up the hill
when sapwood shone beyond a gray forked oak.
A wounded sweetgum had been nearly scraped
in half by the restless buck before he passed.
Each mangled bevel spelled relief from the weight
of making himself known across the woods.
He must have wished his horns free from his brow,
if only for one day’s rest from instinct’s rut.
Knowing a cedar mantle want of tines
and how the hearth’s warm underglow would spread
the pride of shadows on my cabin wall,
I scanned the forest quickly for other marks,
but nowhere a scrape or stamp or even scat,
just a cleft of light that glazed the water beneath
my feet. My faceless contours stared up at me,
and over my shoulder stretched the perfected line
of my rifle barrel, floating like an accent
penciled on a page. I knelt closer to
the mire to give my likeness definition,
but the line grew long and took command of the sky
and the flooded plain. Then this became a place
where even a line can overthrow everything.
And then I knew I wanted it erased
from my body, broken, ground up and melted down,
kneaded into the alluvial dough, pressed deep
into the earth’s damp chest, and given back
to its original ore, no longer a weapon
but a thing unknown, beyond recognition or name.
we’ve got wilderness stuck in our teeth,  
maws crammed with dead leaves, frog  
lims, secret treasure maps  
scribbled on the underside of our tongues.  
we are brothers. we are feral scab  
eaters, sugar-buzzed and drunk  
on each other’s violent spit.  
we crash our bikes on purpose.  
we tread dirt paths with grace’s worn shoes  
until our soles unstitch, until  
our bodies scrape raw as red prayer.  

my brothers, my brothers,  
we swallow grease  
abundant, heir to everything that bleeds  
 easy, all that when pinned beneath  
a magnifying lens will burn.

once, bats flooded the attic,  
erratic colony of night’s music.  
at dusk, we hung a bucket of honey  
outside the window, watched  
as they evacuated the house like a mudslide  
rising backwards toward the sky. when  
the bucket filled with their screaming,  
when still the living wheeled  
above the roof, silent gliders, we raised  
guns, took aim. then  
small bodies fell from the air.
JOHN POWER | BRUTAL BEAUTY, 2017
30” x 60” | OIL ON CANVAS
ELIZA LANE STOOD on the muddy bank down the hill from Uncle Sherwin’s double-wide, throwing pinecones in the swollen creek that heaved, gushed, gurgled, rushed under, over, and around the ice still clinging to its edges. Grandpap claimed it the hardest winter they’d had on the Palouse in decades. Snow fell on snow fell on snow until the reaching, rolling hills turned as white and distant as the sky. But when the first warmth came—and with it rain—the snow melted so fast that ditches flooded and roads washed out. Water streamed from thawing icicles, and patches of snow slid off rooftops with tremendous thuds. The ground
emerged slowly, in patches of broken sunflower stalks and bloated garbanzo beans. Everything smelled faintly rotten, like last winter when they never cleaned the bathroom, and mildew crept from the shower and over the walls.

As Eliza hurled another pinecone upstream, she slipped and crashed backward, landing in the mud. The wetness soaked her pants and she jumped up.

“Lizey Lane!”

Grandpap’s voice. She whirled around.

Wind gusted over the hills, sudden and sharp. Downstream the ragged cottonwoods stirred. A hawk swooped overhead and somewhere a magpie chortled. Grandpap? And the frigid wind blew again, whipping hair into her face and flailing the spiky teasel weeds so that they caught in her jeans, her coat. She ripped them away, though they bit into her hands.

“Ellie! Lizey!” Grandpap’s voice rose again, over the sound of rushing water. And him dead two days.

Mud and ice slicked the gravel road, but she raced down it full force, sometimes slipping, sliding, but never quite falling, the wind behind her, holding her up, pushing her on. Giant gray clouds careened across the sky. The cold numbed her face and water streamed from her eyes, but she ran and ran until she reached the place where gravel turned to pavement and the creek cut under the road. Sagging against the rusted guardrail, she waited, listened.

She’d seen them carry Grandpap out in a box. Uncle Sherwin, his mean eyes bloodshot and his face all puffy, said eight was too young to be coming to a funeral. And he left her, all alone, in the trailer out on the bleak barren hill, where wind rattled the windows and whistled down the oven vent and made sounds like the crying of a baby and the screeching of owls on the blackest of nights. She didn’t know how he’d died, and Uncle Sherwin wouldn’t tell her, and wouldn’t allow her in Grandpap’s bedroom, where she imagined he lay on the bed, feet crossed at the ankles, arms folded over his chest, dead open eyes staring at the cracked ceiling.

Maybe he died in the bathroom. He smoked in there. She knew because the door didn’t hang quite straight and she peeked in the crack.
He read the paper in there, too, the pages propped on his knees so that all she could see were his plaid pajama bottoms dropped around his ankles and his hairy, hairy shins and, above the paper, his red face gruffed with white beard, a cigarette cocked in his lips. The first time she peeked in the crack, she’d smelled smoke and heard him coughing and thought maybe the bathroom had finally burst into flames like Uncle Sherwin was always saying it would. But Grandpap had only lit a match and held it to the tip of his Pall Mall. The newspaper fluttered into the flame and caught. He blew it out quick as a birthday candle. Later she found the paper and put the singed corner into her mouth. It tasted like the fields smelled in the fall when the farmers burned the wheat stubble.

Ellie leaned over the railing and retched. The vomit splashed in the water and disappeared under the bridge. When she stopped heaving, she wiped her mouth on her coat sleeve and crawled into the snow-flattened cattails alongside the road. She held her stomach. She felt empty. Not hungry, but like someone had wrenched out her insides and left only her shell. The wind died away, and the great gray clouds hung still. She sucked water off a cattail blade and hummed just to feel the vibration in her chest.

After a long time, she walked home.

As she passed the cottonwoods and the towering ponderosa at the corner of the driveway, she heard Grandpap’s voice again. A whisper now. Lizey Lane, Lizey, Lizey, Lizey Lane. This time she didn’t run but yanked her hat over her ears and sang the ABCs as loud as she could until she was inside the trailer, the door slammed shut behind her.

Uncle Sherwin sat on the couch, his face blue from the light of the TV. Without turning, he said, “Where you been?”

“Outside.”

“You can’t just go wandering off now we ain’t got Grandpap around to keep his eye on you.” He glanced at her and pushed a pillow to the floor. “There’s room on the couch.”

“My clothes are wet,” she said and slipped down the hall.

She changed into pajamas and curled on her cot, right next to Grandpap’s bed. She wished he were here now. She wouldn’t mind about the snoring, not even about the way he used to scare her in the middle of the night, when he sat bolt upright and mumbled in his dreams.

She crawled into his bed, pulled up his blankets, laid her head on
his pillow, and drifted into deep, deep sleep, not waking until pale mid-morning sunlight filtered through the grimy window. Kneeling on the mattress, she pressed her nose against the cold glass. Gray skies. Fields so flooded ducks and geese floated in them.

She plodded to the kitchen, found a note from Uncle Sherwin: “At work. Stay inside.”

She went outside.

The trailer sat at the top of a stubby hill. She ran down to the valley and up the next rise, where a ponderosa pine grew straight out of a broad rock face. The wind buffeted her, biting through her down coat; she leaned into the gust, hunching her shoulders and crossing her arms. All around, in every direction, the snow-dusted hills dipped and rose and dipped again, like the rippling, billowing sails of an old ship at sea.

“Ellie Lane!”

Grandpap’s voice reverberated through a gust of wind that almost knocked her off her feet. She stumbled to the pine and huddled against its trunk. A pair of Canada geese flew overhead, sounding their long, low honks, and she remembered summertime, hiking up here with Grandpap, his face bright red with the steepness of the climb, his knees stained from falling. The fields surrounding the ponderosa were tall with wheat then, golden stalks rustling and swaying. Grandpap rested beside the tree, and she prowled through the wheat like a cat, burst from a crouch into a spangle of motion, and pounced upon a goose.

It lay on its stomach, wings tucked nearly under its body, eyes glassy black and open. Ellie squatted beside it. She wanted to touch its wing feathers, its long elegant neck, to see if the bird moved, if it breathed, even a flutter. With her fingertips, she traced the contours of its round head and stroked the overlapping feathers on its back, warm in the bright glow of August, and she lay down next to the bird. All through her body she felt the wheat swaying in the golden sun. And she loved the bird. Wanted to cradle it in her arms and bring it back to life, to give it warm light in the golden heat of that August sun.

Grandpap stomped through the field, calling her name. His shadow fell over her, and she jerked her hand from the goose and sat up, thinking he would tell her not to be messing with some dead bird riddled with diseases.

But he knelt and touched the bird.
Together they stretched out its wings—from tip to tip, they were taller than Grandpap—and the sun glimmered on their gray softness. They picked up the bird, Grandpap grunting at its weight, and carried it to the ponderosa, where they lowered it onto a wide flat rock and stretched its wings again, just to marvel at them.

“Get a shovel,” Grandpap said. “Bird like this ought to be buried.”

So she sprinted all the way down the hill, rummaged through the shed, and loped up the rise again. Grandpap scowled when he saw she’d brought nothing but a garden spade, but he took it and began to dig, every now and then passing it to her so he could rest. Once the hole was deep enough, they tucked the goose’s wings against its sides and lowered it into the rich, black earth. Ellie begged to keep a feather, just one, but Grandpap said no, leave the bird its peace. He smoked a cigarette while she filled the grave, the wheat rippling around them like gently waving water.

Now snow banked the rock and she couldn’t remember exactly where they’d buried the goose. She shivered and wished for Grandpap, for his big hands and the orange glow of his cigarette. She listened for him to call again, but instead heard Uncle Sherwin’s truck crunching gravel up the road. Racing down the hill and into the trailer, she flung off her coat, bolted for the couch, and turned the TV on just as her uncle came in the door.

He hung his coat, tugged off his boots, and sat on the edge of the couch. “You slept for hours.”

She nodded.

He leaned back and closed his eyes, spoke as if to himself. “Not me. Kept dreaming about the old man. Guess I wasn’t ever much of a son. Not like your dad. And now it’s just me, the only one left standing. And you, stuck out here with me.” His voice snagged, and she thought he might cry. She wanted to bolt from the room. Instead, she wound her fingers in her blanket and, as he ran a hand through his hair and over his face, he asked, “How come you aren’t in school?”

“Grandpap was homeschooling me.” After a long silence, she added, “He told me that.”

“You’ll have to start real school now. Guess I’ll call and see about that. And the McLeans, they’ve got a teenage daughter. Mandy. She’s going to come around, look after you.”
“I don’t need a babysitter,” she said.
“You’re eight years old.”
“Nine.”
“Somebody’s got to watch you.”
“Mandy looks like a pig.”
Uncle Sherwin snorted. “She does,” he said. “Yes, she does. But don’t tell her that.” And he rose to his feet from the sagging cushions and went to the kitchen and made peanut butter and jelly sandwiches, and they listened to KRLF Christian radio while they ate.

MANDY COULDN’T COME the next day. Uncle Sherwin woke Ellie and made her promise to stay inside while he hauled a load of grain to town. “I’ll be home soon as I can,” he said.

She nodded, and ducked her head when he tried to pat her hair.

As soon as his truck rattled away, she stepped onto the porch. Swaths of blue sky stretched between fluffy white clouds. Sunlight flooded the hills, glinting and glimmering off all the standing water. She tromped to the creek, gathered a handful of pebbles and threw them one by one into the surging, swirling water. She felt lighter than she had in days. She’d make a boat, a raft, and ride the fast-flowing creek through the hills and away, away, to wherever Grandpap had gone.

“Eliza Lane,” he said. “Ignore me one more time and…Listen, I’m cold.”

She spun around, squinted up at the huge white clouds, half expecting to see him floating down with a halo and harp.

“Down here, damn you. Here!”

Nothing there but thick brown sludge and tufts of dirty grass. And Grandpap’s nose. Bright red and rosy, sticking out of the dank earth. His bristly beard poked through when he said, “Get me the hell out of here.” On her knees, she dug away the cold mud with her bare hands until her palms throbbed and her fingers went numb. He said, “Go get the shovel.” She did, and Grandpap said, “Okay, now furrow me up slow. I don’t want to lose an arm, even if I am dead.”

She worked slowly, dumping wriggling worms onto the growing pile of dirt behind her. Blisters formed on her palms, and sweat collected under her coat until finally, finally Grandpap sat up. He took long longing gasps of the sweet spring air.
“Help me,” he said, and she grabbed hold of his outstretched hands and heaved. He tottered to his feet, and dirt rained from his white hair and down his black suit.

“Hello there, Lizey Lane. How about a hug for your Grandpap?”

She hurtled into his arms. He was real, solid, and she breathed in the wonderful smell of mothballs and Pall Malls and aftershave that clung to him even now.

He patted her hair. “Sherwin should have buried me in my pajamas. This is a good suit.”

“Oh Grandpap!” she cried. He hugged her for a long time, then held her at arm’s length. His hair was the same stark white, his skin as thick and ruddy as ever. “Grandpap,” she said, pressing her cheek against his hand. “Grandpap. Aren’t you dead?”

“Course I am. Never thought I’d go, but a heart attack, that’s what it was.” He sighed and stared at the wide sky and reaching hills, nodded and smiled, and kissed her forehead with tickling whiskers.

“Uncle Sherwin said they buried you by the church.”

“That’s true, too, Lizey Lane.” He tweaked her nose. “Now let’s go for a walk.”

Mud gunking their boots, sunshine on the tops of their heads, they climbed the hill to the place where they’d buried the Canada goose. He didn’t stop to catch his breath, didn’t wheeze or cough, instead moved swiftly, as she’d always believed he could. At the top, Grandpap sat on the big rock and she nestled against him. When he lit a cigarette and held it between his lips, she felt as if the bright orange glow was spreading through her. So many questions, but she didn’t speak. The sun arced through the wide blue sky and the smell of rapeseed and soil drifted on a slow breeze. Not a sound out here save the cry of a hawk and Grandpap’s steady breathing, and yet she didn’t hear Uncle Sherwin’s truck until it rounded the bend.

“I’m not supposed to be out here,” she said.

“You better get on.”

“Come with me.”

“I’ll stay up here a while,” he said, and she didn’t argue.

She ran back down the hill. As she rushed into the trailer, Uncle Sherwin burst out of the bedroom, calling her name. When he saw her, he
sagged against the doorjamb, then lugged himself forward, and strode to her.

“I told you to stay inside,” he said.
“I’m sorry,” she said.
“You can’t wander out there alone.”
“I wasn’t alone.”
His eyebrows shot up. “Mandy come out?”
“No.”
“You got some friend I don’t know about?”
She toed the rug, then rubbed her foot along the back of her leg. She didn’t quite want to tell him about this marvelous thing, Grandpap coming back, but she found she couldn’t keep it to herself. She burst out, “Uncle Sherwin, it’s Grandpap! I helped dig him up and he’s okay, Uncle Sherwin, he’s all right!”

His face tinged red. He scratched his cheek and sighed and, sitting back on his heels, placed his hands on her shoulders. “I know you miss him. I do, too. But he’s gone,” he said, his Adam’s apple sliding down his throat and popping back up. “I should have taken you to the funeral.”

Ellie laughed. “He’s just up by the old tree.”

Uncle Sherwin’s arms fell to his sides. He straightened. “That’s enough. Go to your room.”

Her shoulders felt heavy where his hands had been. He didn’t believe her. Of course he didn’t. He moved out of the way, and she stomped past him.

After a while someone tapped on her door. She looked up, thinking it must be Grandpap, but instead, Uncle Sherwin peeked in. “You all right? Lunch is ready.”

“Go away.”

“I’m doing the best I can, Ellie. But I can’t do it all. You’ve got to give a little.”

When she didn’t answer, he shook his head and closed the door. Later his truck backed out of the drive, wheels spinning on wet gravel.

Ellie slipped outside and found Grandpap on the front steps. She sat beside him. “You got to mind your uncle,” he said. She took the Pall Mall pack from his shirt pocket and stuck a cigarette in his teeth. He lit it and breathed deeply. Dried mud peppered his beard. She picked it off. Thin
clouds gathered and a shadow fell across the stoop. Even if Uncle Sherwin didn’t believe her, she knew the truth. Grandpap was back.

**MANDY ARRIVED** at eight o’clock the next morning, before Uncle Sherwin had even finished his coffee. She poured Ellie a bowl of Cheerios—like Ellie couldn’t do that herself—and prattled on about all the fun they’d have, the games they’d play, the pictures they’d color. After Sherwin left, Ellie ran to the front window and searched for Grandpap. She didn’t see him. “Let’s go outside,” she said.

“Oh, don’t think so. It’s raining. Let’s play Candyland!”

“I don’t have Candyland.”

“Then let’s read a book.”

“Uncle Sherwin says if I don’t get fresh air and exercise, I’m really wild and cranky.”

Mandy sighed and heaved herself from the table. “Glad I brought a rain jacket.”

Fog hung low over the hills and misted their faces. As they neared the creek, Grandpap climbed out and up the bank, water pouring from his beard, his suit. He shook himself like a dog. Mandy didn’t seem to notice him at all, but Ellie ran over and grabbed his hand. Leading him to the road, she walked as quickly as she could, sometimes skipping a step and jogging a little to keep up, and feeling no surprise at Grandpap’s new strength, at him swimming in the snowmelt, like he was more himself than he’d ever been before. She hurried down the road toward the bridge. Mandy lagged behind, breathing hard, nevertheless trying to keep up conversation. “I’m very sorry to hear about your grandpa.” She paused. Drew wind. “All this rain sure is wild. I had a cousin who was so scared of rain—not even thunder and lightning, just the rain itself—that she’d hide under the bed, and and and . . .”

Ellie ignored her. “What’s heaven like?” she asked Grandpap. He didn’t answer, and she squeezed his hand and asked again.

“Hm? Oh. Just about like this.”

“You miss it?”

“I’ll be back soon.”

She ripped her hand away. “What?”

Without answering, he bounded down the road, knees brushing
palms as he jumped and skipped, kicking up mud that sprang and
danced around him. She cocked her head, watching, then dashed after
him. Laughing, he grabbed her by the wrists and swung her in circles, so
fast her hat flounced off and her pigtails flapped at her ears. When he set
her down, still giggling, they raced to the bridge. Grandpap won.

Eventually, Mandy trotted up, flattened her hands on her thighs, and
huffed and puffed. “Your hat,” she wheezed, tossing the red beanie. Ellie
caught it and bunched it in her fist. She sat down, stuck her legs between
the guardrails, and tossed gravel into the stream. Grandpap stood over
her.

“You need to thank her,” he said, nodding at Mandy, who was now
bent over, gulping air loudly.

“Coulda picked up my own hat,” Ellie said. “Walking back.”
“You tell her thanks.”
“I don’t need a babysitter.”
“You’re just a kid.”
“I got you.”

Grandpap squatted in front of her. He held a long gray feather, which
he stroked with his gnarled fingers, then brushed it over her cheek.

“Eliza Lane, you got me here for three more days. That’s it. All I’m
allowed. And then you’re going to bury me. Now tell that young lady
thank you.”

She snatched the feather and started tearing barbs out of the quill.

“Quit that,” Grandpap said. “Eliza Lane, you listen to me.” When he
tried to take the feather from her, she sprang away, and shoved the barbs
into her mouth. Then she scrambled onto the guardrail and jumped.

Frigid water surged over her, around her, sent her somersaulting un-
til she squeezed her arms against her sides and let the current carry her,
weeds slapping her face, rocks jabbing her stomach and scraping her
knees. She needed to breathe, her lungs burning, but the water moved
too swiftly, and she with it. Like she was flying.

When Grandpap snatched her from the water, she tried to spit the
feather barbs in his face. They dribbled down her chin. “I hate you, I hate
you! You can’t leave, don’t leave, don’t, don’t leave me!” she screamed,
then sank crying onto the bank. Mandy rushed to her. “Oh, Ellie, Ellie,
Ellie, are you all right? Are you okay? Ohmygodohmygodohmygod.”
She began pounding her on the back. When Ellie choked and screamed for her to stop, Mandy told her not to move, and ran toward the trailer, crying for Uncle Sherwin.

Grandpap stood apart, watching Ellie closely but not moving or speaking. She did not raise her head until Uncle Sherwin lifted her into his arms. Behind his stubble, his face was gray as the overcast sky. He clutched her tightly, and she did not squirm away, as he carried her through the yard, up the steps, and into her room, where he wrapped her in one of his flannel shirts, and tucked her into Grandpap’s bed. He sat on the edge of the mattress and stroked her wet tangled hair, his hand big and warm, and when he dropped his arm, she pressed her face into his broad chest. He didn’t smell like Grandpap, but rather of diesel fuel, and leather, and dirt. Awkwardly, he patted her back. After a while he laid her down again and left. She burrowed underneath the blankets and shivered in the darkness. Through the door came the hysterical whispers of Mandy and the low murmurs of Uncle Sherwin.

**WHEN ELLIE WOKE** the next morning, the taste of goose feathers was as strong in her mouth as if she still held them on her tongue. She brushed her teeth and gargled, but the taste remained. She was brushing for the third time when Uncle Sherwin tapped on the bathroom door and grounded her for the next three days. Ellie spit toothpaste in the sink.

Mandy arrived again at exactly eight a.m. She poured Cheerios for them both, dumped sugar in her own, and then they played Candyland on the board Mandy’d had since she was a kid, while the country station buzzed in the kitchen, Mandy singing along, drumming her dimpled fingers on the edge of the table.

Grandpap refused to come inside. Rain pattered the roof and drizzled down the windows, and he said maybe he was becoming a fish, or maybe a flower, and he needed all that rain on his skin to water him up. Ellie giggled and kissed his cheek and then wrapped herself around his legs, trying to bring him through the front door. Gently, he pried off her hands and slipped away. She watched him rove the fields, trekking over the muddy hills until he seemed no more than a tiny ponderosa in the distance.

While Mandy washed dishes, Ellie sneaked outside. Grandpap stood
on the hilltop, bending and straightening as if digging something up. As she started up the hill, he held out his hand in salute. He ran down to the stubbled valley and up the next hill and, scaling the ridge, he picked her up and threw her high, as if she were still a small child.

“ ‘I love you,’ ” he said. “ ‘Now get back in the house.’ ”

“I want to stay out here with you.”

“ ‘You need to listen to what your uncle tells you.’ ”

“ ‘Never had to before.’ ”

He looked her straight in the face. “ ‘This ain’t before, Lizey Lane. I’m dead. So you listen to me, and you mind your uncle.’ ”

All she wanted was to stay out on the Palouse with Grandpap, to walk right alongside him, slogging through the mud and listening to the Canada geese honking overhead. But when she started to argue again, the sickly sweet taste of feathers rose like bile, and she slunk inside.

Over the next couple days, she slipped out to Grandpap several times. Trapped inside, she sat by the window and watched him, mud-caked and rain-splattered and fading, fading, fading.

**ON SATURDAY MORNING,** Uncle Sherwin made pancakes. “ ‘You start school on Monday,’ ” he said.

She wasn’t hungry and drew circles in the syrup with her fork. “ ‘You’ll like it. You’ll make friends.’ ”

“ ‘I don’t need friends. I got Grandpap.’ ”

“ ‘Don’t start that again.’ ”

“ ‘It’s true!’ ” she said, and leapt up, her chair toppling backward as she rushed from the table, Uncle Sherwin calling after her. In her room she stood still, shoulders slumped, then she crawled under the bed. She spit in the dust.

After a while, the door opened and Uncle Sherwin, on hands and knees, peered at her. “ ‘The sun came out,’ ” he said. “ ‘And you’re not grounded anymore.’ ” He got to his feet, hair curling on his big toes. She slid out. “ ‘I know I’m not much, not like him . . . but you got me, too,’ ” he said, and she let him hug her. His heart beat slowly.

Outside it **was** sunny, and warm enough that she dropped her hat on the front steps. She gathered pinecones as she skipped to the creek. Grandpap would be down there. Standing in the cattails, she tossed the
cones upstream, where a frog croaked and a snake slithered through the weeds. He wasn’t there yet, but he’d be along soon. She flipped a stone and found a newt, its blistered skin flaming orange. She picked it up gingerly. Once she and Grandpap watched a bullfrog swallow a newt whole. The frog collapsed, dead, and the newt sauntered on out. This one crawled all over her hands, and along her sleeves. Grandpap said if you boiled a newt in a coffee pot and drank it, you’d straightaway drop dead. She set the newt down and scrubbed her hands in the freezing water.

Where was Grandpap?

She felt suddenly afraid and ran up the hill behind the trailer, down to the valley, up the next rise where the ponderosa stretched from the green-mossed rocks. Sun splintered the clouds. A flock of birds swooped overhead. Wildness filled her like the fresh air in her lungs and she wanted to scream it into the sky, to scream this burst of sorrow and anger—or was it joy? And the sky, so blue, reaching on and on, forever on, farther even than these hills that rolled and waved like a patchwork caught in the wind.

On the hilltop she found a deep hole, dirt piled high on one side. Grandpap stood within, leaning back and gazing skyward as he sang in a voice full and rich and beautiful:

_Swing low, sweet chariot_
_Coming for to carry me home_
_I looked over Jordan, and what did I see_
_Coming for to carry me home?_
_A band of angels coming after me,_
_Coming for to carry me home._

She crouched on the edge. “Isn’t this where we buried the goose?”

He nodded.

“Where’s he now?”

“Flown away. And it’s time for me to follow. Come here, baby,” he said, reaching for her. Mud lined his fingernails and blackened the deep wrinkles on his palms. She took a long breath, the smell of upturned earth filling her nose. She slid over the edge and into his arms.

“Look at me, Lizzy Lane. **Look**.”

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**Swing low, sweet chariot**

* Coming for to carry me home
* I looked over Jordan, and what did I see
  * Coming for to carry me home?
* A band of angels coming after me,
  * Coming for to carry me home.*
She looked, his beard white as moonlight, eyes clear blue, clear and blue and piercing, and she saw in them the passing of the snow, and the quieting of the creek, and she saw seas and mountains, plants and animals and colors she had only dreamed of before, dreamed and forgotten, and now remembered deep in her bones. Circling her arms round his neck, she pressed her forehead to his.

“I’ll tuck you in.”

“Yes,” he said, setting her down and reclining, arms at his sides, eyes half open. She scattered handfuls of dirt over his pants and shirt, spreading the mud like a sheet over his body. Finally, she knelt and kissed each cheek, his forehead and nose. The grave walls seemed to tower above her. Through the opening, the sky shimmered in the noonday sun. She set her hand on his shoulder. “Grandpap. I can’t get out.”

He rose in a tumble of dirt and laughter and boosted her into the sun.

When she looked back down, he was covered in shadow and snoring raucously. And then the world fell silent.

He slept with his ankles crossed, arms folded. His chest did not rise and fall. “Goodbye,” she whispered, and shoveled the earth back into place. Her old blisters broke, and blood ran from her hands, and when she licked them, the saltiness stung her lips, and the hills spun around her, as if Grandpap still had her by the wrists, flying her through the air. She sat and hung her head between her knees and noticed something white in the dirt. She took it into her palm. It was thin and pointed, soft and white, like quartz tossed in the creek. A bone.

She placed it in her mouth, and sucked on it, and water flowed over her tongue, cool and fresh and sweet. Running her fingers through the earth, the wheat stubble, the pebbles, and worms, she imagined that Grandpap’s beard became feathers that stretched and multiplied until they covered his entire body, and he flapped away into the heat of the sun.

From over the hills and across the fields came the sound of Uncle Sherwin’s truck speeding up the road, gravel pinging off the fenders. Eliza Lane took the bone from her mouth and tucked it into her pocket. She stood a moment longer, and then ran down the hill. ◆
After first frost burns the leaves brown,
his chapped hands gently
tear the outer tendrils of roots knotted
deep in the earth, not damaging
the heart, but freeing it to release it
from the ground.

He works, body bent over a tree
meant for sunlight, not the lash
of December wind. His granddaughter
sits cross-legged beside him,
denim dress hemmed with mud,
fingers tinged pink like the fruits
they picked in the summer. She gathers
broken roots and dry marigolds
near the tree’s trench, size of a grave.

When the storm door of their house snaps
open, she hides in the furrow.
Her father appears,
then drives off in his Ford,
drink changing his mood like rain into hail.
The old man doesn’t look up,
wraps the exposed roots in rags.
This kind will give, he says,
as he bends the narrow trunk downward,
working until dusk, trimming dead leaves
to fit the hollow, guiding it to rest
until spring, when he’ll raise it again
in the sunlight.
He covers it with loose soil and grass clippings.  
She sprinkles peat moss and petals  
from last summer’s garden,  
then helps lift a heavy blanket over it,  
before the sky turns black,  
and her father’s headlights approach.  
She races to bed trembling,  
feet smudged with dirt,  
to tuck herself in and wait.
Any other day no matter how tired I am
mami reminds me that my legs work
fine, but today we are taking the bus.

If we’re late, we have to come back
another day and that’s a waste
of a token that we could have exchanged
at the bodega for cash.

Mami smiles at every white person
who looks important, like she is trying
to convince them she is no trouble.

On the welfare line, my feet blister
& weep onto the floor.
My sister runs into herself & crawls around
the zig-zag of slouched bodies
rich with sweat and want.

Mami has already used her voice
too many times today to waste it
on anything other than prayer,
though an angry whisper is sometimes enough
of a clamor to make a child freeze

like a statue deserving of worship.
Her people believed in sweeping the roof to get rid of warts, in whistling at night to prevent ghosts. That it was bad luck to find a hat, to drink from a cracked cup. Bad luck to hear an owl laugh, to see a white crow, or to find a shoe in the road. Bad luck to hang pants over a shirt or to dream of picking red flowers. Bad luck to have your name spoken aloud by others. A relative once travelled through three states with his foot on his brother’s coffin. One bought a Dalmatian to match his fire-truck. Always an expert at catching bats. Always a pickler. They crossed the ocean three times inside of a thimble they built in their minds. Many saw ghosts but couldn’t remember. Or spent three weeks strapped to a bed thinking of pork-chops. Or asked again and again if she had accepted the Lord as her savior, each time forgetting the answer. Fell asleep beside the collection of carved wooden corks, fell asleep on the coal-pile, ashamed.

The dogs of the family were never well trained. So when the house grew cold in February, she wore a velvet curtain composed of her hunger, of fingers lost chopping wood. She cried when they fired the blacksmith, saying he was evil but she still loved him. She got work as a crooked secretary and feared more and more the arrival of the Devil in the guise of the blacksmith, a beautiful man, a time-traveler, an explorer. She was always on guard for his smile, which, it was said, could seduce bread from rising, seduce curtains from their rungs. She confessed that she wanted her face cut in half in order to portray her dual nature. In order to not be a liar. She left, as they knew she would, for Alaska. Too cold for the Devil, she said. Her skin grew thicker there and covered with fine hair. She paid a lot of money for her passage, for a dog sled and supplies. She happened to do well for herself in the land of no horizon, in that place where light remains undying. She lived to out-run their hand-prints on her shadow.
Sometimes I write your name on the back of my hand.  
   And sometimes I write it backwards

so when I place my palm on my cheek, you exist  
   beyond my dreams and childhood  
   climbing the mulberry tree, branches  
   beyond our reach,  
we shook them and watched the fall.  
And today in the quiet dark,

you are smiling and dotted violet  
from our berry shower.  
White toothy smile  
taking over your face.

And I laugh, and you hug me.

I trace the vein  
on the top of my thigh, a map.  
My mulberry tree and its summer bounty  
   pulpy and sweet on the tongue stain everything,  
childhood tattoos.

But now, of course, the ink has spilled  
   slick into my mind in some irreversible way, stained

my childhood and I don’t want to remember  
your words before you dropped the phone  
   suddenly or if I said then
I can’t live this life. But if I did, I meant to say without you.

You should be.

Any moment breaks me open. Into the pulp, the flesh. Still now warm and fermenting beneath my thin skin that feels like your soft hand

I have to pick up, and put in mine this last time.

And this ink on my skin mixes with you And so I write our names, hard and dark on my cheek and press against your bare chest, still soft. While you become my flesh, my bruise, my ashes.

Beneath my skin. You. The color of mulberries.
and her drowned baby daughter. When she’s on *The Today Show* with her Olympian husband, Bode,

their daughter
floats between them
out of reach.

I tell my husband, *She’ll be okay*,
her belly already swollen
with new hope.

When our six-year-old son died,
I tried for three years to get pregnant,
emerging with a lone embryo
too weak to implant.

I wonder if her therapist is saying,
*It’s too soon to have another baby.*

Morgan says Bode was away
when their daughter drowned,
trembling as she speaks—

I remember how alone I felt,
the day the house got too quiet—

my calls echoing through
empty rooms—the pool
still empty too—
my son’s baby hands full of grass,
pulled after he wriggled out

the pet door, and crawled onto the lawn.
We were careful parents, too.

Bode clutches Morgan’s fingers

like a child, his expression
flat-lined as my husband’s,

each time he hears our son’s name,
as if seeing his ghost

through silent water
or a fog’s rising veil.
JOHN POWER | THE GRACES, 2016
48” x 36” | OIL ON CANVAS
BY THE CORNER of Seventy-Third and Roosevelt, past the smell of fried onions and garlic, past the storefronts displaying twenty-four carat gold, past the women in salwars, the men leaning against parked taxis, across from the overhead train tracks, outside Magan’s News Shop, there was a blue plastic stand, covered in signs and stickers, with stacks of neatly aligned, crisp copies of India Abroad. Jassie picked one up, as she did every week, and flipped to the back page. Once again, only a handful of entries under “Help Wanted.” And they said it was easy to find work in New York.

Jassie didn’t lose her optimism, however. There was always the next issue, or the issue after. There were friends, friends of friends. Something would turn up. She firmly believed things would get better, just as she
believed that “buy two, get one free” was a good deal at Macy’s or that eating cranberries would help her lose weight.

She had read once in a women’s magazine that cranberries, containing antioxidants, were an important part of one’s diet. Surely that meant that if she ate enough of them, her figure would benefit. She had tried everything else—the treadmill, protein shakes, walking up and down the floors of Macy’s, bypassing the elevators. But it was always the same plump figure, the familiar fleshy cheeks, the same loose skin hanging off her waist like folds of a limp cotton sari.

All Jassie wanted was to go down a size, maybe two, to help her forget she was the mother of two teenage sons. Just enough that men would notice as she climbed those stairs to the overhead station and boarded the train from Jackson Heights. Just enough that Johnny and Baby would complain, “Ma, it’s embarrassing to walk with you,” as she looked the other way in feigned indifference.

Finally, one perfect winter morning, she got the call. The job was as an assistant at a small matrimonial service that offered advertisement as well as wedding planning, targeted mainly towards NRIs. She had gone in for the interview wearing her silver boots for good luck.

Miss Anjali, young enough to be her daughter, was hardly the kind of employer Jassie had envisioned. She wore a pleated skirt hemmed with a thin layer of lace, the material exposing her knees and displaying long honey-colored legs. It would create scandals in Jassie’s circle. But on Miss Anjali’s thin frame, and the elegance with which she carried herself, such clothing looked stylish, not tawdry. She didn’t wear any makeup, perhaps a touch of blush. Then again, maybe it was just the effects of the strong winter winds. She opened the door for Jassie with a tired smile, weary of yet another applicant who had not thoroughly read the job description—the distinct specification that the candidate must speak Bengali. Jassie did in fact catch that in small print and with a distant aunt in Calcutta, whom she visited once a year as a child, she felt her Bengali skills were quite adequate.

The interview was short, but to Jassie, every minute stretched longer, like the elastic around her waist. Miss Anjali leaned back in her leather chair. A copy of the resumé lay on the desk.

“What did you do before?” she asked.
Jassie quoted everything in the resumé from memory, hoping the other woman wouldn’t want too many details. Miss Anjali simply nodded and asked more questions. *Why did you quit? Can you use a computer?* She spoke in an awkward mixture of Hindi and English but with such an air of authority and confidence that it sounded like the ring of an exotic, foreign language.

Jassie answered each of them, vehemently nodding her head at the last one. Johnny had shown her how to surf the internet, and on days she was focused, she felt her typing skills were as good as anyone’s.

“And Bengali? Do you understand and speak?”

“Yes. Yes. I can understand fluently. I don’t speak very well, but I can pick it up in no time.”

Miss Anjali, evidently exhausted by the search, hired her on the spot. At first, it felt strange to take orders from someone much younger. What helped, she supposed, was that Miss Anjali never barked her commands. She asked very sweetly, made Jassie feel that she was doing her a favor. And despite all that leg showing, she had a sense of propriety—always wrapping her shoulders in a light shawl or a delicate scarf before stepping out. Her appearance, however, like her Hindi grammar, was careless. Whereas Jassie came into work each morning, clothes carefully pressed, an ornamented clip stuck in her bun, never without red polish or earrings, Miss Anjali’s hair fell all over her face, her clothes were wrinkled, and one morning, Jassie caught her brushing her teeth at the office. It was a wonder how the business kept afloat when she couldn’t keep herself together.

Miss Anjali was from Calcutta. She had earned her A-levels from the International School and her Bachelor’s from a small university in Massachusetts. She was quintessential, that young breed of NRI that Jassie hoped her sons would grow up to be—youthful energy mixed with ambition, adamant that this start-up would be a success. Despite her disheveled appearance, Miss Anjali was always at work at nine a.m., sometimes before. She sat upright at her desk with her morning cup of coffee, already on conference calls with the Indian team, discussing marketing strategies and budgets and ad sales revenues when Jassie strolled in at ten a.m. In the summers, she attended the big Bengali convention at Madison Square Garden, stood at the promotional booth with stacks of
pamphlets and mingled easily with the women—elderly aunts, mothers and grandmothers dressed in their best jewels, their necks, wrists and ears heavily loaded with gold ammunition. In October, she went to various Pujas in Edison and Queens, nodding patiently at those same faces. She consoled anxious parents desperate to marry off their lawyer sons, the over-educated daughters well past their prime, suitors with snazzy resumes proudly claiming aversions to alcohol and cigarettes.

The office was no larger than a few hundred square feet, divided into two rooms. Against a wall stood a large skewed metal-framed desk, which occupied most of the front space. On the other side, rows of badly installed shelving units, lined floor to ceiling with books, took up the entire length of the room. Bengalis and their books. It’s something Jassie never understood.

The titles of the books were in English and odd—some that Jassie couldn’t pronounce. She made a mental note to ask Johnny and Baby and then thought better of it. They would just roll their eyes and groan, “Ma! You don’t know anything!” The whitewashed walls were crumbling, the only thing on them a single corkboard with scraps of paper all over: notes, reminders, business cards, receipts, stuck one over the other.

“There’s not a whole lot of work to be done here,” said Miss Anjali. “You’ll really just be answering phone calls, filing, ordering supplies, those sorts of things, you know?” There was something uncommon about her, the elegant frame and genteel voice mixed with the tenacity of a young entrepreneur. Jassie said she didn’t mind. She was fed up of the search and ready to compromise. Anything to get away from the idiots at home—the constant grumblings, the relentless demands, like needy, pampered dogs. At last, Jassie had found what she was looking for: a job in the city where, for a few hours of the day, she appeased her own needs and that of a civilized, sympathetic employer—someone who appreciated her. If anyone asked her where she worked, she proudly answered, “I have an office job in Manhattan.”

Jassie didn’t really need to work, but she hated having to ask Harry for money. Harry didn’t usually ask questions, though. He preferred to stay out of her business and only interfered when he thought she was being exceptionally unreasonable. He believed that the best way to keep
harmony in the house was to give Jassie whatever she needed. He worked hard to bring in the money, driving around customers in his limousine—airport runs, city pick-ups, half his day was spent sitting in traffic. All he wanted in return was food on the table, the remote by the side of the sofa, and his two sons to grow into big, strong, hardworking Sardarjis like him and his father before.

Jassie hadn’t known him well when they married and relocated from Delhi to Chandigarh. They had only met a handful of times, under the watchful eyes of their parents. She still remembered him sitting on the living room sofa, just below the photograph of Guruji—a fresh garland of flowers draped over the frame, the fragrance softening the tension in the air. He was flanked by his parents who exchanged polite words with hers. She was in the kitchen, and as she arranged pink sweets onto a serving platter, she eavesdropped and tried to imagine his face. She came in slowly, demurely, dressed in finery and, when she couldn’t look down any longer, lifted her face up to look him in the eye. He smiled broadly, displaying pristine white teeth—the nicotine stains came much later.

He was a cut-surd—didn’t wear a turban, his clean-shaven face looked rough and rugged, his dark eyes sparkled in appreciation of what he saw, and his mop of black hair, slicked back with cream, glistened underneath the tube light. She knew he was the one. She had dreamt of it as a little girl, that her life would be so much bigger than this—these grilled windows looking into the back alleys of Faridabad, the roar of neighborhood boys playing cricket, the distant cries of a fruit vendor dragging through the dust. In the twinkle of his eyes, she saw the flicker of endless possibilities.

Miss Anjali was always immersed in her work. If she wasn’t on the phone reprimanding someone in India about printing mistakes, she sat clicking away at her computer for hours without lifting her head. She skipped meals and rarely came out, even to go to the restroom.

One day, Jassie warmed up some of her own lunch that she had brought from home in the microwave of the small kitchenette and placed the rice and vegetables in the center of Miss Anjali’s desk with great care, as if she were serving her own two boys. Miss Anjali lifted her head with mild annoyance, her brows coming together like the wings of
a crow, but her expression changed the instant she saw the offering. She rubbed her hands together. “I’m really going to regret this tomorrow,” she said. Those cheeks, though, filled with rice and kadi—everyday food at which Harry and the boys usually turned up their nose—showed no signs of remorse. She still spoke in mispronounced, ungrammatical Hindi. Perfunctorily, Jassie tried to correct her. “It’s khati hu, not khata hu,” she said, although she had become used to this imperfect, new language they shared together.

Miss Anjali was wearing a long cream knitted top over sheer gray leggings. “Where did you get that from?” Jassie asked later, stroking the material of her sleeve—soft and thin like fine cashmere.

“Oh, some shop in Paris.”

“Paris,” Jassie murmured. The word sat clumsily on her lips, but she was happy she knew of this place. Miss Anjali often spoke of strange cities—Seville, Zagreb, Lyon—places Jassie had never heard of. She had been oblivious to the world outside the peripheries of Punjab and New York. Now she was imagining the Eiffel Tower and marvelling at what it must be like to stand at the very top.

That Thursday after work, Jassie weaved through every item at Macy’s until she found a top similar to the one she’d seen on Miss Anjali. But instead of the plain, dull, monochromatic cream that her boss wore, Jassie’s had little gold studs, little beadwork that added a hint of glamor. She especially loved sparkles—gold sequins, silver embroidery, anything to maximize the allure.

It was her little secret from Harry. Every Thursday, when Hena finished work at the law office, they met at Herald Square to rummage the aisles of the women’s department at Macy’s. She was thrilled to find the discounted top at twenty dollars, further reduced to the high single digits. It was a simple barter: money for happiness, a permanent acquisition that no one could snatch away.

She wore her new purchase proudly the next day, showing it off to her boss. Miss Anjali said, “Great,” without looking up from the computer.

“If you want, I can get one for you too. I saw an extra-small,” said Jassie.

Miss Anjali, who by then was completely immersed in her work again, simply gave a slight grunt.

It was because of Hena, her cousin, that Jassie was here in the U.S.
at all. She had come on her own more than ten years ago, leaving Harry and the boys—only five and seven years old at the time—back in Chandigarh. The consulate denied them their visas. Jassie was the only one granted permission to travel. She was looking forward to the trip, had made her shopping list, bought a new suitcase to replace the old hard-cased one that she had owned since childhood. Now she couldn’t go.

But Harry, dear Harry, insisted. “Don’t worry, we’re fine here. There are so many people to take care of us.” Johnny and Baby held their father’s hand, behind the iron rails of the departure terminal, pushing and shoving to get one last look at their mother as she went through to security-check. No matter how often she had doubts, it was during moments such as those that she knew she’d made the right decision in Harry.

His family owned a chain of convenience stores in Chandigarh. He was still Harbinder at the time. When his father had opened the business, there were just two in their village. Harry expanded it and created a chain of stores throughout the adjoining districts. Singh Supplies. When Harry joined his father, they proudly added “& Sons.” He hoped the tradition would continue. He worked hard all day and came home late. Jassie used to stay awake for him. The smell of smoke mixed with whisky turned her on. How easy things were back then.

Jassie stayed with Hena in Edison during that first visit. The day after she arrived, her cousin took her to the Empire State Building and up Fifth Avenue, past the designer shops and department stores, until they approached Trump Towers. Jassie never forgot what she saw. The midday sun reflected off of the gold, and the building shone with exuberance. One day, she told herself, she’d live in such a building, coming and going not as a visitor but with the authority of someone walking into one’s own home.

Jassie’s favorite, however, was Macy’s flagship store in Herald Square. It was a city in itself, and she often got lost wandering from the shoe section to women’s lingerie. Everything about Herald Square was big—big buildings, big crowds, big malls, people standing in masses at the intersection of Broadway and Sixth, waiting for the lights to turn. It was the epicentre, where all of New York congregated—all the train lines, the buses, the intersection of Sixth Avenue and Broadway—Midtown Manhattan pulsing with life.

She missed her family but dreaded the return back to the old dilapi-
dated house in Chandigarh, silence taking over her days once more as she counted time until the boys and Harry came home. While she enjoyed her time in New York, the return ticket ticked away in the suitcase.

“Don’t go then! Stay. Apply for asylum. Bring Harry and the boys here,” Hena said, as if it were the easiest thing in the world.

“Don’t talk rubbish.”

“Everyone else does it. That girl from the dhaba just got her employment authorization card, and she has been working illegally for years. The fool was still filing taxes even though she was not supposed to work. Anything goes, I tell you. IRS, USCIS, Homeland Security—that’s all rubbish.”

“What about Harry? What about Johnny and Baby?”

“If you get asylum, they’ll be here too. They cannot refuse immediate family.”

When Jassie still didn’t look convinced, Hena went on. “Who’d know better than me? You know my boss is an immigration lawyer. This is what he does—builds cases exactly like yours, day in and day out. As long as you have a convincing case, they won’t deny you.” Hena insisted that she would help her every step of the way. Jassie could stay at her place rent-free while she filed the forms at no charge.

There was a brief hustle that involved making the necessary phone calls, having Harry send over the paperwork, signing forms, delivering them to Hena’s office and going to the post office to get money orders. Then, she went about her days quite normally. Each week when they spoke, Harry asked her how the case was progressing, but she wouldn’t fuel his enthusiasm. Somehow none of this seemed plausible, just another one of Hena’s half-baked plans. That’s how this new chapter in their lives began, ever so casually. Then again, the biggest occurrences sometimes slip by with no pomp or grandeur.

She wasn’t nervous the day of her interview at the USCIS office in Garden City, Long Island. She had rehearsed the moment with her lawyer, Hena’s boss, several times. She looked straight at the officer when he asked her questions.

“These are terrible times in my country, officer,” said Jassie. “Bad men come and take away everything from my family. They loot our house, our shops, beat my husband. My family made me run away. We had friends in Canada. They help me take the bus into this country.”
The name on the badge said: P SANCHEZ. Sitting beneath the American flag, the severe looking officer, whose English was no better than hers, rummaged through Jassie’s paperwork. Photocopies of her entire life lay before him, wrapped neatly in a cream folder—passport; birth certificates for herself, Harry and the boys; notarized letters; affidavits; bogus medical proof of the attacks forged by a doctor they knew in Chandigarh.

The officer absentmindedly nodded every so often as he flipped through the evidence. Finally, looking up, he asked, “Can you tell me what you saw on the bus ride over from Canada into the United States?”

“Oh officer, I don’t know. I was so traumatized and upset about leaving my children, I cried myself to sleep,” said Jassie, in the most tragic voice she could evoke. The answer rolled off her tongue as if she had been ready for this moment her entire life.

That one instant changed everything. Ever since, Jassie had looked at her life as two halves, pre- and post-America, as if someone had drawn a line through time.

**JASSIE CAME INTO WORK** one day to find a list of the usual weekly chores from Miss Anjali: order supplies from Staples, go to the post office, deposit the checks at the bank, and the task that was always present, stubbornly so, an ever-growing mound of manila folders that would soon rival any luminous high-rise in Midtown. It was the chore Jassie dreaded the most, perhaps more than going back to India: filing.

Miss Anjali left stacks of folders on Jassie’s table, with multi-colored notes on them to indicate where each folder went. Most of the time Jassie couldn’t understand her writing and shoved the papers into any old file that had space.

Late spring leading up to summer was especially slow; there was a peaceful lull before the Puja rush of fall. There was something soothing about a warm June day—the sun growing stronger by the week, cars rolling down the dry roads, kicking up dust; the streets that had thinned out over the winter once again gathering momentum. The littered sidewalks comforted her and reminded her of Delhi—left behind far away, but little memories lingered.

Jassie had finished most of her work by mid-afternoon. She sat humming to music she played softly on her phone and flipped through a
copy of *Femina* that she’d purchased from Magan’s store. At some point, Miss Anjali abandoned her own French music, came over from her room, and pulled in the spare chair. She did that when she got off the phone with an exceptionally difficult client. She liked the songs, having never heard them before as she rarely watched Hindi movies. She asked about the singers—Lata, Mukesh, Kishore—names she vaguely knew. Jassie spoke enthusiastically about them, about her family in Delhi and Chandigarh, about her two boys. She said she wanted Johnny to go to college. “He’ll be the first in our family if he does,” she said.

“What would he study?”

“He wants to go into aviation, but I told him to go for nursing. There’s more money in that.”

“And the younger one?”

“He’ll do whatever I ask of him. He’s a good boy.” The mounds of her cheeks swelled with pride.

But her boss, looking at her watch, returned to her room and closed the door behind her. She had to prepare for an important meeting. Jassie knew to leave her alone and only knocked urgently when the landlady of the building came down because Miss Anjali had forgotten to give her the rent check.

In the afternoon, Miss Anjali left the office on an appointment, and Jassie went inside her room. On the desk were two photographs framed in silver. One was of a couple—the woman dressed in embroidered *Benarasi* with a glistening strand of silver hair framing her face, lending an air of distinction rather than showing her age. She stood behind her husband, who sat rigidly in a dark blue suit. The floor-to-ceiling window behind them was draped in heavy silk and further behind, an expanse of lush, green, immaculately manicured lawn.

“My parents,” Miss Anjali had said when she noticed Jassie admiring it on one of her first days at work. The other photograph was of herself, dressed in a cream gown, hair hanging in curls over her shoulder beneath a mesh veil.

She’s married to a *Gora*. A white man. Jassie had shaken her head at her boss’s misfortune.

“The men here divorce so easily. Our men are not like that,” she told Miss Anjali.
“Our men just do what they have to behind our backs.” Miss Anjali sniffed noisily. The kadi that day must have been too spicy for her fragile Bengali tastes.

She said that she had met Mr. Shane at a bar. She said they shared equal responsibility in everything—from cooking to laundry to finances. “Tell me, what Indian man would wash your clothes and make your bed and bring you coffee every morning?”

Miss Anjali was normally quiet; she did not volunteer much information. Nevertheless, over the months, Jassie learned how to tease out little bits and pieces through innocent questions. Where did they live? What did they eat for dinner last night? What was Mr. Shane’s favorite food? Did he like Indian cuisine? She didn’t mean to be nosy, like the women from the Gurdwara or her mother-in-law who just had to be in everyone’s business. It was innocent curiosity, her only window into Miss Anjali’s life.

When the questions became persistent, the younger woman would put her work aside and good-naturedly answer Jassie’s queries in a matter-of-fact manner: They lived on the Upper West Side, on Eighty-fourth Street. They had sushi last night. Mr. Shane made a killer rajma. It was better than hers. If it were up to him, they’d be eating dal and keema every day. For their fifth anniversary, he gave her the brown leather bag, the one that she carried to work every day.

“Must be expensive,” Jassie remarked, admiring the fine craftsmanship. “How much did he pay?”

“Oh, enough,” said Miss Anjali, cutting the conversation short and getting up. She did this whenever talk of money came up, and Jassie was left feeling dissatisfied. It was different amongst her friends. If she admired something on Hena, her cousin immediately said, “Oh, this was so cheap. I bought it at a sale!” It was essential to know the price of everything—the lavender-scented Pre de Provence soap Miss Anjali kept in the bathroom; the fine, soft shawl hanging over her chair (it must be pure Pashmina). Even at Macy’s, sales were only worth something when the original price was clearly indicated and slashed.

Over time, Jassie grew rather fond of Mr. Shane, although she still felt nervous when he strutted into the office and said, “Hey Jessie, how are you?” She could never get herself to look directly at him or correct his
pronunciation. Whenever he dropped by the office and Jassie saw him approach from the window, she’d leap up in excitement as if encountering a movie star. “Mr. Shane is here! Mr. Shane is here!”

**DURING THE PUJA RUSH OF SEPTEMBER**, just before the month-long celebrations which Bengalis observed with great enthusiasm, business was at its peak. Disgruntled customers called to complain about advertisements that were never printed or hadn’t run their course, or about duplicate charges on their credit cards. One Monday, just a week before the *Pujas*, the phone rang incessantly, and Miss Anjali threw her hands up in the air and took out a cigarette. She had long quit smoking but kept these hidden in one of her drawers for such emergencies. She sighed loudly as she headed to the front door.

Jassie was perusing an Indian celebrity magazine, staring at pictures of the rich and famous, instead of doing the filing. She tried to put the magazine away at the sound of her boss approaching, but it jammed on the edge of the drawer and refused to go all the way in.

Miss Anjali just peered over Jassie’s shoulder and said, “I know that girl.” She pointed at the half-exposed head on the crumpled page sticking out of the drawer. “We went to school together.”

“And Jass,” she said. “You know, I don’t mind what you do at work, as long as your chores are done.”

Jassie waited till Miss Anjali had safely gone inside her room before she took the magazine out again, staring in awe at the photograph of the woman her boss had just pointed at—dressed in jeans, high heels, her hand behind the torso of a tall young man with slicked back hair. She had read those magazines for many years now, and the first section, the “People” section, was always her favorite. It allowed her to peer into the private lives of socialites: the marriage of a rich businessman’s son, a fashion show in Bombay, the launch of a new airline, jewelled saris, lighted palm trees, celebrity dancers, overflowing wine glasses and lavish buffets with multi-cuisine counters. It was a whole other reality, but now it inched closer, a part of her extended world, through her revered Miss Anjali.

There wasn’t much that took Jassie to the Upper West, where her employer lived, but on days she walked to Herald Square to meet Hena, she stared up at the city high-rises, well past the sixth floors. Shadows
of other lives moving back and forth. That silhouette would be her one
day, watching the sunset with a glass of champagne in her hand, the sum-
ner breeze against her face. They would be rich—Harry would own a
large limousine company; he would come home just after dusk, and she
would hand him a Black Label on ice and sit by him as he drank. The
boys would be somewhere far off—in college. She would never feel guilty
about a splurge. What it must be like to be wealthy, to never have to
check your bank balance. There'd be no more worries. Life would be so
effortless and simple. But ten years after Harry and the boys finally came
to America, they still lived in Jackson Heights. At first the neighborhood
had given her comfort—a little piece of home in a foreign land—but
now, the red spit stains on the sidewalk filled her with repulsion.

LATE IN THE FALL, Miss Anjali hired a personal trainer who came every
Wednesday evening after Jassie left. Two months into the rigorous re-
gime, Jassie could see the outlines of her biceps. Once, after several re-
quests, the younger woman had even lifted up her shirt to show Jassie
her abs.

“You should work out too, Jassie. If you let your body stagnate, so
will your mind.”

Jassie was still dreaming of the two-pack on Miss Anjali’s torso when
she returned home one day with a dazed smile on her face. She walked
past her the local gym and saw the signboard outside. She read it and
her eyes shone as they always did whenever she found a sale too good to
pass up. It was a summer deal, giving away heavily discounted packages
of training sessions. She returned home with an uncharacteristic spring
in her steps. Past Guruji’s photograph, forgetting to give a quick bow of
respect.

Harry, Johnny, and Baby were sitting in a row in front of the tele-
vision, watching Food Network—two generations of Singhs with their
feet up on the table. The remote control lay on the floor. None of them
turned to greet her. No one asked how her day was or if she was tired.

“Oh Mummy, you’re back. Where were you? We’re hungry!” Baby
said, still staring at the screen. He had just finished ninth grade and had
begun to roll his eyes when she called him Baby.

She was used to yelling. Nothing ever got done in the house if she
didn’t raise her voice or give Johnny a flick on the head. Just the sight of
her older son idling away his time in front of the television or the com-
puter, instead of applying for college, was enough to make her clench her
jaw and stiffen her muscles. But with Baby, her tone was always different.
There was hope for him yet. He was still young, not heavily under the
influence of his brother. He hated conflicts, hated when the others raised
their voices. Jassie saw something of herself in him—a quiet tenderness
that only revealed itself when they were alone. No matter how irate she
was, whenever she addressed him, her hands stopped itching to strike
and instead, yearned to hold him close to her as she used to when he was
a child. Baby, too, knew this. He knew that if he continued to allow his
mother to call him by that name, instead of Sammy—as others in his
school did—his life would, in most ways, remain hassle-free.

But that day, the very sight of the three of them sitting immobile, with
no attempts of getting up, drained her high spirits. Even Baby’s puck-
ered pink lips and his chubby girth could not pacify her.

“Mummy wants to be a model,” laughed Johnny when she told them
about the training sessions at the gym.

“Go for a nice dinner with Hena,” Harry had said. “Or buy a nice neck-
lace, that I understand. But eight hundred dollars for personal training?”

Harry wasn’t being unkind. He simply didn’t understand. Just as he
didn’t understand what she was trying to do when she lingered by the
dresser late at night, in a thin, sheer pink top. Johnny didn’t understand.
He was too consumed by the television and internet. And Baby—he was
only a child.

“Oh really? A model? I’m a bloody model, and what are you? Just an
imbecile fool, sitting there all evening with your jaw wide open and your
hands tucked into your pants, in front of the television. Yes, you too. I’m
talking to you. All of you. A house full of bloody idiots. Get the hell up
and go to your rooms. Do your homework.”

“Ohh,” she moaned, shaking her head, striking her temple. “If only I
had a daughter. What would you do if I were gone? You’d starve. You’d
sit and wait for me to get back and say, ‘Oh Mummy! We’re hungry! Feed
us!’” She mocked her youngest son’s high pitched tone and the large an-
gelic gaze he had learned to use when speaking to her.

The only one who genuinely appreciated her was dear Miss Anjali.
She was so adamant that Jassie work out that she paid for a few sessions
herself. “For Diwali! Be happy and healthy!” read the card included with the check. Miss Anjali was always giving her little things here and there. A croissant from her favorite bakery, a lotion that she used which Jassie admired the day before. A month back, it was a beautiful ceramic jug that she’d brought back from France. It wasn’t really what she was receiving that mattered to Jassie as much as the act in itself, which showed that she was always in the other woman’s thoughts.

However, ever since she’d come back from that trip to France, Miss Anjali seemed, in some way, altered. She didn’t allow Jassie to indulge in much conversation, instead shielding her own thoughts and further frustrating her assistant. The sheen on her face dulled like the gray streets. Business wasn’t working out the way she had planned. Once the initial zeal of creating a start-up died down, it was plain to see that public interest was dwindling.

There were still a lot of calls for her lately—a persistent client, her boss explained. She might have been gazing out of her window that overlooked the backyard of the building, listening to the squeals of the neighbor’s children or the distant wails of a cat. Yet every time the office phone went off like an alarm and Jassie lingered in conversation with the caller, Miss Anjali anxiously called out from her desk, “Is that for me?” Soon after, she got up, picked up her purse and said she was going to the farmer’s market at Union Square. Jassie never asked further questions, although she knew by then that the market didn’t take place every day.

Sometimes Miss Anjali returned by late afternoon with a bag of organic granola for Jassie. At other times, she called to let Jassie know she wouldn’t be coming back at all. Jassie was used to this by now as well. She was pulling down the curtains and locking the door by four p.m., although she was supposed to be there till five p.m.

“You have such an amazing thing going over there,” Hena said as they stood in the checkout line at Macy’s. “Don’t quit this one, whatever you do!”

It really was a convenient arrangement until one day, that fool Mr. Gopal, unable to get hold of anyone at the office, had tried Miss Anjali on her cell phone directly. God knows how he got the number. All those anxious fathers wanting to marry off their young sons and daughters were stricken with fear that even one second lost was as bad as two years off their short, marriageable shelf-life.
Once, Miss Anjali had taken out the son’s photograph from one of the files. “Have you seen this? Just see this. He looks like a toad! Who’d want to marry him?” Indeed—a plump, squat face; thick, dark glasses; sunburnt skin much too dark for any Indian in-law’s liking—poor fellow. The two of them had quite a laugh at his expense. Jassie would go over these little incidents on the way back home and enter her house with a smile on her face, much like the smile Miss Anjali bore these days when she talked on the phone or sent a text message.

When her boss found out about the unofficial office hours, she wasn’t openly outraged. However, her silence showed her displeasure, and Jassie felt humiliated. By now they were practically colleagues. As if by being the only other employee, sharing lunches and snippets of each other’s lives, they shared an equality of status. In fact, it could hardly be called work, more like passing idle time with a friend and getting paid in the process. Jassie couldn’t bear the thought of her esteemed Miss Anjali feeling deliberately deceived. Deception came from lacking courage to tell the truth. The very deed made one a subordinate. However, nothing was ever mentioned and to try and make amends the next day, Jassie cooked an entire feast for her employer.

There was so much of it that she brought a separate container just so Miss Anjali could take the remainder back home. Her Little Boss insisted that she couldn’t, that she was going out for dinner and didn’t have time to eat it.

“Are you going out with Mr. Shane?” Jassie asked.

She shook her head.

“Then take this for him. Poor thing. He must be hungry.”

Miss Anjali didn’t respond. She looked apologetically at Jassie. “Shane and I are getting a divorce.”

The tube light from the ceiling might as well have shattered into pieces on Jassie’s head. “Hai, hai,” was all she managed to utter as she covered her mouth with her hand and tears pricked at the corners of her eyes.

She hastily pulled herself together. “But when? What happened?”

“Some months ago. I left him.” Miss Anjali’s voice was monotone and impassive.

“But why? He loved you. He did everything for you. He even did your laundry!”
“It’s not that…how can I explain? He just isn’t the man I want to spend the rest of my life with.”

Jassie thought of Miss Anjali returning home that night, alone, to a dark and empty flat. In their house, they always left the porch light on. A little gesture that meant someone was home. She looked at Miss Anjali’s tired eyes, the dark circles, her thin, haggard face—a harrowed, divorced lady. She thought of Harry and all the times she’d felt discontented with him—how far from perfect he was and yet, thank God, thank God she wasn’t Miss Anjali.

A thought cheered her up. “That’s okay. Next time, just make sure he’s an Indian.”

Later that week, on their way to Macy’s, she relayed this devastating news to Hena. “Tsk, tsk, see? That’s what happens…,” her cousin’s voice trailed off. She was uncharacteristically quiet that day.

“What’s the matter? Fought with Sukhi or something?”

“Sukhi hasn’t touched me in years,” Hena said very plainly as they sieved through racks of clothing, checking tags with no sighs, no forlorn look. Hena was careful these days about her spending. She was saving for a breast lift.

“I want to be admired, to feel like a woman. He doesn’t even look at me,” Hena said after a while. She didn’t complain, but one who knew her well could recognize the tell-tale signs—the lethargy, the gradual weight that showed on her hips, the eating, the hiding and smoking (and incessantly swearing she never touched tobacco). What was more, she even took to drinking some wine on her own on occasion. The obsession with plastic surgery was very recent. She was certain that a change in her assets would bring about a change in her emotional well being.

“You should get something done too,” Hena said. “Everyone’s doing it. Malini’s friend had a liposuction. The other secretary at work got a nose job. They can set you up with monthly payment plans. Harry won’t ever know.”

It was indeed tempting. Especially when, months later, she saw the results on Hena—truly a piece of art. Hena went in with tired, limp breasts and came out with a pair that was exquisitely shaped, firm to the touch, bulging in a beautiful mound from her Victoria’s Secret bra. The knife had erased twenty years off her.
“Sukhi loves it.” Hena sighed with contentment.

Perhaps she would consider liposuction of the stomach after all, Jassie thought—as a surprise for Harry, if nothing else. Of course, she wouldn’t tell Miss Anjali about it. Her Little Boss would be aghast. This was something that Miss Anjali would never understand. Just as there were those details about Miss Anjali that Jassie still couldn’t fathom—why she constantly rearranged those bookcases, then stood back to appreciate her work; why she took meditation classes when she was smart enough to know it was all an American mumbo-jumbo; why she loved travelling to strange countries where she didn’t know the language or why she spoke to her own family in English. Jassie asked her once, “Why do you go to Turkey? What’s there that we don’t have here?” Miss Anjali had looked pitifully at her.

As November settled in and Diwali drew to a close, Jassie planned to throw a big party. She held nothing back. She bought wine in gallon-sized plastic containers, set out trays of mini samosas and cocktail kebabs for hors d’oeuvres. They had procured smuggled fireworks from India through a friend of Harry’s who knew Air India pilots. The entire house was lit up in tealights.

Jassie had long made up her mind to invite Miss Anjali. In fact, if she were honest with herself, it was that secret fantasy which had occasioned the party. However, when the time came to formally ask, Jassie became nervous. She went into her boss’s room, not daring to look her in the eye, and played with her fingernails, unconsciously chipping at the color. She tried to be as casual as possible. “I’m having a dinner party for Diwali, will you come?”

Miss Anjali thought for a while, checked her calendar and finally said, “Sure, I’ll be there.”

Jassie had to do everything in her power not to go up and give her boss an embrace. “Very good,” she managed to say and shakily left the room.

Diwali arrived and with it drew attention to Johnny’s terrible cleaning habits (despite several instructions), Baby’s inability to make one single phone call to the caterer, Harry’s complete obliviousness that something important was to take place in the house and other small calamities that arise in the proximity of such an event. All Jassie could think of was her
Little Boss. It felt like the day when she was only eighteen, waiting behind those curtains to finally meet Harry.

Just past eight Miss Anjali arrived, thankfully dressed modestly in white pants. Jassie wasn’t perturbed that no one else had come as yet. Typically the guests trickled in until well past nine, drank whiskey till eleven p.m., ate dinner at midnight and around two a.m., everyone staggered home. This meant Jassie had the opportunity to introduce Miss Anjali privately to Harry, Johnny, and Baby. Immediately, her family grew stiff and awkwardly accepted her extended hand. They stood around, expecting something to happen. Miss Anjali too seemed uncertain what to say, and Jassie, eager to see her at ease, patted the sofa beside her.

“Come, come, sit down, have something to drink,” she said, motioning at the large faux-leather sectional that took up much of the living room and thrust a glass in Miss Anjali’s hand. For the occasion, the sectional was accented in designer throw pillows encased in zebra printed suede covers.

She had long imagined this scenario over and over again. Miss Anjali would sit at the dining table, helping herself to seconds and thirds. She would talk to Johnny and Baby, asking them questions about college, imparting the wisdom that Jassie herself had grown to rely on.

But here they were, around the coffee table, with the Little Boss sandwiched between the armrest and Harry, while Johnny and Baby sat across from them. As she spoke, Miss Anjali looked solely at Jassie, whose eyes wandered around the room. The weather-resistant palm, placed on the corner of the stairs as ornamentation, shone like plastic; the chandelier didn’t sparkle enough; the cushions didn’t match the curtains.

When the other guests began to arrive, a small circle gathered around Miss Anjali. Hena began to speak in English, a language quite unnatural to her.

“You live in the city?” she asked, and when Miss Anjali politely answered, she looked suitably impressed. “Must be very expensive…how much do you pay in rent?”

Miss Anjali sat like a pristine show dog stuck between common mongrels, graciously answering questions, holding the glass of wine that she had been nursing for well over an hour now.
“Drink, drink,” Harry said, gently patting her on the back. Miss Anjali said she didn’t drink alcohol much.

Usually Jassie loved these gatherings. The following morning, she and Hena would go over the entire evening in minute detail, discussing outfits and gossip. But that night, she barely enjoyed any part of it. The boxes of fireworks had yet to make their appearance, but she was in no mood for them anymore. She was beginning to wish the night were over.

It was not quite ten thirty p.m. when Miss Anjali came over to say she was leaving.

“But I haven’t even served dinner.”

“That’s okay, I’m so full already. I have to go, Jassie. It’s a long ride back to the city.”

Jassie looked around in desperation. “Oh, Johnny!” she cried in relief, spotting her son at the far end of the living room. “Johnny will give you a ride back to the city. Don’t worry.”

“No, really, it’s late. I have to go. Have to walk the dog.”

A FEW DAYS AFTER THE PARTY, Jassie was sitting at her desk in the office, flipping through Society magazine. It was another quiet afternoon. Not even a siren in the distance. Miss Anjali pulled up a gray metal chair and sat down. She shifted uneasily and cleared her throat before she spoke.

“Jassie…” she began.

“Jassie…” she started again, in vain.

“Jassie, I’m leaving New York and closing down this office,” she said finally, hastily stringing the sentence together before it got away from her.

Something pushed against Jassie’s chest, making it difficult to breathe, as if someone had pinned her to the floor, taken down all those dusty books and placed them over her torso.

She meant to tackle those bookcases soon, get a ladder and climb up to the topmost shelf. There must be an inch of dust up there. And once she was done with that, she was hoping to mend the curtains. She just hadn’t gotten around to any of it.

“What are you going?” she asked. Her voice was dry and hoarse. What came out was barely a whisper.

“Back to Massachusetts.”
“What’s in Massachusetts?”
“Grad school.”
“More studies?”
Miss Anjali shrugged. “It’s something.”
“And you’ll be back then?” Jassie asked hopefully.
“Perhaps.”
Of course, Miss Anjali could do it now—take risks—just as Jassie herself had once done many years ago. Sometimes she marvelled at her own nerves back then.

There was a photograph of them together on their last day. Jassie had called down the landlady and handed her the camera with care, showing her how to use it just as Johnny had when he had given it to her.

In the photograph, they were hugging, and she had drawn Miss Anjali in, holding her by the side of her cheek, close to her own face as she used to with Baby.

Jassie was unable to hide her tears, and Miss Anjali said sadly, “Don’t cry, Jassie. You’re making me feel terrible.”

“God knows when I’ll see you again,” Jassie managed to say.

“Don’t be ridiculous. Of course we’ll meet. We’ll meet every time I come down, at one of these restaurants, okay? You’ll get your chance to go to Macy’s then.”

Miss Anjali laughed as they hugged goodbye, and the last thing Jassie saw was the edge of her light blue shawl as she turned the corner. The next time they met, it would be outside of work. She could just see it—them sitting across a white linen tablecloth, pouring over the menu together, eating lunch like two old friends. Jassie would tell her about Johnny’s new job and Baby’s college. They would discuss Miss Anjali’s new boyfriend, and Jassie would tell her to get a breast enlargement because it would provide a huge boost to her sex life. She had longed to impart such wisdom to Miss Anjali for some time now. ◆
We listen to the loco sirens
sounding their cry below
maybe chasing a thief
like Honore Pieret
who you let sleep on your couch

and who stashed the Egyptian statue there
he had stolen from the Louvre
so you got busted and they took you downtown…

with your large eyes and small moustache
your overcoat and yellow shoes
the head-wound you brought back
from World War One

your tombstone with its heart-shaped poem
your Polish mother’s gambling addiction
your father entirely unknown
your fine poem Zone

Maybe kindness can be like a cell
we live in, looking out through its frame
and wavy lenses

who invented the term Surrealism
to describe the music of Erik Satie

and loved the grace of the industrial streets,
the rooftops and metal, glass and smoke,
who saw like his friends Picasso and Braque
the different angles of being
the cubist cones and jagged planes
like crystal formations stacked and locked
deep in the optical brain.
It’s the Mets and Cubs tonight, and I swear everyone in this bar knows who Sandy Koufax used to be, and how he got into a batter’s head without losing his own. Tonight, in the seventh, the relief pitcher walked his first batter, and the catcher ran up to the plate. This is how entropy should work: in uniform. What I want doesn’t matter, but tonight, in New York, I think they’ve roped most of the sounds straight out of the movies, everyone ready to boo on cue. This is what I mean when I say I want to play like the boys in the big leagues. I want to run up to the mound and slap the pitcher’s mitt, coax him to relax, tell him that each moment he has the ball in his hand is exactly like each moment he doesn’t, so don’t even worry about the ball or the batter or the way the lights out there make mosquitos blink like glitterati, because everyone falls, I’d tell him. I’d say everything shot out on a line has to drop, no matter how hard you throw, so throw hard. And maybe I wouldn’t know enough about Koufax, or if he even matters, but tonight, I’d say, let’s gamble on precision, let’s place our bets on another moment’s coming soon anyway, one that’s just good enough to get us out of any sudden trouble we’ve all managed to get us so deeply in. And though I’d want to tell him how kids biking neighborhood blacktops after the lights fly on all over the world play this same game, truth is, I’d probably forget exactly what I wanted to say, between the guy on the third base line who won’t stop flipping me off, and the lady in the second tier who has her compact held out, throwing the light back...
into my eyes, but before I forgot everything, I would hope I’d lean in one last time, right before I half-hustle back to the plate, tell him we have these sudden lives, and that sweating is the body telling the truth in the sweetest way it knows how, and that sometimes, right when the lights flicker off, if you look up, rings toss off from the tops of them, just like under a pint glass on a bar-top where some guy’s sitting now, ripping the coaster they gave him specifically to avoid those rings from forming, as if we’re not allowed to leave our wet and shiny mark, as if we have anything to offer that isn’t already falling apart.
KEVIN COYNE

PORTRAIT OF MY BROTHER, FALLING

That middle school snowday we snuck
to the sled pit behind the old police firing range
where shell casings & broken bottles
   mottled with fresh snow
I watched you fly down the hill, off the plywood ramp
   a whole world of white
       unfolding beneath you
watched helpless as you drifted
farther from me each year after that
your unraveling implacable as a Nor’easter

first  brother gone Icarus
then   brother gone incognito
later  brother gone incoherent
drunk, key scratching
   our moonlit doorknob
now    brother gone back
to abandoned house
   & treadmark arms.

\

I want to know who you were
beneath me
   in the bottom bunk,
     feigning sleep with me
because Dad was white-knuckle drunk
again: his boot-thud steps
   his hulking silhouette
     sharp in our doorframe.

Because this too, is myth:
   you an island
you an Ithaca
I’m always stumbling back to
always plumbing the riverbed of you
trying to fathom your history—
yellow wallpaper in our room (your favorite color)
cinnamon roll in the center of the pan (you’d fight me for)
your pink cheeks (sunburnt from light off snow)—
all of you North River silt through my fingers.

\n
I want to build you a brother-sepulcher
before your 3 a.m. bail out calls,
the days you locked me out of our room
when you sweated through bedsheets
in stale curtainlight
before your half-assed stints in St. Monica’s.

Even before the green sled wailed out
from under you
& you collapsed into the ground
where broken glass gashed
across your belly
marooning the snow beneath you

there was briefly this:
you, brother flying
as I dreamed
the Assumption of Mary might have looked
your shadow lengthening over flattened snow
a hedge of fire burning above you
a flurry of skin, a fury of light
diadem of white around your head
& you, beautiful, unaware
of the earth beneath you,
its barbed embrace.
TO BE FAIR, the kid was asking for it. The moment he stumbled into The Collective with his archaic set of yam-colored suitcases and big Midwestern smile, he might as well have passed around engraved invitations to his own ass-kicking. He arrived during a rowdy dinner of wine and lentil loaf, and as he stood grinning in the dining room doorway, the late August sun made a nimbus of his prairie-colored hair.

“Hello folks!” he said, breathless with innocence. “I’m Leonard Salts from Illinois. You can call me Leonard or Lee or Leo or Leon—whatever floats your boat.”

Leonard’s earnestness was palpable. It brought all forty Collectives—their banter and scraping of tin plates—to a hush.

“Looks like I got the last room on campus, but I figure that’s what
happens when you can’t make up your mind between New Hampshire and Ohio.” Leonard shook his head like he was an utter fool. “Ohio, New Hampshire. New Hampshire, Ohio. Finally, I just looked in the bathroom mirror and said to myself, ‘Leonard, you nut! You bonafide coconut! Ohio? You know Ohio. It’s just like Illinois but with less corn and more porn.’” The kid lowered his voice like he was letting everyone in on a family secret. “At least that’s what my dad, Walter Salts, says. I know, I know. Walter Salts, Walter Salts. My grandmother was a poet and she didn’t even know it. Or maybe, just maybe, she did.”

Leonard gave a little snort and addressed his suitcases. Two were tucked under his arms and two he held by their silver handles. Like a bellhop, he stacked them in a pile on the dining room floor from biggest to smallest. On top was a squat and square ladies’ cosmetic case that the whole room seemed to consider at once. Leonard, unburdened, went on. “But, back to the why and how. In the end, New Hampshire picked me and I picked New Hampshire and the administration picked this place for me to live. Well, not picked actually, because it was the only room left. But here I am and nice to meet you all. Again: Leonard Salts from Ursula, Illinois. Probably never heard of it, but now you have and you can no longer say you haven’t.”

Leonard gave a little bow. There was a quiet chortle or two, followed by a low whistle from the rear of the room. It seemed for a moment that no one knew what to say. The Collectives in their designer love beads and imported leather sandals looked at one another, this way and that, as if they were being pranked and one of them was responsible. At long last, Teddy Yates, The Collective’s president stood and lifted his coffee mug of wine.

“Well, I say welcome!” Teddy’s voice took on the showman’s tone that his dorm mates had come to expect, a tone Leonard mistook as genuine. “The Collective is exactly that: a collection of all sorts and all types. I think you’ll find yourself right at home here. In fact, ten minutes from now, I bet you the farm you won’t miss Nebraska at all.”

Leonard’s smile fell a bit. He corrected Teddy with an “Illinois,” but his state of origin went unheard in the roar of applause for Teddy. The next thing Leonard knew, he was being pushed down into a dining chair and up to a table where someone slid him a tin plate of lentil loaf and a
full mug of wine. Leonard, in the chaos, tried to insist he could partake of neither—one because of his weak stomach, the other because of his morals—but The Collectives collectively pouted as if the whole bunch of them might burst into tears, and after much cheering and jeering, Leonard choked down what was in front of him before promptly regurgitating all of it back onto the table. The applause that followed was so deafening and lengthy, that Leonard, pale and clammy, eventually gave a weak smile in spite of himself. Then Teddy yanked him up by the armpits and clapped him on the back and showed him to his third-floor room.

“Welcome home, Nebraska,” Teddy said, gesturing at the concrete walls and iron bed. “You’re not in Kansas anymore.”


**TEDDY WASN’T SURE WHY** he started in on Leonard, but he felt compelled to. When he woke the next day and saw Leonard sitting in the dining room with a tall glass of milk, he recalled a horse he’d once seen broken. Teddy’s sister had once been into the equestrian world out on Long Island, and one summer Teddy had tagged along to see how people went about training a show horse. A woman had put a rust-colored horse with flared nostrils on a long leash and trotted it in a circle for a good hour. First clockwise and then counter-clockwise. The woman explained to Teddy and his sister that she held a whip, just in case, but she rarely needed to use it. She maintained that repetition was stronger than violence, and Teddy remembered this as he watched Leonard take a long pull from his milk and forget to wipe his upper lip. Teddy could see it clearly; the world would devour Leonard if someone didn’t show him the ropes, so Teddy decided that a few times a day, he’d take it upon himself to get out the ropes and dangle them in front of Leonard’s angelic corn-fed face. Never mind if this behavior wasn’t in keeping with The Collective’s original mission of love and let love, live and let live. It was for Leonard’s own good.

**FOR THE FIRST WEEK OR SO,** it was just “Nebraska” whenever Teddy saw Leonard. “Missing Nebraska?” he might say, or: “This is my new buddy Leonard. He’s from Nebraska.”
Leonard would always reply, smiling. “Well… actually. It’s Illinois. Ursula, Illinois.” To which Teddy would give his head a big oafish shake or tap his temple and say: “Geez! Silly me! That’s right! Illinois!” only to repeat the “Nebraska” trick a few hours later. When, after about ten days, Leonard quit smiling and quit correcting Teddy about Nebraska, Teddy made fast to re-win Leonard’s affection so the training could continue. “Hey, Peoria!” Teddy took up saying. “My man! Peoria!” This new nickname seemed to equally confuse and appease Leonard, and once Teddy felt Leonard was less skittish, he ramped it up with unpredictable shout-outs: “Hey, Tin Man!” across campus. “Hey, Dorothy!” across the dining hall. “Hey, Ozzie, my friend. Ozzie Oz!” down the hall.

Within a month, Leonard looked tired. But also less naive. Teddy gave himself credit for this ripening, but something about it nagged him, too. What it was, he couldn’t explain. There was just a general unease about what he’d taken upon himself to do. Teddy sensed he either needed to call it quits or double down to make himself feel better. And one night, at odds with himself, he wandered up to Leonard’s room to get an idea of how he needed to proceed.

“Nebraska,” he heard himself say unexpectedly as he knocked on Leonard’s door. “It’s your biggest fan. Teddy.”

There was a long pause and then Teddy heard a quiet “Come in.”

Teddy opened the door slowly and took a peek inside. Then he threw the door open wide in awe. “Holy shit!” Teddy said. “This is some set-up you’ve got here.”

Leonard looked up at Teddy from his desk. He wore magnifying spectacles and had been tinkering with something miniscule. His eyes grew bigger than big at Teddy’s praise. “You think so, Teddy?”

Teddy wandered around the room with his arms crossed in front of him while he inspected Leonard’s displays. “So I think, Leonard. So I think.”

Leonard’s room was nothing short of a museum, a war museum to be exact, but which war exactly was lost on Teddy who knew little about history other than his own personal one. “What is all this stuff?” he asked. “How’d you fit all this into your suitcases?”

“Revolutionary War replicas,” Leonard said. “Uniforms, bullets, buttons, and the like.” Leonard smiled, quickly regaining his day-one
enthusiasm and speed. “My mother’s been mailing it to me. I make everything to be as authentic as possible. I’m a faker-maker, you could say. Nothing I create is the real thing, but it passes as such all the time.”

Teddy smiled. “So you scam people?”

Leonard took off his spectacles and set down his tools. “Of course not!” he said. “Absolutely, resolutely not. I make things for myself and occasionally museums.” He stood up from his desk and dug through a stack of photographs. “I had one museum request a pair of colonial boots, and, by Jove, I made them a pair of colonial boots. See? Here you are.” He held up a photograph in front of Teddy’s face. The boots in question looked like a pair of women’s old shoes. “You can’t tell the difference between these and George Washington’s. I ran over them with my father’s John Deere to break them in, and then I oiled them and ran over them, oiled them and ran over them, and then finally packed them in some dirt for a week until… abracadabra! Museum quality.” Leonard beamèd like he had on the first night, before the lentil loaf and wine had gotten the best of him. “My grandmother thinks I crossed the Delaware in a past life. I’ve been eat up with this stuff since I was three.” Leonard went to the yam-colored cosmetic case and brought it to Teddy. “Open it,” he said.

Teddy looked at Leonard’s ecstatic face. The horse was completely off its lead now. Teddy was going to have to start from scratch. “Go on,” Leonard urged. “Look inside.”

Inside the case was a velvet box about the size of a sandwich, and inside of that was what appeared to be dentures. “They’re Washington’s teeth,” Leonard gushed. “Well, a replica of. They took me a year to make. I made them out of pork ribs. Well, pork rib bones.”

Leonard was on cloud nine. Teddy thought for a moment of how he might knock him down to cloud two or three. He closed the velvet box and put it back into the case and gave a long, drawn-out sigh. “You know, Peoria, The Collective was founded during the Vietnam War.” Teddy handed the cosmetic case back to Leonard who seemed to wilt a little. “Thirty years ago, some honest-to-goodness flower children got together on this campus in the name of peace and petitioned for their own cooperative dormitory.” Teddy looked for a place to sit, but finding none, went and leaned against Leonard’s desk knocking several small
tools to the floor in the process. “These were peaceable student-activists who wanted to live in harmony… cook together, bang on some tambourines, stand up to injustice. They didn’t believe in Wall Street or mouse traps or razors. And they sure as shit didn’t believe in war.”

Leonard went from looking discouraged to scared. “Oh, I’m as peaceful as they get, Teddy. I’m just into the history of it. That’s all. Really.”

Teddy leaned up from the desk, and more tools fell to the floor. He knew good and well that the present-day Collective was more drugs than hugs, a gathering of imposters—young men and women who hailed from money but dressed as if they didn’t. Potheads with no political agenda who ate beans for show but prime rib when they went home to their parents’ country houses. “I believe you, Leonard,” Teddy said, positioning himself as Leonard’s one and only confidante. “But the others wouldn’t.” Teddy took a final stroll around the room with his arms crossed, as if now assessing a police lineup. “We’ll keep this just between the two of us, okay?”

Leonard nodded silently, and Teddy let himself out. Alone in the stairwell, Teddy paused between the third and second floors. He could hear his own heart pounding. He knew he was terrible. He knew he was being just plain rotten. He didn’t know why he’d ever started in on Leonard in the first place. He’d never acted like this in his entire life, at least not that he could recall. On some occasions maybe he had been a little arrogant, but this behavior was just above and beyond, and Teddy knew it. Far off, from some Collective dorm room, Teddy could hear a whoop of laughter and bongo drums. What a charade, some voice inside his head said. A never-ending costume party. Teddy’s stomach gave a little flip. Maybe he could lay off a little. Maybe he could give the horse a vacation from training, let it out to graze.

Teddy went down to his dorm room and lit what was left of a joint. He pinched it between his fingers like a dead, white moth and turned off the lights. He lay down on his futon and let himself remember Leonard in the doorway the first night. How his amber hair lit up like a halo. How he stacked his luggage like a child stacked building blocks. Teddy let himself feel guilty about everything for a while. He even went so far as to say a prayer, which was something he hadn’t done since he was maybe seven, when he’d wished to God that his parents would stay together,
which they hadn’t. *Please let Leonard like me,* the prayer went. *Please let Leonard think I’m a good guy.* Teddy repeated the prayer again and again until he felt certain his prayer would be answered. After a while, he fell asleep peacefully and without remorse.

**TEDDY DID THE BEST** he could to ride Leonard less hard. He stuck with “Peoria” and “Ozzie” and dropped “Nebraska” and “Dorothy.” A few times a week, he went by Leonard’s room to watch him work. He’d sit on the bed, and Leonard would sit at his desk, and for a while, Leonard would talk about Illinois, the family farm, the cow he’d raised that won a trophy, the way his mother made three-day beans. Sometimes he amused Teddy with rural tales he swore were true, like how he’d trained a cat to nurse a litter of possums or how a tornado had once corked their chimney with a live goat. One day, however, he really set Teddy’s head spinning with the casual announcement that his maternal grandfather was a full-blood Shawnee.

Teddy snorted. “Please. I refuse to go on believing your 4-H bullshit.”

Leonard kept at work at his desk, intent and scraping. “It’s true blue,” he said calmly. “I’m related to Tecumseh. He’s my great-times-five grandfather. Great, great, great, great, great.”

Teddy sat up on Leonard’s bed and stared. “Stop yanking my chain,” he said. “What sort of Indian sits around on his blond ass making Revolutionary War collectibles?”

Leonard scraped and scraped. “No man is without conflict,” he said. “That’s what Walter Salts always says.” Leonard turned around and gave Teddy a big, mid-American grin. “You should try to get into the enemy’s shoes some time. To see things from the other side.” Leonard turned back to his work. “My father says if you don’t fight the war on the inside, you’ll fight it on the outside.”

Teddy didn’t know what to say. Leonard suddenly struck him as complicated. If Leonard was telling the truth, he was a hypocrite. If he was lying, then he was everything Teddy had never imagined he could be. Teddy sat and stared at the back of Leonard’s 24-karat head until he could name the feeling he felt. *Impressed.* Leonard turned as silent as a monk, and Teddy sat in admiration until the whole room went golden and time stopped and the two of them were suspended in amber. Teddy watched until all he could see was a column of light. Until all he could
hear were the soft sounds of industry. The next thing Teddy knew, he was waking, blissful, in Leonard’s bed. Leonard stood smiling at the bedside looking down at Teddy. In one hand, Leonard held his scraping tool. The other hand, empty, reached out slow and tender to brush Teddy’s cheek.

“You fell asleep,” Leonard laughed gently. “Right on my bed like a big ole teddy bear.”

Teddy’s face burned where Leonard had touched it. Teddy put his own palm to his cheek and sat up, overcome with a sudden, inexplicable sorrow that he quickly replaced with anger. “I have to go,” he said, his palm still on his cheek. “You shouldn’t have let me stay so long.” Then Teddy rose and left without another word.

**AFTER THAT,** Teddy didn’t go back to Leonard’s room. In fact, he avoided him altogether for a good while out of fear. Then one October morning, Teddy saw Leonard alone at breakfast. Leonard looked lost and vulnerable, like he had the first day, and Teddy joined him at the table despite himself.

“Making any boots?” Teddy asked. “Any pork rib dentures?”

Leonard lit up like a harvest moon and set down his milk. His upper lip was foamy. His eyes were bright. It seemed to Teddy he had grown more pure and perfect in his absence. “Why, yes I am. Thank you for asking,” Leonard said. “My great uncle wants a set of Washington teeth. He knows a fellow who knows a fellow who knows someone who works at a famous history museum, which is actually located right here. Well, not here in New Hampshire, but here in the United States. Massachusetts, maybe.” Leonard leaned forward confidentially. “This could be a big break for me, Teddy. I mean, I’d still go to school here and get my history degree, but I’d have something waiting for me when I got out.”

Leonard looked as if he might cry from joy, and Teddy’s stomach did the same somersault it had the night he’d resorted to prayer. “Don’t say anything, promise? I know you won’t. You’re the best friend I’ve got here, and I trust you.” Then Leonard reached out and touched Teddy’s hand on top of the table and answered a prayer. “You’re a good guy, Teddy.”

Teddy felt his hand go hot and his brain go cold. He shot up from the table with such force his tin plate clattered to the floor. “Don’t do that,” Teddy commanded. “Not ever.”
With that, Teddy ran from The Cooperative and out to the campus’s far field. When he made it halfway across, he stood in the damp morning grass and leaned over with his hands on his knees and was sick. He stayed that way for some time, fearing he might collapse if he straightened his spine. Bent over, Teddy fought against something inside himself that he couldn’t name and was sick again. Maybe the problem was that the horse hadn’t been trained at all. Maybe Teddy had let it out to pasture before it had learned a single thing. Teddy remembered the woman and the show horse. He remembered her whip, rare but ready. He wondered what kind of horse she had ever had to use it on. Maybe it wasn’t on one that was too wild, but on one that was too mild. Teddy spit into the grass and put his hands on his hips. He decided that was the case. If he didn’t act fast, Leonard would wither before Thanksgiving. Teddy frowned for a long time at a span of yellow maples. When he had come up with a good plan, he went on to class empty-handed so he wouldn’t have to go back and chance Leonard.

**TEDDY’S ORIGINAL PLAN** was to feed Leonard a few pot brownies in the common room. A gathering of Collectives would put on some Pink Floyd, pass around a plate of cosmic fudge, and the next thing everyone knew, Leonard would break free of his cornhusk. It would be like attending the birth of a baby. Everyone Teddy ran the idea past thought it was the greatest undertaking The Collective could ever attempt. But then things got out of control. Teddy made the mistake of mentioning Leonard’s war hobbies. He made the mistake of mentioning the Washington teeth and Tecumseh and the goat in the chimney and the colonial boots. He made the mistake of picking Leonard’s dorm room lock while Leonard was at class and taking a bunch of Collectives on a tour of Leonard’s collectibles. They tried on his wigs. They tried on his Tri-corn hat. They laughed and laughed until they had a better idea than pot brownies in the common room.

“A tea party,” someone suggested.

“Like a Boston one,” someone countered.

At that point, Teddy knew it was beyond him. But having it beyond him relieved him of responsibility, so Teddy gave his blessing. An enthusiastic one.
“Your only job is to get him there,” Howie Ames said.

**Leonard Wasn’t Too Keen** on going in uniform after what Teddy had told him about the original flower children, but after a few brownies, Leonard didn’t know Illinois from Nebraska.

“You look great, Peoria,” Teddy said, as he buttoned Leonard’s waistcoat. “More all-American than ever.”

Leonard didn’t respond. His eyes were big and black, as empty as a shark’s. Teddy equipped Leonard with a cardboard musket and straightened his wig, and the two presidents went out to the far field where a bonfire the size of a teepee raged.

“They’re coming!” someone shouted when they saw Teddy and Leonard approaching.

“Who’s coming?” a chorus asked.

“The British!” another chorus answered. “The British, the British are coming!”

Though incorrect, Teddy found this hilarious, but Leonard, in the flickering, distant glow, stopped in terror.

“Come on, Peoria,” Teddy said. “The party can’t go on without you.”

And that was when Leonard took off, fast and frantic. He had an unexpected agility, and Teddy thought, with some level of parental admiration, that maybe he had, once again, underestimated him. Maybe he knew nothing about him at all. He watched with awe and horror as Leonard made for the dark span of distant maples, where the far field met the wilderness. The Collectives, beyond inebriated, were delighted by this unexpected turn.

“Go, Nebraska, go!” someone hooted.

“All the way to Mount Vernon!” another shouted.

In the glow of the bonfire, all that Teddy could make out as he tried to follow Leonard’s retreat was the white wig bouncing in the night, growing smaller and smaller against the jagged silhouette of the forest like the terrified end of a cottontail. A chorus of laughter followed when the wig could no longer be seen. It was laughter that soon faded to an intoxicated murmuring and later to a glazed glee of stupidity.

When the sun came up a few hours later, innocent over the woods,
no one seemed to recall what had happened—to Leonard or themselves. The fire was now nothing but a handful of ashes. The discarded baking pans and tambourines dotted the scene like battle shields. The Collectives eventually rose up from beneath their dewy blankets and squinted out empty at the world, before staggering back into the dormitory for eggs and sleep.

Teddy’s fear unfolded with the day. At first, his anxiety was manageable. He stayed out in the far field for the morning, picking up debris, pouring warm beer in the ashes, staring off at the maples in the hopes he’d soon see Leonard emerge, rumpled but golden, shaking his head in good humor, holding his flattened wig in one hand and waving Hello! Here I am, Teddy! with the other. But by noon, there was no sign of Leonard, neither in The Collective nor in the field, so Teddy went off into the woods on his own. He kept reminding himself of Leonard’s unexpected agility as he walked. He reminded himself that Leonard had grown up on a farm and had raised a cow from calf to bull. Teddy tried to imagine Leonard strolling over fallen trees and whistling with the birds, but instead he saw him pale and dead on a bed of crimson leaves. He tried to imagine Leonard sitting on a stump in his Revolutionary garb, buttoning his boots and reciting the Preamble, but again, Teddy saw him dead and white, his eyes open in a last moment of panic that Teddy had orchestrated.

Teddy came back from the woods in the late afternoon. By the time the sun began its descent, Leonard still had not returned, and Teddy was near panic. He called a meeting of all the Collectives, but some were in too poor of shape from the night before to attend, and of those who did, nearly half of them found Leonard’s absence insignificant.

“Nebraska’s fine,” Gavin said. “Schoolchildren have eaten worse brownies.”

“He’s probably in town,” Howie said. “Have you even checked the diner? Twenty bucks he’s there right now drinking a six-pack of milk.”

Teddy gnawed his bottom lip. “I think we should tell the administration. Maybe campus security.”

There were some audible groans, and Gavin shook his head. “Leave the school out of it. The kid’ll turn up eventually. Dapper and dumb as ever.”

The meeting adjourned without Teddy’s blessing. Teddy went up to
Leonard’s room to see if he had crept back into The Collective when no one was watching. But Leonard wasn’t there. Teddy sat at Leonard’s desk and turned on the desk lamp. He tried on Leonard’s magnifying glasses. He scraped at a brass button with a dental tool. Then he took off the glasses and curled up on Leonard’s bed and prayed the prayer he’d prayed before, plus one more. *Please let Leonard like me. Please let Leonard think I’m a good guy. Please let Leonard be alive.*

**THREE DAYS LATER** and three towns over, Leonard was eventually found. He wasn’t dead, but he was dehydrated and weak and had a broken arm. The Collective gathered around the common room television to watch the local news. Leonard was still dressed as a soldier. He still had on his old wig, as well as a new cast, as two policemen helped him into a cruiser.

“Look at him!” Gavin said. “He’s as white as a sheet.”

“Check out his eyes,” Howie said and whistled. “They don’t look real.”

Teddy hung back in the common room and stared at the floor while the newscaster gave his report. Leonard had been found on an elderly couple’s front porch. When confronted, he’d told authorities he was the first President of the United States and that he was originally from Nebraska. Thanks to a student ID, the cops were able to determine that his name was Leonard Salts and he was from Ursula, Illinois. He was now in good hands and being sent back to his parents, accompanied by a school counselor. “He’s a lucky young man,” the newscaster said in closing. “He was pretty bad off when he was found.”

The Collectives, save for Teddy, clapped when the segment cut to a commercial.

“All’s well that ends well,” one said.

“Talk about making history,” said another.

**TEDDY SKIPPED CLASS** for the rest of the week. On Saturday, a tall, sad man, accompanied by a dean of some sort, came to pack up Leonard’s things. Teddy stood in the hall and listened while they wrapped Leonard’s creations in newspaper.

“I can’t figure out what went wrong,” the tall man said. “Leonard always had a good head on his shoulders.”
There was a long silence. Teddy’s stomach spun one way and then another.

“Some people do better close to home,” the administrator finally said. “I’m sure he’ll bounce right back once he gets back to what he knows.”

Teddy left the hallway and went to his room. An hour later, he watched from his window as the tall man and the dean walked from The Collective with the yam-colored suitcases and a dolly full of cardboard boxes. Teddy watched until they disappeared around a wooded bend in campus. He watched the bend until the sky was black. Teddy couldn’t stop thinking about Leonard or the teeth in the velvet box. He couldn’t stop thinking about the museum waiting for the teeth and how they might never receive their order and Leonard would lose his chance. But mostly he thought about watching Leonard work—his bent back and the gentle scrape of his tools and the slow evenings suspended in amber.

TEDDY SANK into a deep depression. He took a leave of absence before Thanksgiving break and went home to his mother in Massachusetts. She babied him with soup. She gave him half of her Prozac prescription. He spent most of the winter sleeping and reading his old comic books and trying not to think about Leonard. One desperate January day, Teddy picked up the phone and called Information and got a number for a Walter Salts in Ursula, but before he could convince himself to call, he burned the piece of paper the number was on. He lit a match and held it to the paper and dropped the paper right before it burned his fingers. The ashes of Walter Salts’s number left a little brown scar on Teddy’s white bedspread. When spring came, early and with the fattest robins Teddy had ever seen, his mother encouraged him to take more time off and go to Africa, to help people who, in her words, “really had it bad.”

Teddy did just that. He went somewhere hot and humid and primitive—a place where he was tall and godly and could be the bearer of good and necessary things. It turned out his mother was right: seeing people worse off than himself really put Teddy in a better mood. When he was done in Africa, he returned to the States and continued his righteousness by volunteering in a soup kitchen. The homeless men really took to Teddy. They told him how generous he was, and Teddy believed it. The ladle he wielded was not unlike a scepter, and over time, Teddy thought...
of himself as a benevolent king. Within a year or so, Teddy’s mood had soared. He was nearly giddy. He felt good enough about himself to finish his degree at a school closer to home, and, after that, to go on to law school, where he specialized in environmental law. Within a few years, Teddy made partner at a reputable firm and married a beautiful woman with an obvious limp who he felt reflected how compassionate and open-minded he was. By the time Teddy and his wife had children, one adoring girl and one adoring boy, Teddy had, for all intents and purposes, forgotten Leonard Salts.

And then, one summer Sunday, on a drive back from the beach, Teddy and his family stopped at a rest area. It was dark and dated, but it had clean-enough bathrooms, and while Teddy’s wife tended to the children, Teddy stood with his hands on his hips in the vestibule and stared at the vending machines—first into one, then into a second, and finally at the space between them, where a small box was bolted into the wall. Teddy stepped closer to see. The box was made of glass and steel, and it was smudged with fingerprints, but inside rested a set of yellowed false teeth and three brass buttons and a neat row of crude bullets. Teddy’s stomach did a flip, and he leaned in closer still. He couldn’t find a plaque, just a little strip of paper inside the box, upon which someone had typed the word: REPLICAS. Teddy bent over until his nose touched the box. He stared until his eyes watered. For a moment, he could hear the scraping of Leonard’s tools. For a moment, Teddy was back on Leonard’s bed, suspended in amber, right at the threshold of the afterlife. He saw Leonard’s nimbus of hair, felt Leonard’s warm hand on his cheek. And then: his wife and children. Loud and soapy and fresh, their shoes squeaking against the floor. “Vending machines!” they squealed. “Can we have quarters, Daddy? Can we? Can we?”

Teddy couldn’t speak. Their presence was suddenly tin plates clattering all around. He stormed from the rest area and went out to the car and sat panting behind the wheel. When his wife and children finally climbed back in, Teddy started the car and gunned the engine. He put all the windows down and drove off, fast and erratically, first in one lane and then in another. In the roar of the hot summer wind, as he sped westward, Teddy could once again see the horse. It had gone mad from fear and was galloping toward the horizon in a cloud of dust. Behind it,
clinging to the training lead, was Teddy. He thought he had let go long ago, but he realized he never had. He realized he never could, even if he wanted to.
DORIANNE LAUX

IN ANY EVENT

If we are fractured
we are fractured
like stars
bred to shine
in every direction,
through any dimension,
billions of years
since and hence.

I shall not lament
the human, not yet.
There is something
more to come, our hearts
a gold mine
not yet plumbed,
an uncharted sea.

Nothing is gone forever.
If we came from dust
and will return to dust
then we can find our way
into anything.

What we are capable of
is not yet known,
and I praise us now,
in advance.
JOHN POWER | PROMETHEUS, 2012
48” x 76” | OIL ON LINEN
MILLA VAN DER HAVE

AFTER THE EXILE

This gentle void.

Our bodies made of winter and of still-water promises
(like when we said we wouldn’t hurt
what we couldn’t name
and forgot about tongues)

This missing. This white. This youth.

The past is fertile, a nest where I can drag belongings
that I can’t bear to hold to the light:

your back, scaled against the wall, the drawing of your cheeks
around every fallen word

the table, laden, a centrepiece of finished vows

how animals walk, right into the knife and how you claim
they don’t know but they know, I have seen it in their
gait, their low-swinging bellies and the rise
of blood on my skin

my waiting, my waiting

the simple essence of air, the thing you can’t catch,
that other word for death.
Along with your own poems, and through your emphasis on the importance of work in The Poet’s Companion chapter “Writing & Knowing,” in which you mention David Lee’s poem “Loading A Boar” from The Porcine Legacy and The Porcine Canticles, you teach us to have resilience as poets and to take in the sights and smells of our everyday struggles with work, even when we have to struggle to overlook those pigs, the micromanaging bosses who breathe down our necks and bite us on the foot. As George Bernard Shaw once stated, “I learned long ago to never wrestle with a pig, you’ll get dirty, and besides, the pig likes it.” Among Shaw’s pigs are those in bowties who give us a tough time in our professions as either those who get in our face or our supervisors. You show us through your work and your teaching that if writing what you know “worked for [Walt] Whitman and [Emily] Dickinson, for [C.K.] Williams and [Carolyn] Forche and [Rita] Dove,” it can work for us.

Here’s my question for you both, how do work and all your past jobs still influence your own writing, even in the decades after you began teaching in universities?

I don’t think you ever forget your first jobs, the ones that got you where you needed to go, the people that touched you, or as Philip Levine says, “marked you” along the way, the sense of satisfaction you felt at the end of a long day, your first day, your last day, days when things happened you will never forget. Those jobs, those people, those days, have made
their way into my poems and continue to rise up from the past and ask to be considered. And even when [I’m] not writing directly about past jobs, they are there, inside my experience, shaping my worldview.

JOSEPH MILLAR

Work is one of the great mysteries of life, our “love made visible,” as Kahlil Gibran says. So there’s something honorable to becoming what Marx calls a worker among workers. Not trying to be a boss, not complaining (too much) about the labor, trying the best we can to bring humor into a tough day, helping somebody else maybe, trying to get the job done well. Questions of character. So the workplace becomes a deep field of possibility, something realized earlier by poets like Wordsworth and Whitman, and then more recently by James Wright, Adrienne Rich, and Philip Levine. The state of mind of the worker, the attitude of sardonic resignation, sometimes bordering on outrage, the moments of acceptance and even triumph. In addition, craft-wise, when it comes to imagery, there’s something that happens to the tools and materials of our trades as we handle them day after day. They take on a different hue, they become sort of magnetized. Just naming them can help to imbue our poems with life.

RG

Work in this sense does not always mean working for wages; the most difficult work is raising children, in my opinion. How do the responsibilities and stressors of raising children in these times, when it really takes more than one income for the average household to make it, amplify your work—even when you need to fill up your car, visit the gas station, or be waited on in a restaurant, or when you have to call a tradesman over to your home for work on your roof or to clean the gutters. How do you convey the message of empathy for those in service-industry trades within your lessons and advice among the many poets you’ve influenced either directly (as your students) or indirectly through the messages of your poems?

DL

I teach an honors class called “The Poetry of Work” where students look at the history of work in the United States through the lens of poetry, art,
music, film, culture and politics. They read Stud’s Terkel’s groundbreaking book, *Work: People Talk About What They Do All Day and How They Feel About What They Do*. They see how much work has changed over the years, learn about jobs that no longer exist, hear ordinary people talking candidly about what work means to them, how important it is to shaping their lives. They read Joseph’s book, *Overtime*, as well individual poems, songs, and lyrics of domestic, agricultural, and industrial work, sea shanties, African American work songs, folk songs, labor movement songs, Woody Guthrie, Bob Dylan, John Lennon. They view the murals of Diego Rivera and Thomas Hart Benton, the art of Van Gogh, Jacob Lawrence, Courbet, the photographs of Walker Evans. Cultural artifacts and icons include the Farm Security Administration, WPA, *Let Us Now Praise Famous Men*, Rosie the Riveter, Joe Hill, and the Labor Movement. And films such as *Norma Rae*, *Silkwood*, *Swing Shift*. We take field trips to places like a textile mill, a newspaper, machine shop, junkyard, thrift store. They write poems. One in the voice of a worker, one in the language of work, and one that imagines their dream job. As a final project, the students go out in twos into the surrounding community and interview, à la Terkel, people who work—the bagel store owner, the cookie shop cashier, the waitress, the meter reader, the clerk. They transcribe their interviews and create a presentation on these individuals and talk about what they learned. All of them walk away with a profound respect for work and workers, and often reevaluate what it is they want to do with their working lives.

**JM**

Anyone who does a service for me I treat with respect. I used to be one of them (“Tradesmen use rear entrance”). I tip 20 to 25 percent in a restaurant or taxi. I think of it as part of the cost, part of the deal. In terms of child raising, of course this is work that never ends, though the terrain may change. I’m not sure how much influence my poetry has had on my students, maybe some. Though I always encourage them to approach their own writing in a workmanlike manner: show up, sit down, start writing. I encourage them to write about what they know, images and characters, relationships they have experienced, familial and otherwise. At times I encourage them to let their imaginations go free, but mostly I
suggest they keep grounded in the world of their own experience, where their deepest feelings are to be found.

**RG**

*What is your advice to the single mom or single dad who has a passion to create art though has to work multiple jobs to support and raise their kid(s)?*

**DL**

When I was working as a single mother I found times between time to write—nap time, waiting for my daughter to get out of school, standing in line at the bank. I got up early when the house was quiet, or after bedtime. If you want it bad enough and are willing and able to sacrifice, there is usually a way.

**JM**

I would say try to keep the art close to your person—whether it’s a notebook or sketch pad, harmonica, etc. So you can touch it when you have a free moment. I used to write poems in the cab of my telephone truck. Try to be around other artists when you can—take a class if you have to, even if you’re more advanced than the other students. It can provide you with helpful deadlines and encouragement. Read (or otherwise make yourself available to) work that’s currently being done in your field, stay connected to your contemporaries.

**RG**

*You have told me in the past, “You can say you won’t write about this or that, though when we sit down to work, the poem that wants to be written will be written.” You both also taught me through The Poet’s Companion and through your own work that I can write about anything. Do you gravitate to reading the poetry of those who write about the complexities of work, and when was the moment you realized you could write about work—as Larry Levis has said, “Out here, I can say anything?”*

**DL**

I love many kinds of poetry, am drawn to a variety of subjects and styles, but yes, am especially interested in the poetry of work. The problem is,
there aren’t so many poems about work, or art, or music. It’s not usually the first thing someone thinks about when writing a poem, but it’s an un-mined river of gold.

**JM**

I’ve generally been open to whatever is present in my life. It’s where I’ve gotten most of my material, whether remembered or happening in the moment. By the same token, I believe that anything we can fully imagine we can make into a poem. Some of us are better at this than others. Sometimes in the process of revision, it’s happened that the poem will wander into some side street and never come back, so that its whole thrust is changed. Surprise is one of our greatest “weapons” as poets, in these days of free verse.

**RG**

*From The Review Review interview that took place on December 2017 with Raleigh Review editors, it is clear you have influenced so many, and this magazine in particular is now contributing to the worldwide literary community. How would you like to see Raleigh Review grow in the future?*

**DL**

The magazine itself has grown so much since its first edition and has continued to grow in new and surprising ways, combining the local with the global, including art in its pages as well as fiction, poetry, and reviews. One thing we’ve all been thinking about is how we could create a community venue for readers and writers of all ages, artists of every stripe, to meet and mingle, take a workshop, listen to a reading or talk, view artwork, listen to music. Maybe simply sit on a couch under a lamp and read a book or write a poem. It’s a dream I think every community has—or maybe doesn’t even know they have until they walk in and feel it. ♦️
ANY ACT OF WRITING is always an act of revisiting, living twice, but in All Its Charms, the third collection from poet Keetje Kuipers out from BOA Press, this act of revisiting feels less like nostalgia of self and more nostalgia for what’s to come. The collection opens with Kuipers revisiting her own becoming in the landscape of her childhood, where she walks the reader through a body of nature she knows intimately: “hillside of purple vetch, dead butterflies in my teeth, early spring meadowlark,” and then arrives at the third poem in the collection, “The elk my father shot,” which shows a reverence for the natural world and its endless cycles. This poem is the first to directly mirror the natural world with the speaker’s decision to have a baby by conjuring what a woman and Mother Nature can: a new cycle.

This collection doesn’t represent a before-and-after idea of motherhood, but instead a view of motherhood where time is all at once. Suddenly, with a daughter, Kuipers counts time as a mixture of past, present, and future happening simultaneously. The final lines in “Anemoia” reveal this triple plane: “But if she doesn’t/learn nostalgia now, how will I ever teach her/regret? I have to get her ready for the future.” The lines show Kuipers’ previous regrets, her daughter’s learning, and her future
knowledge. Following soon after, in “In the Yard I Lie on My Back and Dream of Turtles,” she says, “She is making something new/of me, something to someday burn/only in the quiet ditch of her memory.” This part of the poem nods to synchronous growth that eventually reduces in flame. Time moves between these poems, only a few pages apart, from the steadiness of now to an inevitable burnout. In the poem, we recognize a mother’s desperateness to teach. When Kuipers discusses her future wife later in the collection, after having her daughter and trying for a second child, Kuipers writes in “Told You So,” “We spend all these years wanting, and then one day—sudden/as a lamp set to a timer—we have.” As if the “have” is inevitable, a suddenness, an all-at-once.

And yet Kuipers learns a whole newness from the birth and growth of her daughter. Through her new knowledge, she reckons with a version of America in the poem “Self-Care at the Playground,” which documents the death of Philando Castile. While the speaker is at the playground with her daughter, “the small screen” in her pocket waits to show her another loss of life. She says in the poem, “her body/participating in a kind of joy/uncomfortable for the rest of us,” which feels especially timely and almost accusatory of the compartmentalization of our lives. Here, Kuipers acknowledges, for one of the only times in the collection, the effects the outside world of other human interaction, news stories, and injustices has on the life of her child.

In other ways, the natural world, past and current lovers, and the danger of everyday objects creep into Kuipers’ fears for her daughter, but “Self-Care at the Playground” stands out as a singular reckoning with the world of humans outside of her mostly female family: wife, aunts, grandmothers, mothers. The poem sits almost exactly halfway between the start and completion of the collection, forcing the reader to face Castile’s death as a collective injustice. It also leads the reader deeper into the struggle of the new couple’s consideration and trials for a second child, making birth and death less about choice than the first half of the book. In the first half, the speaker deliberately picks the child’s father from a series of descriptors in a clinic. Kuipers seems more invested in the choice of having children in the second half of the book, particularly in transition from musing on the natural world to the inequity of the human world. How does the view of Castile’s death impact the decision
to bring children into the world? This question on the natural order seems distinctively different than the first half of the book.

At first, the natural world is abundance, something thriving and decaying beyond Kuipers’ interaction, but after the baby is born, the natural world becomes something all women inherit. In the poem “Great Lakes” the final resounding lines are, “But my aunt needs me to believe in the glass/and the blood, and her daughter’s body/a thing unidentifiable, a thing none of us/had really seen in years. She needs me to understand/that her pain is water as far as the eye can see.” Coming to represent the women of her family, the intimacy between Kuipers and her wife, as well as between this new mother and daughter in moments of breastfeeding, the organic and natural metaphors truly enhance the collection’s lack of segmenting, sections, or discontinuity. Instead, like nature, Kuipers is living in an all-at-once, similar to how the reader experiences the poems as an act of bending time without a strict before and after. By doing this, Kuipers calls us to question our own natural cycles, our own beliefs of what is expected, continuous, acceptable because of repetition.

So many of these poems are ekphrastic in nature, doting on objects either overlooked or relegated to stages of life. What’s most interesting about these poems is that they don’t slow the narrative down but give glimpses towards the care of a single moment. In this way, Kuipers removes the reader from a regular routine, from getting too comfortable in cycles. These poems include “Still Life with Nursing Bra,” “Still Life with Small Objects of Perfect Choking Size,” “Landscape with Ocean and Nearly Dead Dog,” “Landscape with Child,” “Still Life with Caviar and Crayons,” and “Still Life with Beauty Berries and Two Theories of Time.” While Kuipers sets up the idea that time exists concurrently, these poems give life to a partiality, dependent on the movement of time but so invested in this singular moment. What I notice most about All Its Charms is both a longing to document an entire incantation but also a discovery of delights through each seemingly small element involved in making something larger than ourselves. How does someone look at a life without being witness to the grief and gratitude nature has made of it? This tenderness and roughness, pure and painful, seems to be part of the transformation each charm begets on mother and child.
SARAH ANDERSON holds an MFA in poetry from the Warren Wilson Program for Writers. She has 15 years of high school teaching experience. With her husband, she owns and operates the Word Barn in Exeter, New Hampshire, a gathering space for literary and musical events, where she runs a reading series (the Silo Series) as well as writing workshops. Her poems have appeared in various journals, including North American Review, Off the Coast, the Cafe Review, and December, and she was a finalist in contests run by The Pinch, North American Review, and Black Lawrence Press. She has poems forthcoming in Driftwood Press Literary Magazine.

DEREK BERRY is the author of the novel Heavens & Liars of Lickskillet County (PRA, 2016). They are the recipient of the Emrys Poetry Prize, KA-KALAK Poetry Prize, and Emmett Robinson Poetry Prize. Their recent work has appeared in the Beloit Poetry Journal, Gigantic Sequins, Broken Plate, BOAAT, Yemassee, and elsewhere. They live in Aiken, South Carolina, where they work in a Cold War Historic Curation Facility.

ALLISON BLEVINS received her MFA at Queens University of Charlotte and is a lecturer for the Women’s Studies Program at Pittsburg State University and the Department of English and Philosophy at Missouri Southern State University. Her work has appeared in such journals as Mid-American Review, the minnesota review, Nimrod International Journal, Sinister Wisdom, and Josephine Quarterly. She is the author of the chapbooks Letters to Joan (2019) and A Season for Speaking (2019), part of the Robin Becker Series. Her chapbook Susurration is forthcoming in 2019. She lives in Missouri with her wife and three children, where she co-organizes the Downtown Poetry reading series and is Editor-in-Chief of Harbor Review. www.allisonblevins.com.

EMMA BOLDEN is the author of House Is an Enigma (Southeast Missouri State University Press), medi(t)ations (Noctuary Press) and Maleficae (GenPop Books). She received a 2017 Creative Writing Fellowship from the National Endowment for the Arts. A Barthelme Prize and Spoon River Poetry Review Editor’s Prize winner, her work has appeared in The Best American Poetry, The Best Small Fictions, and Poetry Daily, as well as such journals as the Mississippi Review, The Rumpus, StoryQuarterly, Prairie Schooner, New Madrid, TriQuarterly, Conduit, the Beloit Poetry Journal, and the Massachusetts Review. She currently serves as Associate Editor-in-Chief of Tupelo Quarterly.

CHANEL BRENNER is the author of Vanilla Milk: a memoir told in poems (Silver Birch Press, 2014), which was a finalist for the 2016 Independent Book Awards and honorable mention in the 2014 Eric Hoffer awards. Her poems have appeared in New Ohio Review, Poet Lore, Rattle, Muzzle Magazine, Pittsburgh Poetry Review, Spry Literary Journal, Barrow Street, Salamander, Spoon River Poetry Review, and others. Her poem, “July 28th, 2012” won first prize in The Write Place at the Write Time’s contest, judged by Ellen Bass. In 2018, she was nominated for a Best of the Net.

KIERSTIN BRIDGER is a Colorado writer and author of Demimonde (Lithic Press), winner of the 2017 Women Writing the West’s Willa Award. She is also author of a full collection, All Ember (Urban Farmhouse Press). Winner of the Mark Fischer Poetry Prize, the 2015 ACC Writer’s Studio award, and short-listed for the Manchester Poetry Competition in the UK, she earned her MFA at Pacific University. Kierstnbridgetor.com

CAYLIN CAPRA-THOMAS’s second chapbook, Inside My Electric City, is available through YesYes Books. The winner of the 2018 Fairy Tale Review Award in Poetry, she has published poems in journals including 32 Poems, Hayden’s Ferry Review, New England Review, Bennington Re-
view, Copper Nickel, and elsewhere. She lives in Idyllwild, California, where she is poet-in-residence at Idyllwild Arts Academy.

**WHITNEY COLLINS** is the winner of a 2020 Pushcart Prize. Her stories have appeared in *Ninth Letter, Southeast Review, Grist, The Pinch, Lumina, Laurel Review, Quarter After Eight,* and *Moon City Review,* among others. Her flash horror will appear in Catapult’s upcoming *Tiny Nightmares* anthology, and her forthcoming story collection, which won the 2019 Mary McCarthy Prize, will be published by Sarabande Books in 2021. She lives in Kentucky with her husband and sons.

**KEVIN COYNE** is from Boston. He is currently an MFA candidate in poetry at North Carolina State University and was the winner of the 2018 NCSU Poetry Contest. His work can be found in *American Poetry Journal, Dappled Things,* and *the Susquehanna Review,* and he can be found at a dive ranting about the Celtics.

**GERI DIGIORNO,** Sonoma Poet Laureate (2006-2007) and artist, is founder and director of the Petaluma Poetry Walk. She studied art at College of San Mateo, Solano College, Sonoma College, and Santa Rosa Junior College, and has worked at the homeless shelter in Petaluma teaching poetry and collage.

**HANNAH DOW** is the author of *Rosarium* (Acre Books, 2018). Her poems have appeared or are forthcoming in the *Southern Review, Image,* and the *Cincinnati Review,* among others. She has received awards and scholarships from the Sewanee Writers Conference and Bread Loaf Orion. Hannah is the editor-in-chief of *Tinderbox Poetry Journal,* an Assistant Poetry Editor for *Memorious,* and reads for *Ploughshares.*

**SUZANNE GROVE** is a graduate of the University of Pittsburgh and received the J. Stanton Carson Grant for Excellence in Writing while studying at Robert Morris University. Her poetry appears in the *Adirondack Review, the Penn Review,* and *Rust + Matb.* She currently serves as the short fiction editor for *CRAFT* literary magazine.

**JULES HOGAN** grew up in the Blue Ridge but now lives in Arizona and is pursuing an MFA in fiction at Arizona State University. Stories have appeared in *Appalachian Heritage,* the *Sonora Review,* *Bull: Men’s Fiction,* and others. In 2017, Jules won the Coker Student Prize in Fiction from the South Carolina Academy of Authors. Follow on twitter at @seektheyonder for puns, fun facts, and updates on Atticus, the three-legged one-eyed cat.

**DORIANNE LAUX**’s most recent collection is *Only As the Day Is Long: New and Selected,* WW Norton. She is also author of *The Book of Men,* winner of the Paterson Poetry Prize, and *Facts about the Moon,* winner of the Oregon Book Award. She teaches poetry at North Carolina State and Pacific University.

**CAMERON MCGILL** is a writer, an educator, a musician, and the poetry editor of *Blood Orange Review.* His poems have appeared or are forthcoming in the *American Poetry Review, the Beloit Poetry Journal, Mid-American Review, Sonora Review,* and elsewhere. His chapbook, *Meridians,* is forthcoming in winter 2019 from Willow Springs Books. He holds an MFA in creative writing from the University of Idaho and teaches in the English Department at Washington State University, where he is co-director of the Visiting Writer Series. His work lives at cameronmcgill.com.

**SARAH MESSER** has published four books, most recently, *Dress Made of Mice.* She teaches in the Residential College at the University of Michigan, and works at White Lotus Farms in Ann Arbor, Michigan.

**JOSEPH MILLAR**’s fourth collection, *Kingdom,* was published by Carnegie Mellon in 2017. His poems have won fellowships from the Guggenheim Foundation and the NEA. He teaches in North Carolina State’s and Pacific University’s MFA programs.
EMILY NASON is from Columbia, South Carolina, and is currently an MFA candidate in poetry at the University of Virginia. Her work has appeared in the Kenyon Review, Georgia Review, Indiana Review, Ninth Letter, and elsewhere.

JODI NOWOWIEJSKI lives in a suburb of Columbus, Ohio. When she’s not teaching, reading, or writing, she loves spending time with family, and enjoying the outdoors.

JANUARY PEARSON lives in Southern California with her husband and two daughters. She teaches English composition classes at Purdue Global University. Her poems have appeared or are forthcoming in publications such as Notre Dame Review, Atlanta Review, Valparaiso Literary Review, Third Wednesday, Journal of American Poetry, and the Cape Rock Review.

Growing up in New York City, JOHN POWER’s artistic vision was shaped by visits to the Metropolitan Museum, the Museum of Modern Art and the lively art scene that only New York could offer. He studied there both at the Art Student’s League and the School of Visual Arts. At the League he studied drawing with the master draughtsman Gustav Rehberger, instilling in him a love of the human figure as a vehicle of expression. In the mid-eighties he moved to New Jersey, where he raised a family and started exhibiting with the Blackwell St. Artists. He now devotes himself full time to art, teaches figure drawing at the Morris County Art Association and has his studio in East Orange, New Jersey. His work is represented in both corporate and private art collections, most recently in the corporate collection of the Federal Reserve Bank of New York.

JACOB RIVERS currently serves as the Assistant to the Director of the Frost Place in Franconia, New Hampshire, and is an MFA candidate at New England College. His poems appear or are forthcoming in the Cortland Review, Storm Cellar, and elsewhere. He is the poetry editor for Malasaña.

JOHN SAAD lives and works in Birmingham, Alabama. His chapbook, Longleaf, was the winner of the Hopper Poetry Prize and was published in 2017 through Green Writers Press.

BUKU SARKAR is a writer and photographer who has lived between Calcutta and New York. Her written work has appeared in N+1, Threepenny Review, Huffington Post, Conde Naste, and elsewhere. Her photographs have appeared in the New York Times and Documentum. She is currently working on a collection of short stories about Indians in New York and a photo project with the slum dwellers of the Park Circus Basti, the largest Muslim slum in Calcutta.

TALI ROSE TREECE holds an MFA in writing from Pacific University and is currently working on a collection of short stories, as well as a novel. She has work published or forthcoming in the Saturday Evening Post, Litro, Bayou Magazine, The Round, and elsewhere. In addition to writing and freelance editing work, she teaches first grade in Texas, where she lives with her husband and pup and an ever-increasing number of house plants and books.

MILLA VAN DER HAVE is a Gemini. She writes poems and short stories and is currently knee-deep in a novel. Her poetry has appeared in Whale Road Review, After the Pause, and Cherry Tree among others. She is the author of Ghosts of Old Virginny (2015, Aldrich Press), a chapbook about Virginia City, Nevada. Milla lives in the Netherlands, with her wife and two rabbits.

ELISABET VELASQUEZ is a Boricua Writer from Bushwick, Brooklyn. Her work has been fea-
tured in *Muzzle Magazine, Winter Tangerine, Centro Vices, Latina Magazine, We Are Mitú, Tidal*, and more. She is a 2017 Poets House Fellow and the 2017 winner of Button Poetry Video Poetry Contest. She is a 2019 Latinx Fellowship recipient of the Frost Place. Her work is forthcoming in Martín Espada’s anthology *What Saves Us: Poems of Empathy and Outrage in the Age of Trump* and *The BreakBeats Poets Volume 4: LatiNEXT*.

**PATRICK WHITFILL**’s poems appear or will appear in the *Threepenny Review, Shenandoah, the Kenyon Review Online, Cherry Tree, West Branch*, and other journals. Currently, he lives in South Carolina and teaches at Wofford College.