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WHERE I BELONG

By

Joy E. Weitzel

THESIS

Submitted to
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In partial fulfillment of the requirements
For the degree of

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SIGNATURE APPROVAL FORM

Title of Thesis: WHERE I BELONG

This thesis by __Joy Weitzel__ is recommended for approval by the student's Thesis Committee and Department Head in the Department of __English__ and by the Assistant Provost of Graduate Education and Research.

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ABSTRACT

WHERE I BELONG

By

Joy E. Weitzel

This project compiled research of my family history to present an honest and creative portrayal of my family's journey, connecting the stories of my ancestors to the common struggle, movement, and growth of humanity. The Duckworth's were farmers who came to West Virginia from Maryland in the 1830s. Five pieces follow the course of the Duckworths, who witnessed the growth of industrialism, the toils of migration, the extension of the B&O railroad, and the eruption of the American Civil War. The lives described in this thesis are the patriarchs of the Duckworth family, beginning with Henry Duckworth migrating to West Virginia due to the coal mining industry overtaking his home and continues with George Duckworth, the focus shifting to creating something tangible of his life for future generations. Place becomes central to the life of Ephraim Duckworth who not only worked the land but also fought in the Civil War. Progressing further in time, Hansford Duckworth moves off the farm and becomes more informed of the stories that are creating the United States and creating him as well. The final "creation" of Lowell Farrell Duckworth once again aims at truly experiencing his past life by examining tangible photos that he left behind. Through each of these essays, I was able to evoke the essence of my family and place them into the grand narrative of human existence. Ultimately, by combining lyricism and biography, I was able to see my own context in the history of my family and my family's context in history.

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2014

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This thesis follows the format prescribed by the *MLA Style Manual* and the Department of English.

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INTRODUCTION

Family history reveals the ties within humanity, the connections between nature and farmer, neighbor and neighbor. This collection of five essays attempted to recreate the lives of Duckworth ancestors from 1830 to 1950 in West Virginia. Locating the intimate details of an individual's life proved difficult when the only information left behind formed a scant outline of who that person was. I could know where people were, what they did, how old they were when they died, when they married, but I could not intimately know the workings of their mind, their personality, how I look like them or act like them, or what they saw in battle or on the road. Family history opens a door to the life of a real person but doesn't let one cross the threshold.

Turning my attention to occupational history, such as farming, and the natural world allowed me to be able to more fully grasp the significance of my ancestors in my life and in the larger course of history. Gathering a sense of the place where my ancestors lived was crucial to creating pictures of their lives. These people, my ancestors, had breath, voice, beating hearts, and laughter. If they were once real, they can be real again on the page of a story, as a mental projection, or as a connection that bound me to the Duckworth family and to West Virginia, their home for nearly 100 years.

With a knowledge of what surrounded them, whether physical surroundings or historical events, their lives were able to be developed and given meaning by using lyricism and speculation. Biography became poetic, and this freedom of prose allowed these characters to bloom and take shape, finding the similarities that have been passed down through generations. Further, these lives were recreated on the page using myself

as a model and by considering what I still have from these people that lived long ago. With this knowledge, I was able to go forward and honestly portray the essence of my ancestors, connecting myself to them. Instead of finding my place among them, they found their place in me, in what I wrote and how I view their lives.

Robert Root, transcriber of *"Time by Moments Steals Away:" Journal of Ruth Douglass* and author of *Recovering Ruth*, discovered through his research of Ruth Douglass that he "had accidentally become the custodian of her identity…her life and her experience needed to be remembered" (*Recovering Ruth* 20). He was so intertwined with Ruth that he felt it was his duty to recreate her as it is my duty to recreate the members of my family. Because my relation to my ancestors is through blood, my stories seek to preserve their identity, give them meaning, so others may remember their lives, and reflect on the voices of the past.

I am connected to the Duckworth family through my father; it is my maiden name. The Duckworth's have appeared in American archival records dating back to the 1600s, when a John Duckworth came to New Jersey as an indentured servant. They stayed in New Jersey and Virginia for a few generations before moving west to Allegany County, Maryland during the time of the American Revolution.

In Maryland during the 1830s, the Duckworth family farmed in the area known as George's Creek, near Cumberland and Lonaconing. With the rise of steam power, coal became a profitable commodity for northern mills and industries, drawing in buyers and companies that would mine the Maryland mountains in Allegany and Garrett Counties. This brought in immigrants and other workers who made a living working in the mines and living in the company towns. Katherine Harvey, author of *Best Dressed Miners: Life*

in the Maryland Coal Region, 1835 – 1910, describes the area and the rise of the coal mining industry in Allegany and Garrett Counties. From the time the Duckworth's first settled in Maryland around 1790, the landscape drastically changed as farmland was sold and mined for coal throughout the early 1800s. Though there is no record of a Duckworth working in the Maryland mines, it can be assumed that the family was affected by them, which could have caused them to move to western Virginia.

The nature of migration and the emotions attached to migration became central to the first piece, "Coal Land," that dwells on coal as the cause of human migration. As the resources for farmers dwindled in Maryland, farmers picked up and moved, looking for a landscape that was more untouched and wild, land that was cheap and could be cultivated. There is a force, a reason, that moves animals and humans, and sometimes that force is destructive and cruel, or migration itself is cruel. The piece runs in parallels with a view from the sky, the earth, and below the earth, attempting to find the force that causes everything to shift and, yet, stay the same.

As a technique to find meaning in the life of Henry Duckworth, the focal ancestor of "Coal Land," I braided several segments together—coal mining, geese migration, and farming. Because I do not know the specifics of Henry's life, I was able to look around at what most likely surrounded him. Alberto Rios wrote a poem entitled, "Some Extensions on the Sovereignty of Science." In a poem that discusses kidney transplants, losing weight, glaciers, and the human ear, Rios tells his readers that it is perhaps better to "turn away from the explosion." The explosion will already attract others, who will hear the bang and turn to look at the mushroom cloud that rises from it:

But who is looking

> The other way? Nature, that magician and author of loud sounds,
> Zookeeper and cook, electrician and provocateur—
>
> Maybe these events are Nature's sleight of hand, and the real
> Thing that's happening is in the other hand,
>
> Or behind or above or below or inside us. (Rios)

It is not always the explosion, the bright light, the life, that should draw our attention, but what that explosion illuminates—coal and geese. Using these two ideas along with brief glimpses of Henry, I could "feel the movement of the earth as it rotates and the passing away of years." The movement that happens with humanity and nature is continuous and monotonous, and though it may be ugly at times, it is beautiful. As time moves and humanity moves, nostalgia and memory flood back, and the knowledge, or realization, of the same constant movement makes us feel all right.

The monotonous movement of memory and time continues with the life of George Duckworth. George moved his family, including his father, Henry, to West Virginia in the 1840s. He settled near Philippi in Barbour County before the onset of the Civil War. George was another farmer, another obscure person with little to his memory except census records and a gravestone. "An Introduction at the Cemetery" attempts to connect myself with the past through physical description and a journey to a cemetery, dwelling on my reasons for doing family history, which were to create a life for each patriarchal ancestor. A meditation recreates George's life through a conversation, as if my voice would bring his body out of the past.

This meditation and conversation with George was attainable by researching place and past. In *Recovering Ruth*, Root noted, "To recover an individual life you must recover the individual's world. They are inseparable; they dwell in one another" (xvi).

Archival records and genealogical research served as general outlines for George Duckworth's life, but his life was further uncovered by experiencing the place he lived and wondering about the natural world. Through the combination of biography and lyricism, I grappled with the details of his life. Annie Dillard, author of *Pilgrim at Tinker Creek*, wrote from a sense of wonder in the surrounding world in the pursuit of understanding life: "Some unwonted, taught pride diverts us from our original intent, which is to explore the neighborhood, view the landscape, to discover at least *where* it is that we have been so startlingly set down, if we can't learn why" (14). As Dillard sought to find her place in the natural world by wondering about praying mantises and muskrats, I also sought to discover my place in my family history, looking at the historical and natural landscape and wondering *why*. The past holds our wonder and awe as we seek to connect to it, to see the world before the changes, before time can take effect. This is part of my intrigue in genealogy; I want to see George and actually know him, making his "feet move over the narrow trails that pass between cedar and hemlock."

This recreation becomes more of a reality with the character of Ephraim in "Almost Heaven," where Ephraim Duckworth writes, or speaks, from his own experience in the three most significant places of his life—Philippi, the Civil War, and Coon Creek. Each space creates his character and voice as he ages and grows, holding onto the good and facing the ugly in a place that has been termed "almost heaven" by the lyrics of John Denver. The mountains have served as the graves of Civil War soldiers, they have been torn down by the logging industry, and yet they are the wonderful, beautiful home of farmers that value their place in this country and the land upon which they live. Several of the images I wrote about have death-like undertones that twist and confuse the piece

and the reader. In the essay, the mountain ridges "stick out like the bones of the starving dogs that trot down the road and sleep beneath the edge of my roof, trying to hide away from the sun." Further, the earth is tied to the anatomy of the body that can be climbed and conquered: "I have torn this rock from the depths, broken the mountain's back, and claimed its fallen corpse as my home." Words like *bones* and *corpse* surround the bulk of the piece, which is the Battle of McDowell, Virginia, and fittingly contextualize the significance of the Civil War, its wrath and destruction in one of our country's beautiful places.

The place of West Virginia was central to the creation of each character and essay. Dillard's work served as an inspiration for the natural and pastoral as well as a model for lyrical language with her vivid description of life in the Appalachian Mountains and woods. She chooses words that not only describe the scene but also cause the reader to feel the rhythm of her world through the meditative tone she renders throughout the piece. Her trek through the seasons captures the sounds of alliteration and the stresses of syllables as well as plays with the different parts of speech. In one of her meditations on the creek, she alliterates the evening with *s* sounds: "On windless summer evenings I stalk the creek bank or straddle the sycamore log in absolute stillness, watching for muskrats" (22). Using internal and external *s* sounds, Dillard, in a sense, hushes her world with *windless*, *summer*, *stalk*, *straddle*, *sycamore*, *absolute stillness*, and *muskrats*. Language, here, has broken out of its role of mere telling and adds another dimension to this scene, making it quiet and peaceful. The sound of the sentence becomes the breeze that ripples the surface of the creek.

Through the language of Tinker Creek, Nature was telling its beautiful and ugly story through the life that happens in the Appalachian Mountains. That life can be understood through the tangibility of analogy. Dillard brings us into a space using metaphor that is concrete as well as odd and intriguing. “In these Appalachians we have found a coal bed with 120 seams, meaning 120 forests that just happened to fall into water, heaped like corpses in drawers” (129). Dillard lyricizes research and facts here by not only hinting at the process by which coal forms in the ground, but also giving the reader an idea of decomposition and death. It is a stunning visual of trees becoming dead bodies, lying flat together in a constricted space.

Beyond forming a sense of place, these essays also sought to create stories for my family, connecting with land and with time. In the essay, “In West Virginia,” Hansford and Etta Duckworth begin their life together in Coon Creek, in the schoolhouse, where past scholars left their marks on the walls. Coming from farming families, Hansford began his carrier as a farmer, though later he became a stone mason and an engineer in the early 1900s. As can be seen, the Duckworth family begins to move off the farm and into the towns where more people move and have their lives. Trains and technology, the outside world, influenced their way of life and their way of thinking, shaping who they were and are. The essay, “In West Virginia,” looks at the years and overlaps events with time. History has created stories, which creates meaningful lives: “The current will move as they move, time no longer a factor in anything except the sun that shifts from dawn to noon to dusk. As they pull their boat ashore, they will say nothing, but they will think about their mother’s name in the walls of the old schoolhouse.” The schoolhouse, time, and an elephant become the central part of this essay as the meaning of and

decomposition of our stories and history becomes obscured with the facts and details of a nation.

Even as this thesis attempted to cement a history of my family, to uncover stories and new realizations of the past, it also revealed the fleetness of time and its inability to be nailed down. The past will never be truly grasped and felt the way the present is, similar to eyesight, similar to the old photographs that have been passed down to grandchildren and great grandchildren. So much changes in one hundred years: "What I want to do, then, is add time to the texture, paint the landscape on an unrolling scroll, and see the giant relief globe spinning on its stand" (Dillard 141). To see the constant movement and effect of time on a landscape and a person with our waking eyes is one of the attractions of nature and family history; it is something we long to grasp and watch like placing a mirror in "space so that it is traveling faster than the speed of light (there's the rub). Then you can look in the mirror and watch all the earth's previous history unfolding as on a movie screen" (Dillard 143). This, of course, is not possible, and it would most likely make us sad and miss what we no longer have.

Time is cruel in that it cannot be rewound or seen on a screen; it does not allow us to truly experience history, though bits of it may be passed down through journals and photographs. These bits are just part of the full story, and one is left questioning what happened outside of the frame. After gathering the pieces in the dustpan can one speculate on the story: "how you slept beneath a cotton quilt made by your mother, how you shot squirrels out of trees with one arm, how you read books about the wooly sedge, the spring peeper, and the northern red salamander that breathes through its skin." These details are linked to the time and space of the individual, dying as he or she dies. There is

a cruelty about nature and time that Dillard grapples with and questions. Nature and time have a way of abruptly ending life, almost sinister in its intent. Death is what ends life, changes nature, and ends time. Dillard realizes "The world has signed a pact with the devil; it had to. It is a covenant to which every thing, even every hydrogen atom, is bound. The terms are clear: if you want to live, you have to die" (183). Everything is affected by this "pact" even the stories of humanity. Humanity has not escaped the pact of death; therefore, it can only wonder what happened before death claimed its lives.

This collection ends with Lowell Farrell Duckworth, my great-grandfather, and the photographs he left behind that tell a partial story of his life in the early 1900s. As time stands still in the photograph, elements of the photograph and the camera have changed and progressed throughout history. The essay "The Old Kodak" breaks down elements of the camera similar to Fabio Morabito in his work that romanticizes ordinary tools such as oil; Morabito wonders about what their properties mean and do. The camera has a potential of capturing light in order to create a picture of time. Time is converted as "Light passes through the lens, curved glass, redirected and bent; the image passes through unscathed. Metal panes close over the glass, stopping the light for a brief moment, enough time for absorption and darkness. In this dark place, the salt and silver begin to work, leaving an imprint of the reflected light on a piece of paper." The lens and the light work together along with chemicals as if it were their job to instantly paint the photograph—each element doing its part in the process, working like a human body to function and produce a result.

In Morabito's essay, "Oil," he employs lyrical language to abstract upon the properties of oil. He does this through personifying oil and giving it humanlike qualities:

"Oil is water that has lost its get up and go, its cheeky forward drive … It is water that is weak at the knees" (221). Oil is a body, sluggish and unmotivated. Morabito also looks at what oil can do: "The oil that covers over a certain material, that lubricates it—a pipe or whatever—is subtly duplicating it, like an echo. It extends it microscopically in order to take away its claws and to help it relax" (Morabito 222). The definition of oil twists here through Morabito's choice of words, which renders oil's purpose concretely as a way to meditate further on human interaction with oil and what that interaction, in turn, says about humanity. By observing the different elements of something, one tries to give it definition and purpose within the context of humanity and the world. Each part of the meditated subject adds dimensions and complexities that offer a reflection on the hand that creates it and the hand that uses it.

Each life described offers something to be held onto, something concrete, something that can be known. Ideas like migration, wonder, place, story, and time are all grand ways of discovering the little things about each life that make them meaningful. For me, family history is not just about looking at census records on Ancestry.com, it is finding what I can take from each life and making it mine. This name, Duckworth, belongs to me as it belonged to all the men in this collection. I have created stories for this name, honest stories of how I view their lives, the words of the past, and the place they lived: West Virginia. However, their purpose in my life became more important to the task of creating this collection of biographical essays than my place in their home. Perhaps the initial question was not what I was asking after all. It is not *where* I belong; it is *why* I belong.

COAL LAND

Coal: A combustible black sedimentary rock occurring in layers and veins. A producer of electricity and heat for refining metals. A formation of dead plant matter pressed beneath the surface of the earth; a transformation of old swamps and forests condensed and evolved from peat to lignite to sub-bituminous to black bituminous to hard, glossy anthracite. Laid out in the pit, it burns from red to gray ash, and atop the grill, rib-eyes sizzle and pop, insides cooking to medium-rare.

This dark dust boomed the Industrial Age, powering steamboats up and down rivers and across oceans. It burned in furnaces smelting iron ore. It fueled the silver dollars with the shield-bearing eagle in worn pockets. It was an inexhaustible resource until men found it could be exhausted. Calloused hands stripped coal from the earth in dark shafts or picked at exposed edges and beds. Hands that grasped and ate sandwiches of bread and venison wrapped in paper, in bark, in embroidered handkerchiefs, three pink initials hugging the miner's lunch.

It called men to work the mountain and to make strained muscles push the black rock in wooden carts, heaving out their tons and pounds in heaps. Men were colored with the dust of their prize, living in the veins by the light of lanterns. They were accustomed to the sound of hammers driving wedges into cracks and fissures. Pounding and tapping the cold walls of the earth, men moved as dark blocks tumbled forth, adding to their piles and tons and pounds. They loaded the burden and followed the flames of their fires to open air on the side of the mountain, where their pupils contracted like bats in the sunlight.

* * *

The leaves turn. You can smell it—the cut fields, the drooping sunflowers, the dying trees. It is the season of the harvest, the time when the earth hushes the oaks and bears and squirrels with the whistle of wings and the resonant call of the great migrators.

Every year, the pattern repeats—the constant north-south movement. They know when it is coming; they, perhaps, are the first to know. They take flight, following the Pacific, Central, Mississippi, and Atlantic flyways established by their ancestors. They leave their frozen homes in the arctic, on lakes in the Canadian Shield, along the shores of Hudson Bay. They search for food in the prairies, lakes, golf courses, city parks of southern Canada, the U. S., and Mexico. The migrators stop and gather followers, growing to flocks of 30 to 100 birds, eating corn, clover, and cattails. At an altitude of 2,000 feet, a V-shape forms and morphs as a new bird takes the lead, looking for a land with water and shoots of winter wheat.

* * *

Henry was born on September 5, 1779, in Burlington, New Jersey, during America's war for independence, one of ten children. Aaron Duckworth, Henry's father, had little inheritance as the second son. Aaron sought land far away from the growing populations of the east, so he removed to the unexplored west that offered unclaimed land and boundless forests: free wildness that spread from the sky to beneath crusty layers on the edge of the Appalachians waiting for the shovel to dig and ax to chop, a man staking a claim into the core of the earth.

He settled in counties whose lots would be set aside for those who fought in the American Revolution, though there was no record of him ever taking up a Yankee

musket. The land was a pension, a reward, for fighting. But he settled there, a squatter, arriving before soldiers did, while east of the Appalachians, red coats and blue coats threw bullets into bleeding hearts, and white sails fanned the coast.

* * *

Allegany County, Maryland, in 1830 bloomed forests across rough mountainsides. From Frostburg to Westernport, yellow birch, sugar maple, and eastern hemlock spread over a single road scarcely wide enough to allow wagons to pass, and small bridges crossed over creeks. George's Creek and the great Potomac rambled and rushed, dissecting the space between ridges.

This was Maryland's western frontier settled by farmers, hunters, and woodsmen with names like Duckworth, Dye, Browning, Green, and Grove —men searching for soft soil and venison. They built their houses in crevices left by moving mountains and prepared to stay, clearing three or four acres to plant corn, pumpkins, cucumbers with wooden plows while seeds of wheat and barley were spread amongst the standing stalks and stubble, furnishing family and farm, human and animal. The uneven land became their home as they hacked greenbrier vines that twisted and grasped in thorny thickets, tendrils clinging to bark and branches, while above the wild grape swung from tree to tree, wrapping its woody skin around the neck of its perch awaiting the farmer's final ax.

The small fields revealed dark, combustible rocks, but these men weren't miners. They were providers and mountain men, living on their grain and livestock between the Dan and Savage Mountains, within the twenty-five mile strip between the Potomac in Piedmont to the Pennsylvania state border.

They lived atop the Big Vein.

Fourteen feet thick, the Big Vein encouraged men to work the ground. They found traces of coal on their small farms, black rock pushing out of the earth's surface like grass and mountain laurel, the poisonous evergreen with attractive white blossoms. They grubbed it out with picks and sold it by the bushel to Ft. Cumberland or kept it to heat their homes. Its fame spread as similar veins were discovered—the blood of the Allegany Mountains, which men drained from the hills until it was necessary to dig deeper for the clean-burning fuel. It was rumored among the early settlers to be inexhaustible. Perhaps they didn't understand that a revolution was coming.

* * *

You hear them as you sit in your small apartment. They fly out to the big lake and back to the Dead River every morning and every night. Your brother shoots these birds every year; your husband does now too. It's something you are used to; you've grown up with feathers in the freezer, lying cold among cartons of ice cream and bags of frozen French fries.

Arranging decoys in a U-shaped pattern in a cut cornfield, the callers coax the birds into their net, imitating the sound of their prey: "Goo-it, goo-it." Eight birds circle the field. They set their wings to fill in the empty space of the strategic half-circle of decoys, landing into the wind. They think it's safe. Wing tip brushes other wings and bodies. Extending their feet, they are startled by the sudden appearance of two guns. Their wings flare. As the birds realize the trap, they frantically flap to regain their former altitude. Humans have sprung out of the cornfield, it seems, firing off three quick shots each. Four birds fall and thrash amongst the stubble in their last moments of life. The smell of gunpowder hovers around the blinds where six empty red shells lay smoking on

the ground. The rest of the birds are high and safe, calling for the ones they have lost. Their bird hearts beat against the walls of their feathered breasts.

These birds will sustain you. They will become fajitas and stir fry with rice.

* * *

Henry was past Fort Cumberland before he was ten years old, in territory that still had natives in it; territory that would become Westernport, Lonaconing, George's Creek—the west. On land called Pleasant Prospect, Henry turned the soil under his plow, creating a dark line across the field; he urged the mule, sweat dripping from his sun-tanned brow as the dark stones stuck against the iron share. On his knees, he dug through the soil with calloused hands feeling for rocks, roots, and centipedes.

* * *

The mines began as short tunnels in the side of a hill, whittled away with picks and shovels. An outcropping of black rock jutted out of the ground, attracting simple men and farmers. The curious and needy hands of the settler found it peeking out of the earth as the plow ran through fields designated for crops. It flowed beneath the land where they dug in their homes; they recognized the combustible rock, and they knew of its ability to make them a small profit. It became a part-time job.

Farmers bartered and traded in coal during the winter months in towns like Cumberland and Westernport on the Potomac River. Before the company came, men heaped it into their wagons, hauling it several miles to the riverside. There, it waited for the spring floods, the Potomac's boating stage, to send it down to Georgetown and Harper's Ferry on eighty-foot pine flatboats. They left the docks of Cumberland and Westernport, each carrying fifty to sixty tons of coal.

Boatmen navigated the treacherous rapids and curves of the Potomac in crews of four, steering the burden with poles and paddles until the river jumped and kicked, throwing man and coal over the edge. Bodies smacked against stones and submerged trees pulled down by floods and the meandering river. Black rock and bone rested on the murky bottom, darkening the current that sought the ocean.

For three to five days, boatmen paddled while eating bread and bacon, washing it down with whiskey. In the evening, they pulled out their fiddles and played tunes like “Betty Likens” and “Lonesome John,” accompanied by the river’s babble. Passing beneath the cliffs of Shenandoah, taken around Great Falls through the Patowmack Canal, the boatmen saw the rise of brick buildings and the reach of docks into the tide waters of Georgetown. Humanity bustled up and down cobblestone streets meeting ships bearing tobacco and coal.

The large flatboat never came back up river; for $10 or $12, the boatmen sold their cargo for profit, boat for lumber, not risking the upriver rapids. Spending a few cents in the tavern for American whiskey and a bed, the boatmen rested before they traveled 150 miles back home. For ten days, they walked to their farms and families in George’s Creek, winding through places where ridges folded into flatness, pausing only for sleep and food. The farmers moonlighting as miners and boatmen, black from the dust of their venture, passed beside the Potomac with extra cash in their pockets and fiddles and bacon on their backs.

* * *

Their beaks dabble in the shallows, sometimes plunging into the water, raising their hindquarters above to reach for food on the fertile bottom of the lake. They come up

with dangling seaweed and small squirming fish. Their long necks are held high in alert, white cheeks behind dark, watchful eyes. Their constant chatter warns of intruding predators and of the passing canoe with fishing poles sticking out of its open cockpit. “Ah-honk” echoes across the shallow lake, across the still water and the tufts of land and cattails and grass within the swampy region. For now, they remain, paddling through the marsh with their flock. The tepid water is cooling with the air; inevitably, it will freeze.

* * *

Henry married Abigail on October 1, 1801. He was 22 years old; she was 16. She could not read or write. They had 13 children between 1802 and 1827; all but one survived past the age of ten. There were no twins. Three boys carried on the Duckworth name and tradition, clearing land, planting corn and wheat and growing into men, dreaming of hunting deer and birds and future brides. They didn’t dig tunnels or shafts; they worked the uneven ground, watching the birds fly above their sweating backs. They pulled and piled brown and grey rocks that would do nothing to provide for them, taking them out of the dirt of their fields. All they wanted was sustenance and the methodical tilling of the plow turning up the darkest of the soil.

* * *

The tunnels grew longer and deeper; men left their plows to tend the demand of industry. In an empty field, the wooden machine froze into the upturned earth, unable to move. In springtime, as the world thawed, the plow rotted with moisture in its cracks. It became soft, unusable, forgotten. By summer, the land reclaimed the wood, taking it as one of its own, covering it with wildflowers and grass so that it could sleep the seasons in peace.

By 1837, the age of steam spurred the growth of the mining industry in Maryland. Eleven thousand acres of land in the George's Creek watershed had been bought by the George's Creek Coal and Iron Company, a Baltimore and London syndicate. They mined for iron ore, limestone, and coal. They timbered the yellow birch, sugar maple, red spruce, and balsam fir to support their tunnels and shafts.

They built an iron-smelting blast furnace in Lonaconing at the base of Dug Hill, producing six tons of iron a day in a fifty foot truncated square pyramid made of sandstone. They built a top house, engine house, and two hot-air furnaces for heating the blast. Steam engines pushed bellows while men dumped ore, limestone, and coke into the heat; oxygen and carbon molecules tugged and jumped, separating from the iron and released as carbon dioxide. Molten iron spilled out hot and thick as the core of the furnace reached 3,000 degrees Fahrenheit, a burning orange sliding through molds. When it cooled, it was called pig iron, hard and brittle chunks that could then be melted and formed into wrought iron, cast iron, or steel. From these, they could make farm implements, housewares, mine car wheels and rails.

Yet, iron did not succeed. In the midst of an economic depression, they lost their funding, their skilled workers cost too much, and they realized that their means for reaching the eastern markets had stopped sixty miles to the east. The Chesapeake and Ohio Canal would not reach Cumberland, much less Lonaconing, until 1850. The Baltimore and Ohio Railroad would not be completed through Wheeling until 1853.

The blast went out in 1855 after several years of sporadic operation. The George's Creek Coal and Iron Company turned their whole attention to the combustible material

that could produce energy and heat. They mined the Big Vein that weaved through the mountains, and they hired the blackened men.

* * *

Men lined dark spaces with tree trunks to support the earth above and around them; as their methods improved, they left the black rock in the form of support pillars. Yet the mining men could only dig as far as they could breathe, cutting and digging deeper wedges into the black walls, pulling out blocks of coal by the firelight of an oil lamp on their head.

They used their tools: two picks, two wedges, one shovel, one sledge. They judged coal's quality and stability by the sound of their picks, rock against metal. In pairs, they pried the walls and crushed the blocks and loaded their small carts, pushing their load to a "heading," a main tunnel, to be hauled out by horses or mules over railroad tracks laid into the mine shaft. Their rocks became piles, weighed ton by ton. Thirty cents by thirty cents with every swing of the sledge.

They mined a "supercoal," a semi-bituminous that generated more steam than other mines in the country. It would go to blacksmiths for premium smithing and steel mills. It created the steam for New England's textile mills as an alternative to water power and for ocean steamers in the U. S. Navy fleet and steamships in Baltimore's harbor. It fueled locomotives on the Baltimore and Ohio Railroad and the Tom Thumb that burned coal instead of wood. It was a compact fuel, and it would be known as a specialty.

* * *

They will be here for a little while. They will move on to other lands, ponds, and rivers, habitat for grazing and open water for drinking. They will run along the surface of the water for take-off. Their wings will beat in downstrokes, pulling forward, lifting upwards, and spreading again in constant motion. At speeds of 30 to 55 miles per hour, they will travel 650 miles a day. Home will shift to meet their needs; they will need food rather than snow and ice. Some will fly to the Gulf Coast, over West Virginia and Maryland, voicing their constant call to guide each other over the paths of their ancestors, dark feet tucked against their warm brown bodies. In puffs of steam, breath will escape from the mouths of boys who sit in reeds and stalks with shelled steel pellets waiting in chambers.

* * *

Henry's father was a farmer. Henry's grandfather was a farmer. Henry was a farmer. Henry cleared the trees to open the ground for crops and raised a few livestock, some cows and pigs. On 50 acres called Stoney Ridge, he conducted his farm, following the seasons of plowing, planting, and harvest, spring, summer, fall. He repeated the same year after year until it was time to leave, to migrate. He sold his land to his nephew, Israel, in 1844. As he watched the sun set over Savage Mountain, a northern breeze swept through the valley. He reached down and ran his calloused fingers through the worn soil. He signed the deed to his land, selling the stone and the ridge.

* * *

People came. English, Welsh, Scottish, and Germans worked the mines in Allegany County as miners, ironworkers, foremen, and administrators. They built houses,

mine buildings, and churches, taken from the felled forests. They took their earnings and saved, waiting for a time when their family could rise above the pits.

Families came. They settled. They stayed. They made their lives on the mountainsides and in the valley. Few Americans became miners; instead, they coped with crops and cows. Immigrants were cheaper; immigrants were willing to go into dark passageways. Yet, immigrant labor no longer became necessary in the mines as men and their sons crushed and lugged rock in the tunnels. Immigrants settled. Immigrants stayed. Immigrants became native-born persons; they became Americanized. They became American.

Men worked one mine for several years, men with quiet and peaceful dispositions spending their days in darkness, listening to metal hitting rock and the strained turn of wheels carrying tons out of the mine. They returned to the surface as light left the sky. They returned to wives and children, a hot bath, clean clothes kept away from the black dust, a hearty supper of beef, corn, and potatoes bought from the company store followed by a smoke on the back porch. They coughed dust out of their lungs, and, as night clouds passed in front of a rising moon, they slept next to their wives, pulling the blankets up to their faces, and dreamed of dark tunnels and oil lamps and mountains that bled black. Slipping on the stream of coal, they rushed to the beating heart that pumped in faster and faster rhythms until it stopped.

They were trained, professional, men from the mines of Scotland and Wales, knowing how to coax the black material from the vein. They knew the swing of the sledge, the sound of picks, the resonant echo of the rocks against their metal. These miners were of an elite class, standing apart from the farmers, depending on rain and

sunlight and seeds, men who were the poor majority, men who lived apart from the company. The mining men became known as “gentlemen miners” in George’s Creek where common language abounded and racial disturbance was minimal. They were free from “pestilential Hungarians” who came to Pennsylvania mines to make a few hundred dollars to take back to Hungary. There was no “Irish problem,” no nationalistic feuds between the Irish, English, German, or Welsh. Men had bigger dreams of success. Bringing their families with them, these miners settled rather than migrated.

Some say the nonviolent conditions of Allegany, Maryland, stemmed from the company store, mill, and post office, hiring a company doctor for the health of miners and community, fashioning company schoolhouses and churches to impose the importance of education and religion within hearts. Some say the horizontal mines were less dangerous than the vertical mines in Pennsylvania or Virginia. Some say the miners were men that came to make an honest living to start a farm somewhere, perhaps Iowa or Wisconsin. Some say the miners eased into this country, transforming the vast forest into bustling industrial towns. Some say it was strict company control monitoring workers with a multiethnic garrison patrolling the riotous streets of the settlement or the company’s establishment of rules of residency.

> *Every person in the Employment of the company will be required to be present at work on every day of the year, excepting Sundays and Christmas Day: and the hours of Employment (excepting in special cases, which the Superintendent allows in his discretion) shall be from Sunrise to Sunset, with such intermission for meals as shall from time to time be appointed.*

Wages will be paid monthly after certain deductions for accounts at the company store, mill, and post office, and after each worker's contribution of fifty cents toward the town doctor and school: and the amount of wage for miners will be per diem based on the value and weight of their mined product.

Distilled liquor will be prohibited within the town limits as well as all brawling, quarreling, fighting and gaming.

The firing of guns, which has been more frequent of late than usual in the valley of the works, is also, as dangerous and unnecessary amusement, forbidden in future. The managers must aid in enforcement of this rule by reporting to the superintendent all violations thereof which may come under their knowledge.

No dog will be permitted on company grounds (excepting in special cases, which the Superintendent allows in his discretion).

Violation of said rules will be grounds for dismissal, and, once dismissed, the worker and his family must leave town.

* * *

You hear the mournful call, and you can't help but feel sentimental as if something was fading, never to be heard again. You feel this way every autumn as you see the brown shapes fly across the sky. You stop and watch even though you have seen this many times before, birds moving through the air, repeating the flapping of wings,

repeating the back and forth movement over your home, repeating the journey north and south, south and north. You connect to a bygone time, to another soul that has watched the birds and felt the same wonderful ache through the continual cycling of the years, autumn giving way to winter and winter giving way to spring, summer. You feel the movement of the earth as it rotates and the passing away of years. You find that nothing is new. It's a beautiful monotony.

* * *

Between the Dan and Savage Mountains, a continuous street and town stretched twenty-four miles in the George's Creek valley from Frostburg to Westernport with mining towns like Lonaconing and Eckhart Mines transforming the wooded wonderland to a place of extraction and industry. The towns did not simply spring out of the ground like the rocks on which the companies and men staked their fortunes. They were built—houses, stores, mills, kilns, churches, schoolhouses, headquarters, post offices. They were taken from the wood of the landscape creating homes of log cabins, double-cabin shanties, and framed doubles called blocks. Roads wedged into the valleys and farm lands, connecting the many parts of the mining company and the men with corroding lungs due to the carbon-filled air of mines. Trains began to bring materials to market and workers to the growing towns. Most settlers would remain, shifting with the migration of humanity; Henry would leave.

* * *

A move, an exodus, a migration. Young and old picked up their trowel and rake and made the journey west through the Allegany Mountains to the wilds beyond—Barbour County, Virginia. Henry was 65; Abigail was 57, following their children in a

wagon packed with porcelain dishware, a wedding gift from their parents, Henry's dirty blue trousers and white cotton shirts, and the remaining rations of ground corn and salt-cured meat. Keeping the family together, they nestled among the mountains once more, along rivers within valleys, with fields of corn and wheat.

Henry settled in Philippi, establishing another family farm worth $750. He lived until the age of 75, dying on May 26, 1855. Abigail would live nearly 19 more years, watching the Civil War pass by her window in Barbour County, watching her children grow up and move away, watching the continual westward movement of people to a frontier of prairies and gold.

Abigail and Henry were buried in Taylor's Drain Cemetery with aging tombstones marking their place of rest in the mountains of West Virginia. On the gentle slope, they look out into the green valley beside Hacker Road beside a pair of steel rails sitting on a bed of crushed rock. Above them, the quick tapping of a woodpecker's beak resonates against a telephone pole as men drive white pickup trucks beneath it. Daisies waver and bend in the breeze that comes over the Tygart Valley River and over the white stones that fade to the color of coal.

AN INTRODUCTION AT THE CEMETERY

I look over the ridge and see green. I tell my husband to stop the car so I can take a picture; I want to remember what it looks like from up here in the sea of mountains. From this view, I see a few vultures floating on wind currents, looking more majestic than they should. I see tree tops and ridges that fall into valleys where patches of light green signal a farm or pasture. I can't see within—the rhododendrons with their tangling pink flowers, the mossy stones that peer out of fallen leaves on the forest floor, the little stream that hardly moves over stones but cuts a deep path, every drop running over sandstone to find the Tygart Valley.

There is a house on this ridge, and I wonder what it would be like to wake up to a view like this every morning, to see the mountains change with the seasons, from fiery reds and oranges to the quiet white of snow to lush green as it is now. I wonder what it would be like to run down from the ridge, hopping over roots and vines, splashing in the ravine that runs alongside me. At the bottom, I would look up and my house would be gone because I would beneath a canopy of green, waxy leaves and white birch bark. I wonder if, instead of running, I would fall and trip breaking open my skull so that it bleeds into the stream, becoming part of the earth of West Virginia. I think I would rather sit on the back porch, on the back step, and just look out to watch my morning, my evening, my every moment show.

But right now, I wait for a vision, a time machine to fall from the blue sky with its date set to 1847. If time machines were real and fell from the sky, I would hop in, and, as the lights and whistles spun around me, the mountains would reverse the seasons several

times over. The trees would shrink back into the earth, leaving the ridge bare. Loggers would replace the timber with their axes, putting the poplars and birches back in place. Fields would open and close like fish rising on a river, their lips breaking the surface and creating ripples. When it all stopped, I would look out from the bald that I stood on, and I would search for a sign, something that says "I am here; this is my home. Come see me, and I'll show you my life." It would be above a cleared field that you might be plowing at this very moment, pushing the metal and the wood through the dirt. I would walk beside you, while you told me of the journey, the bear you killed last fall, how you know the earth—the technique for sowing and harvesting. You would teach me how to push the plow behind the mule, and I would slip in the dirt as the iron hit a stone. I would be tired after one row.

When the time machine refuses to fall, we drive further down the road, a dirt road that is more rock than dirt and is only wide enough for one car to pass. The Jeep's tires spin on the rocks as gears force it up the climb. Our bikes wobble on the back hitch as we carefully track through potholes. The road ends suddenly at a blue gate where a yellow sign reads: "Nodis, Trepespasers'll be percekuted by 2 mungrel honds that don't like STRANGERS n' a 2 barel shotgun loded fer troble. DAM if I ain't gittin tired of this HELL raisin on My place!!" We make the 14-point turn and head back the way we came.

We come back to the main road, two lane, paved and painted, and turn down another road leading to Taylor's Drain. A little hill rises up on our left, where two deer graze in a cemetery. They flee, white tails up, as they see us coming. We pull over, parking the Jeep next to a pile of stones. I climb the little hill, passing beneath a large oak tree and bypassing the "No Trespassing" sign nailed into its trunk. The wind and rain

have worn the gray markers so some names cannot be read; they stand, lie, or lean bare and blank. I look for ancient footprints, but I don't know the size of your shoe.

I see names—Boehm, Mitchell, Hathaway, Weaver, Proudfoot—becoming frantic with the thought that maybe I'm in the wrong place. But then, I find your son, T. J., his stone honoring his service in the 15th West Virginia Infantry. I find your father, Henry, and mother, Abigail. I find your 13 year-old son, John, and your wife, Rachel. You are nearby, lying flat on the ground. I brush away the wet grass that has settled in your name as if I were brushing away the hair from your face. I want to clean you up, remove the dirt that surrounds a hand holding a Bible. Though it is just a stone, I feel like I am touching you, a weird connection leaping out of my chest and suctioning to the damp dirt in which you lie. Your presence dwells in the dates of your life, in the carved hand, in the imprint of your name, my name. Your name is my name, and I am alive. I have searched for something that is yours, and this is what I found—a stone with your name, and it becomes you. I feel like it's what I'm supposed talk to when I come to a cemetery. It says you are here, somewhere beneath the earth upon which I kneel. Though your body is empty of you, it is what remains, bony fingers and hollow eye sockets. You are the earth now, dead and decomposed. But I don't think about that.

I think about what to say.

I am part of you and the ones before you; we shared a surname: Duckworth. It's Anglo-Saxon, originating in Lancashire, England. It means Docca's Estate. Last names used to mean places or occupations. You were of a place, or you did something significant. The ones before you were "of Duckworth," an estate in Oswaldtwistle, a township in the parish of Whalley, when Duckworth was called Dokeward. It has been

surmised that the name could have been corrupted from *duc*, a leader, or *doge*, a coin ducat, which is money issued by a duke, a leader, or *docca*, a pet form of Marmaduke, a sea leader or steward. *Worth* means "at the worth," which is an enclosed homestead with surrounding land, like a manor or an estate, where walls rise up on the edge of the land, stone placed upon stone or wooden planks lined up in rows. They bar others from taking further steps; they make strangers and trespassers out of unwanted people and animals, though trees can enclose just as well as walls, acting as the borders of lands and fields for crops. They shade the stranger who hides in the darkness, while keeping the light for the masters, for the Duke, for Duckworth's. I don't think our ancestors were dukes, but we could have worked the Duke's lands, working for a master rather than ourselves. But, before all this, before the time of Henry III, our name was written as *dykeward*, an officer who takes care of dykes. Men saw the water that floods, freezes, and fills could be held at bay; the current could be made to trickle, estates employing portion control so that the land would not die of its obesity, drowning in the rush. The stone enclosure the Duckworth's patrolled bore the crashing waves, and they patched the cracks so the enclosed remained dry.

Our name came overseas with John, most likely. He was a four-year indentured servant to a man named William Dockwra, the inventor of the penny post and a proprietor of East Jersey. John was imported into New Jersey in the 1600s; the exact date is debated. Not much is known about John. He may have lived in Lancashire; he may have come from London, his dirt removed from the streets by the London merchant.

What is known: he came alone.

John gave the name to William, who may have given it to another William, though I am convinced the Williams are the same person. William gave the name to Aaron, his second son, and then he ran off with Alice Baxter, thinking that he never married Aaron's mother, as if the union was never real. William gave his children everything, but the oldest son fought for it all, and Aaron moved to Maryland to start a new life for himself and family.

Aaron gave the name to Henry, and Henry gave the name to you, George, when you were born on January 24, 1804, in Allegany County, Maryland. And your mother, Abigail, raised you in the area known as George's Creek where coal was being dug from the soil, where a creek joined the great Potomac in the hills of the Allegheny Mountains, where Duckworth's became farmers by putting their hands to the plow and not turning back. She raised you with your brothers and sisters, showing you how to be a pioneer, showing you how to dig for your own potatoes. In the garden, she crouched beside you, sweat on her brow, and dirt on her skirt. The yellow plant lay on its side, revealing tendril-like roots and round tubers.

You married Rachel Kight on August 15, 1830.

The Kights lived on a nearby farm; you went to school with them and grew up knowing how to raise pigs and fix a torn shirt. You passed the father, a lean man with an untrimmed beard, on your wagon, giving a courteous nod as he headed into Westernport to sell barley and wheat. His daughter was hardy, like your mother, born in the mountains, tending geese and pigs. She sold eggs every Saturday morning, her calloused fingers taking your mother's pennies, and, reaching into her basket, pulling out white, brown, and speckled eggs the size of her palm. She knew when to harvest the tubers, how

to feed pigs the rotted corn, how to sing the tragedy of Barbary Allen beneath the stars, singing, “And there they twined in a true love’s knot/Red rose around green briar.”

She was five years younger, but you noticed her when she was eighteen, when the time came for you to find a wife, when you heard her singing down by the creek as she washed her hair. You were shy at first, watching from your plow as she laughed with your mother about the chickens that blew the coop. A basket hung from her elbow, dark hair pulled back from her face in a long braid down her back, shoes covered in mud, eyes shone light blue beneath dark lashes, hands tanned and dirty from harvesting beans and wheat. You didn’t know she would want you, but you decided to marry her. She was twenty; you were twenty-five. Her family migrated to Missouri, leaving her behind with you, hands clasped beside the roses that grew near her father’s house.

Rachel bore you eight children in twenty years, producing male and female, four of each. First, there was Nancy Hizer, then came Thomas Jefferson, Drusilla, Ephraim, and Sarah. And later, after your journey, they were followed by Francis, Louise, and John. The last of whom drove your wagon full of wheat and barley to market on the narrow country roads while your older sons went to war. His young body bumped and bruised on the wooden seat as he urged the horse up the hill. He clicked with his mouth and tapped the horse’s round hump with the leather straps. Gravity pulled him backward, so he leaned forward against it, all of the baskets and bushels sliding to the back of the wagon. The wheels creaked, threatening to break.

You became restless. The wagon-rutted roads led over the mountains, where a wide river was a steamboat highway, and across that river, there was land, rolling country for the farmer, where your destiny is what you make it. You heard the words, “Go west,”

but you replied, “not too far west.” Beneath the large oak tree, you sat on the wooden bench, fingers twitching, while the stars above hung their lights in the upper branches. Enclosed by mountain ridge, you dug this land with these fingers, and they know the feel of nutrient-rich soil and the feel of soil that has nothing left to offer. In George’s Creek and Westernport, roads cut away your land; companies roamed the area looking for the supercoal, the Big Vein, atop which you built your home where the chimney smoked above a stove that burned the coal you shoveled, and beneath the leaky roof, your children piled into beds, two at a time, clinging to stitched dolls with missing eyes and limbs.

The Allegheny Front, unbroken slopes of one thousand feet, was a natural wall rising from the folds of the earth. Pioneers, like yourself, looked up at the jagged rocks and edges that confined them to the coast, to the lowland that reached out to the Atlantic, and they decided to go over, blazing trails and leaving great depressions on hilltops and in gorges, plowing out the way through the Appalachians with wagons. At the age of forty-one, you left the land of Cumberland and moved to Virginia, loading up your wagon with your wife, children, parents, your grandmother’s Bible, and several pounds of seed in canvas bags. You walked alongside your steeds as they pulled everything. Before you got too far from your old home, you stopped to look behind you and received a vision. The fields dug up with great shovels and dynamite, the house torn down, plank by plank. The kittens in the barn follow their mother, scurrying through fields to find a warm place to sleep. The hilltop and the valley below are gone, stripped of its coal and ash.

Over the winding roads and turnpikes with their herds of cattle and hogs, you drove your wagon over the pressed-stone, and you found the other side of the mountains to be green and rippling. It was here where you felt the wind rising up from the valleys. It was warm against your tanned skin, ruffling the edges of your brown beard. It took your hat and threw it into the air. You looked at Rachel beside you. She had a child in her arms, young Francis, who batted the air with his tiny hand. He was hardly a year old. You smelled the damp creeks running below through green so vibrant that the earth beneath must be good. You only paused a moment; you continued down the path, passing other wagons as you guided your family down the slope, around the bend, up the hill, beneath the arching branches, and over the horizon. You only stopped for the crushing rain beating against your canvas and the rolling thunder. When the sky filled with constant flashing light, you could only look at your family, huddled together, because the thumping drops made your wagon a drum in which you sat. Beneath the wagon, your dog shivered as small streams began to run between the wheels. Smoky clouds curled and pushed their course over the mountain tops before settling in depressions between ridges, falling to earth and fogging up windows.

You settled in the valleys beside the creeks and rivers, beside the Tygart Valley River, a branch of Monongahela, draining over a thousand square miles through Valley Head, Mill Creek, Elkins, Belington, Philippi, and Grafton, flowing beneath northern red oak, mockerynut hickory, sassafras, American chestnut, and red maple. You settled just on the other side of the wall where the Alleghenies force prevailing east-moving winds to pour heavy rainfall, leaving the east, leaving Cumberland, with a few drops leftover. Above you, the spruce spread out over a half-million mountainous acres, harboring the

flying squirrel, who makes her nest in a woodpecker hole in the side of a hickory tree, arranging the feathers, fur, and shredded bark around her naked babies. Her large, glistening eyes peer out of the hole into the night, looking for snakes, hawks, and raccoons, ready to spread her body into the cool air that fills the membrane between her legs. Slight movements steer her around branches and leaves; tail extends as she pulls up the brake. Below, beneath the fallen log, nestled in moist moss and leaf litter, the salamander searches for mites and ants. Her dark, white-flecked skin breathes as she roams her territory, the shaded ravine beneath the rhododendrons, in a humid summer night. She is high in the Allegheny Mountains where the red spruce grows tall on Cheat Mountain. Here, she will lay her eggs inside a rotted log or beneath a rock and guard them until they hatch, like you guard your children with rifle and shell, though she uses her body, her slimy skin that releases a noxious chemical. She will live for 20 years, in her territory of 48 square feet, moving only a few meters during the span of her entire life. Together they live during the night, while you sit beneath another oak tree and watch the stars. They build their homes and will stay in the mountains, raising their young, protecting them from what may come, bobcats and owls and you.

You could not see their lives in the night, but they were there, watching you make your home, afraid you might take theirs. Instead, you took ancestral seeds and scattered them across the sloping Virginia soil, shallow and phosphorous deficient. Corn, wheat, oats, barley, soybeans. You guarded what you had, letting the seeds shake out of your hand.

You cleared a few acres for crops, a few acres for future pasture, and the squirrel in her woodpecker hole, the salamander in her rotted log, scrambled further up the

mountain. Yet, you left a border of bark and branch, taking only what you needed for a house and a barn. The salamander curled up in what you left behind; the squirrel found the seeds that fell out of your pocket. You did not know this, but you had seen the cathedral of trees along the road and remembered the vision of it all stripped away—dark holes, fire, and metal wheels.

Yet you swung the axe and heaved your home in place, muscles ripping as the impact of your metal reverberated through the handle, through your narrow wrists and elbows, through your strained bicep and shoulder, through your aching neck that lately had been giving you trouble, and through your skull that held your brain that told you, "one more year; hold on." Sweat dripped from beneath your hat, into your eyes; you blinked and wiped it away with the back of your dry, sun-tanned hand. In the springhouse, you dipped your bucket into the cool, earthy water, tilted back your head, and let the water drench your body, your clothes, your lips. I wonder if it felt like drowning or if the water really quenched your thirst, streaming down your throat and absorbing into your blood. It filled in the cracks that formed from the dust, the saw dust and woodchips that lay in little piles at the base of stumps, chestnut, oak, and maple removed. Your patch of light green broke the surface, rippling into the dark and tangled, and you rose to grasp the mayfly that floated on the water.

As the leaves turned and the geese flew, honking overhead, you harvested the fallen mast—fruits, nuts, roots, and maple sap—and hunted deer for venison, rabbits for stew, while the salamander slid underground, preparing for the hastening winter. In the spring, you came out of your hole only to begin repairs on the two-room cabin, covered by a leaking roof, connected by an open breezeway where leaves piled in cracks and

began to decompose. Your chores seemed endless as you fixed the log barn, the springhouse trough made of cracking clay, the smokehouse beams for raw, salted meat, and the holes in the corncrib floor where sniffing rats, mice, and rabbits had chewed to your grain.

You went back to the fields, pushing the ploughshare across the hillside, where you rammed into rocks and roots that appeared to grow beneath the winter snow. Bending your knee into the earth, your calloused fingers dug, feeling the dirt accumulate beneath fingernails. You tossed stones aside to load them up later and dump them in the woods. You would repeat this process year after year, fixing, cutting, plowing, waiting. There would always be something.

Every day, you saw your three brown cows grazing on the hillside, tree stumps dotting their pasture. Your mule grazed as well, its large grey head rose occasionally, ears alert, listening for something, anything. You heard the soft cluck of hens coming from the barn. Rachel was gathering eggs. You turned around to the sound of laughter. A drove of hogs trotted past you with a group of children running behind it, cheeks red, shoes muddy. Your sons, Thomas and Ephraim, strung up a deer by its hind legs, letting the leftover blood drip out of its mouth. Ephraim held the rifle, sitting on a stool, while Thomas took the knife and shaved off the skin, revealing red meat and white tendon underneath. The younger brother watched, learning as Thomas learned by you when he was 12 years old. This was how you decided to live, on the land growing corn and wheat, turning over the ground each year, urging a stubborn mule to pull the metal plow, watching for the rain, the hail, the sleet, the snow, and harvesting what it gave.

You saw three of your children, you saw your wife, die before you. In their beds, they wheezed and coughed, calling for their mother, for the doll with missing eyes and limbs. Sweat rolled down their faces while their feet lay icy cold beneath wool blankets. There was the thirteen-year old son, your youngest, dying crushed beneath a wagon wheel, or dying of a fever caught as the seasons turned. There was the daughter who never married, who stayed home with her mother and tended the chickens when she could. There was your wife, Rachel, fifty-eight years old. There was the son who fought in the Civil War, came home, married twice, and died in December.

After every death, you followed that familiar trail to the cemetery beside the church a few yards away from the rushing Tygart. The chestnut trees were marked with white blazes, showing the well-worn path to the graves. And though the breeze was slight and the sun reflected the white petals of the daisies, there was no mistaking the trampled ground and the land upon the hillside dotted with gray stones. The smell of fresh dug earth, dug with your own shovel to fit the size of John, Sarah, Rachel, and Thomas.

Eventually, a train would chug pass the cemetery, weaving through the valley to Philippi. It brought people and took trees. In a little while, the seemingly endless supply of West Virginia timber would be almost exhausted, revealing abundant land for livestock and crops. The trees that shaded your balding head would be taken, leaving a bare land. But, the agricultural boom would fade, and the industrial farmers would let the land return to small family fields. There was better land further west, Oklahoma, Kansas, Nebraska, where tribes would be confined to reservations, lands boxed in with barbed wire. Your family would not go that way. They would stay here, in the land of West

Virginia for another seventy-five years. You would not hear the train or the hack of the axe because your own marker rests next to Rachel's in Taylor's Drain, Barbour County, West Virginia, with the date March 27, 1877.

You will not hear me, though I find you in this cemetery as I find my voice. I ask you to show me who you were, to show your face, how fast you ran after your friends, how you looked at creeks and saw fish hiding in the shadowy depths, how you looked at your wife when she was young and when she was old, how your children, how Ephraim, climbed up on your lap and asked you to tell him about the bear, how you read the Holy Bible or depended on the farm, on nature and winds. I want to know what I have taken from you and what I have changed. I want to make your feet move over the narrow trails that pass between cedar and hemlock, the trees that built your house and bed. As I form your life on the beaten paths, I will see the blazes on your back. You will turn, and I will see you.

ALMOST HEAVEN

Philippi

The river is quick, shallow and deep; sandstone boulders break its surface, and little ripples track around them. They are islands for otter, ducks, and turtles that climb to their crests to sun their skin, feathers, and shells. They leave the wet prints of their bodies like photograph of their presence at that place at one time. The river's muddy banks, wet from the recent flood, contain the tracks of raccoons and deer as they venture down to its edge to drink; the water reaches down their throats and cools their blood. They see their reflection and, within that, what lies between the banks. The river moves with fish beneath the surface as they rise to pluck mayflies and striders out of the cool spring air. Sometimes, I'll take my boat and row to the bend, casting my string and hook near the water weeds and eddies where the sun makes it warm and pleasant. I pull in rock bass and trout in their season and blue gills for battered, fried, and crispy meat.

In town, a new covered bridge crosses the river, aiding the Northwest Turnpike in its journey through the mountains. I have crossed it a few times with my horse and wagon, encompassed by wooden beams.

My father's cattle graze on the hillside, on land I cleared of hickory, walnut, and oak. Rocks stick out of their pasture, gray, black, and white, covered with a mossy green. My home is nearby, built with wooden beams, notched together in the corners and covered with poplar clapboards. Smoke puffs out of a stone chimney, smelling of rabbit stew that cooks over its fire. Dogwoods bloom in the valley, marking the edge of land, acting as the corner of what belongs to my family's name.

The mountain is dark in the evening as the sun hides behind its ridge and branches blanket my path to the river. Beyond my pastures and fields, rhododendrons tangle around each other, blooming in summer so that pink flowers and long, green vines paint the mountain. They skirt the trunks of trees and huddle beside mountain streams, arching and forming passageways and hideouts under their leaves.

There are boulders on the mountain, broken in two as if they were dropped by the heavens and severed on impact. These are the bones of the mountain, I think, sticking out from the earth like a spine with notches and joints. The dirt and clay are the sinew, the tendon, which holds the stones in place, shackling them to the body of the mountain. Nothing slips unless it breaks or floods, and then the whole land becomes sick, aching from its missing pieces. Moss covers the rocks, making them slippery to climb and grip, but when I climb it, that rock, that bone, I feel as if I have conquered the whole hill, that I have torn this rock from the depths, broken the mountain’s back, and claimed its fallen corpse as my home.

But the mountain is not dead. I cannot kill it, nor do I want to. I want to tame it, mold it with my hands so that my cattle can eat and grow fat, so that my wheat can grow tall and thick, so that I can live in my wooden home and eat and work as the Good Lord intended me to.

McDowell

Men whisper and turn beneath their blankets. I hear the shout of one startled by a mouse in his bed, then all is hushed. I am grateful for a night of no rain or wind, no stream pouring through my tent and puddling at my feet, though sleep passes over me like the wispy clouds above. I lay on the ground, watching the moving phantoms with my

hands behind my head. My fire has burned down to coals, red and black. My eyelids flicker; my body twitches, envisioning a march, a drill, a shot.

I hear the reveille, and look up to see stars and the dark mass of Bull Pasture Mountain. Not even the sun calls this morning. Dark shadows of tents and the lights of campfires spread across the plain and town of McDowell.

Yesterday, under Milroy's orders, we set our picket on the east side of Shenandoah, to spoil the Rebels' progress on the road. In the morning, as I made my breakfast of hardtack and coffee, I saw the gray lines marching along the road. They just kept coming out of the trees, the sun glinting off the muskets in their hands. A long line of men, brims pinned back to keep the rain out of their eyes, rucksacks strapped across the chest where the metal cup clangs against the Bible inside. Man upon man, we saw: an endless line.

Spread at the base of the hill, we knew nothing except to flee, leaving behind our breakfast, our food supplies, our wagons, our tents and blankets. We made for the woods, the ravines, the rocks, hiding in the bones and crevices of the mountain, escaping the enemy. We all withdrew to McDowell to wait for the enemy's certain approach.

Now, we hear of a junction between Allegheny Johnson and the Stonewall, as he's called. We are half the size of their 9000 men, and we are down in a valley; we would feel the hard rain of minie balls and cannons, and long for the soft wet of clouds.

Milroy, the Gray Eagle, says he won't yield a foot to treason. We will not turn from a fight.

* * *

My hardtack and coffee sloshes around in my metal cup, and I drink it in one swallow, a lump of tasteless mush sliding down my throat. A small light peers over Bull Pasture, but not enough to darken the stars. My gun rests against my side, the barrel cool and empty.

* * *

Scouts spot Rebels atop Sitlington's Hill rising in the east, directly above McDowell. This hill is across the swollen river; the only way to cross is by a bridge just out of town on the Staunton-Parkersburg Turnpike that winds around the left side of the hill, past the church and the cemetery dotted with a few grey stones. The hill rises with a bare top but cloaked with trees at the base. Ravines and loose rocks layer its sides.

A large green field opens up between Bull Pasture and Cemetery Hill, where our artillery prepare guns to engage with the Rebels on the other side of the valley. I imagine the metal balls flying over the heads of grazing cattle, pieces of earth and metal scarring their hides as their heads bend low to eat the grass.

Our men poke and prod the enemy, like a man prodding a bear den, with skirmishers moving up the hill. I hear a few shots as the silhouettes of more Rebels arrive at the crest of the hill. The bear is awake and growling. I imagine the beast will always keep coming, keep coming, with inexhaustible strength.

* * *

General Robert Schenck has arrived, bringing two regiments, about a thousand men to reinforce our few. He and Milroy stand outside the Hull house, yellow light flickers through the glass windows framed with red brick. The men motion at the mountain ridges before them, stroking their mustaches in thought. Milroy looks like a

twig next to the large frame of Schenck. His white hair stands on end, and his dark beard bobs with his chin, reporting to his senior general. The Gray Eagle has a fire in his small dark eyes, as he points to the open field and Sitlington's Hill beyond. Schenck listens, half of his gold buttons undone across his chest. His dark, thick mustache twitches, and he rests his dimpled chin on his hand.

* * *

One thousand men from Ohio march across the bridge, up the mountain to spoil the enemy's plans of pulling guns to the top of the hill.

Down in the valley, we here continuous gun fire. We see men on top of the hill; the western sun lights up their faces as flames spit out of their guns towards the trees below the crest. The whole mountain shrouds itself in a mist of smoke and fire as our boys thunder up the rocky slope, the trees unmoved by the terrible force that rains heaven-like power upon them.

* * *

We come to the bridge and take the road, marching four abreast. Trees and mountains rise on either side, and we weave through the crevice.

I have never felt my heart beat like this. I am anxious to fire my weapon as sweat from my hands wets the metal around the trigger, but a pain in my stomach rises to my throat and threatens to choke me. I can picture myself on the ground, skin pale and white except for the red streak of blood trickling out of my mouth. I look into the forest, and phantom bullets seek me out from the end of a long, hot barrel. I hear the snap and pop of muskets up the hill on my right; I hear rustling in bushes and branches as men stumble and march through thick grape vines that entangle bark and skin. The sounds are so loud,

I cannot hear the birds, whistling the coming of spring, hopping from twig to twig. The birds are not here today.

* * *

Whoops and battle cries pierce through the valley. They sound like natives on the plains, calling to the gods of the sky and earth as they unleash their fury. I hear the name "Jeff Davis!" amidst their yells. "For Old Virginia!" they cry. Their voices scratch the air as their pitch rises.

The 31st Virginia Infantry stretches out on the crest of a small hill on the road, 100 yards in front of us. They stand to salute us and call our names before the slaughter begins. I know the men we fight. I saw their faces in Clarksburg as I signed my name, *Ephraim B.*, to enlist in the Union army. Enemies, neighbors, enlisted into both camps, in the same place. I saw them in Philippi, my home, bringing their farm money to the bank, driving their wagons down the road to the river. There are no sides divided by a state border or mountain ridges, no countries warring over land. The fight is within, within our towns and families, where sympathies fall on either side of the line—secession and slavery or unity and freedom.

Their reinforcements charge down the hill with another whooping cry. Exposed on both sides, we alternate shooting in front and behind. A moment of fear thrills me as I imagine the sensation of a bullet in my spine, in the back of my neck, in my buttocks. A cold chill renews my sweating pores.

Form companies and platoons, elbow to elbow with our comrades. I am part of a dark line marching into the open; natural cover will not protect my chest or my back. The

command to halt, load. I tear the cartridge between my teeth and pour its black contents into my barrel. Ram home twice.

I shoulder my weapon and wait.

“Ready! Aim! Fire!”

Yellow flames spit out of the end of my gun.

This is not a dream. This is not a story passed down through generations of the heroic deeds of my family. This is not my grandfather fighting a black bear in the mountains, smelling its angry breath as it snaps for his neck. This is a bear that I know using its teeth for ammunition, biting my ankles, my ears, my cap. I work like a machine and drop to my knee to load as the men behind me take their shots. We continue to fire and load, fire and load in our ranks and companies. This was what we drilled for, training a concentrated force of power and steel. The sounds of guns, cries of anger, pain, and frenzy burst from our men.

I recognize voices, calling to us as they fire regiment by regiment, advancing up the protective hill to get clear shots at our chests, though the bullets fly above our heads in their haste. They expose just enough of themselves to fire and then disappear. While we remain in the open field below them, watching them fire and disappear in rapid succession, I catch a glimpse of young Frank Trimble serving the Barbour Greys. His six foot frame and blond hair stand out to me as they fire at us, calling us blue bellies and Billy Yanks while asking how our sister fares on the home front. But these men fight for Southern Independence, for the landowners in the east, for the whip on fugitive’s back.

My twenty year old body and mind know the work of the farm, finding purpose in the lives of my cattle and wheat. Every man deserves the right to own his land and work

it because it's his. My lungs burn as I inhale and exhale curses at my once-fellowmen. We have no protection or breastworks to hide from our enemy's bullets. We fire and load at will, awaiting their hats on the hill.

* * *

The air of bullets, hot in their search for the hearts of men in blue, pass by my ears, my shoulders, my legs with haste before burying themselves into the dirt, a tree, or the breast of another man. Men lurch around me, grip their stomachs and cry, "I am killed." For some, Death comes quickly; others must wait to be dragged back to camp to catch pox or fever. I don't have time to be afraid for myself. I become a piece of the regiment, firing and loading, firing and loading, marching forward, halting. I am a number against their numbers, a small force.

The 31st leaves their position on the hill, and we fall back on the road. We chase them up the hill a ways, battling the loose rocks and thick vines more than the men we pursue. My ears are ringing with gun shots and the shouts of men. I can no longer hear out of my right ear. My gun presses against my chest; the barrel is hot, burning with my own fire. Dirt, sweat, blood have found the crevices in my face and color me a soldier, and I am out of ammunition. There are flashes of fire, and the scent of gun powder hovers beneath my trimmed, brown mustache.

Night begins to fall, and the hill ignites with the fire of guns, smoke rising from its summit as if it were in flames. Ragged bushes, torn to twigs, are all the cover that remains. Bullets have ripped through maples, poplars, and hemlocks, skin, tendon, and bone. Dark shadows and silhouettes stand on the top of the hill, phantoms instilled with the purpose to kill. They are a never ending line.

Coon Creek

I am old now. I have traveled much and rested little. I have nine children, and now my grandchildren live in my home because I have outlived their parents. I sit on my porch in the evening. Sometimes I have a pipe; sometimes I just sit. Mary sits beside me, her worn leather shoes peeking out from beneath her dress. She has lines on her face; I notice them when she pulls her hair back in a bun as she does now. Her hair is gray though it used to be light brown, long and soft. She tied it up in braids and wore a bonnet or a hair net to gather her strands at the back of her neck. She still wears the hair net rather than the frilly caps the younger girls wear these days.

Down in another valley beside another stream with 208 acres beneath my feet, I raise my cattle and my grain. I cut down my hickories and birches and sell them for a profit. Cleared of its blanket, the land stands naked, exposed. Its ridges stick out like the bones of the starving dogs that trot down the road and sleep beneath the edge of my roof, trying to hide away from the sun. Already, hairs are starting to grow out of the skin of the earth; nature works to cover and hide its raw form from wind, erosion, and human hands. It covers the beds of coal and iron that compress beneath, while the green grasses and wildflowers lighten the landscape. I now have rolling hills rather than dark mountains.

I plant 300 trees bearing apples, peaches, and pears. When I walk through the orchard paths, I hear the hum of bees, pollenating the flowers. I smell the blossoms before I smell the fruit which sometimes falls to the earth, pecked by birds and rotten; its fermenting skin creates an aroma that attracts ants and flies and deer. I pick an apple from a branch. It is red and green; its skin is hard and crisp, and, when I bite into it, I feel the juice spray my face. It trickles into my beard, making it sticky.

On the banks of Coon Creek, I have my life. I live on the dirt road that the little creek runs over sometimes. It is narrow here, between the ridges, hardly allowing one wagon to pass through at a time, but the wagon is passing away as loud trains rumble beside the Elk River and through the town of Gassaway. There are cars now too and cameras that can fit in your pocket. But it all feels far away when I'm down here in the valley where the creek runs beside the road, and the damp and shade makes the air cool.

IN WEST VIRGINIA

1872—

In March in West Virginia, Etta Ann is born in her mother's home where the smell of afterbirth lingers in the poplar planks.

1879—

Hansford meets Etta in the one-room schoolhouse between the creeks in West Virginia, where the dirt road weaves through thickets up to the framed front door. The families living beside Coon Creek constructed the schoolhouse, each man offering his skills: cutting the poplar logs, drawing them together, making the boards. Together, they raise the walls, lay the floor, and fill in the cracks with mortar or moss. They place two log benches on either side of the room and a desk for writing at the front. Boys and girls sit opposite each other; the young one's legs dangle off the edge while the older scholars meditate on how to get a longer Christmas vacation: poison the teacher? Lock him out of the schoolhouse until he gives them what they want? Or drop him in the icy pond for a mid-winter bath?

The children of Coon Creek learn during the winter months when farms are sleeping beneath snow and frost. The boys keep warm by playing baseball or hauling wood for the fireplace, a chore they approach with zest because they know the girls are watching the ones with brawn, with sweat on their brows, and scars on their arms. Though Hansford is small and skinny, he cuts his skin on the sharp, poking branches. He ties it together by ripping the edge of his shirt and letting just enough blood seep through

the fabric for Etta to see and swoon. The girls twist their hair around their fingers as they stand in groups beside the schoolhouse door, wondering if the strongest boy will kiss them someday.

But, for now, they content themselves with the walls of the schoolhouse, a clear canvas for young love and memory; they will be marked, scuffed, and etched. The initials of children in their chairs, names, dates, and verses: Jas. Dunn, August 9th, 1880. W.F.D. 1881.

She signs her name beside her words. Etta Ann Dean. Perhaps she is leaving it for him to see, the overalled love of her eight-year old heart. Perhaps she leaves it for the school-house, a memory of her; it is her small white fingers, her dark hair in braids tied with blue silk bows, the way she walks with a sway, metal lunch pail swinging with a jam-covered sandwich inside. In her mark, she etches her voice, cooing, as she recites her numbers off the slate, the pledge of allegiance, the Lord's Prayer, her poetry. Touching the carved words, Etta returns to the schoolhouse and whispers,

"Remember me while love is sweet,
Remember me whenever we meet,
Remember me when upon high,
I will remember you until I die."

1880—

It is the year Thomas Edison, in a sport coat and bow tie, begins testing an electric railway. In the night, he works with the rails in his rubber-gloved hands, forcing an electric current through their metal innards strong enough to move his locomotive. An

electric bulb illuminates his work space, shining off the steel and iron and the grease in his unwashed hair. The cars run along a third of a mile track: a freight car, an open-awning car, and a box car. Wheat lies in bundles or ground up fine, poured into barrels that rock and sway like Etta's hips when she walks to the schoolhouse. Laboratory boys in their dirty overalls and railroad men with their dangling mustaches and rounded bowler hats ride at 40 miles an hour till the train jumps the tracks and are hurled from their seats. Edison leaps out to tweak his invention while the men rise up with bloody noses and grass in their pockets. Brawn and blood, indeed.

In West Virginia, trains use steam and the power of coal to transport timber and coal.

It is the year the first electric streetlight is installed in Wabash, Indiana, the "Brush Light," described as "so dazzling as to be painful to the eyes." It shines yellow light onto Monumental Park to the sound of Grays Band in the Pavilion. In West Virginia, Hansford reads his father's newspaper beneath the lamp lit with oil and wonders how electricity works.

It is the year a long winter strikes the plains of the Dakota's, leaving Laura Ingalls trapped inside her small white house as predicted by the thick walls of a muskrat den. Laura watches the snow outside her window from October to May, burning twisted hay for fuel in place of coal; she eats potatoes with coarse brown bread and waits for the trains that will not dig through snow, stranding the town of De Smet till spring. Drifts blanket two-story homes, and farmers tunnel through the snow to reach their livestock. The Ingalls family gathers around their stove, the only light in their dark world, listening to Pa play his fiddle, and Laura drifts to sleep beneath a wool blanket, resting her head on

her mother's shoulder, dreaming of rolling prairie fields, bright sun, and warm breezes whispering musical notes through her hair and against her cheek.

In West Virginia, it is a cold walk to the schoolhouse where children scratch their names in the wood.

1893—

It's May 15. At the ages of twenty-one, Hansford and Etta become husband and wife. They are married by J. C. Friend, a minister of the Methodist Protestant Church, a minister of prevenient grace and new birth according to his denomination, at the residence of George Dean beneath the birch tree. This same tree killed her sister and maimed her older brother, and Thomas Dean grows up with crooked fingers.

Two months after they are married the United States falls into an economic depression. Railroads go bankrupt. They build too much, spread too far; their growth is unsustainable. Farms that are producing more crops than ever cease to operate as the nation produces more than the people can consume. Wheat prices fall to $0.08 a pound. Homeless families stack up their furniture on curbs—chairs on top of fur coats on top of end tables on top of desks. They sit in the shade of their belongings, holding a broomstick and a baby.

In West Virginia, farmers grow hay, barley, tobacco, and buckwheat.

In West Virginia, people get married under murderous birch trees.

1900—

For seven years, Hansford and Etta live in the Otter District of Braxton County, where otters once slid into the Elk River, sensing crayfish with their whiskers. Etta stays at home with three children: Austin, Lowell, and Elsie. Hansford works the farm, plowing new rows with the same broken machine; she cooks roast beef and makes apple butter. She sends the children off to school, the school with her name scratched into the walls.

They hear from the newspaper about the first electric bus in New York City, the autostage, carrying twelve people for one nickel. They wonder about traveling through the city in the smooth ride until they hear about a coal miner's open light igniting methane gas in Red Ash mine, Fayette County. It kills the fifty men who were left in the dark beneath rubble, suffocated by carbon monoxide gas. Etta recites the Lord's Prayer in front of her bedroom window, thankful for a husband that is a farmer, not a miner.

They hear about the first automobile show on November 3 in Madison Square Garden in New York City, displaying horseless carriages powered by electricity, steam, and internal combustion engines. Olds Motor Works, Baker Electric, Duryea Motor Wagon, and Locomobile light their surreys, runabouts, phaetons, and delivery wagons. Forty-eight thousand people, paying 50 cents each, come to see the cars, to see the white-enameled interior and the braking, racing, and obstacle contests. Young boys with their fathers look down from the gallery seating to watch the cars move around the wooden track, popping popcorn into their mouths and pointing at the cars weaving through flags and cones and boulders. Some wander down into the middle of the track where cars and parts are displayed in rows of dark metal. Ladies coo as they look at their reflections in

the car doors and blush as strong men offer a hand to let them sit on the red velvet seats. In West Virginia, horse and wagon are the transportation of choice, traveling at eight miles per hour between farm, home, and town over muddy, dirty roads, with hay and children loaded in the back.

They experience American chocolate, the Hershey bar, at the grocery store in Gassaway. Wrapped in white, glossy paper with gold lettering, it is advertised with a healthy, curly-haired boy emerging from a cocoa bean: *A nutritious confection.* "Hershey's sterilized milk chocolate is especially recommended for Cyclists, Athletes, Ladies and Children. It is most sustaining, being amalgamated by special process with the finest *Fresh Milk*." The small squares melt in their mouths and cost only a nickel. They just want it to last forever, drip down their throat, and sustain them. Feeling the smooth chocolate on their lips, their teeth, and then their tongue, pushing it to the roofs of their mouths and letting it dissolve there for five minutes until there is nothing left and they must take another bite.

1910—

Hansford and Etta remain in the Otter District for another ten years. They turn 38 and live with six children between the ages of one and sixteen. The farm is gone, left behind in Coon Creek. On the hill of Gassaway Town, their white trimmed home is enough for a small garden with green peppers, tomatoes, strawberries, and corn, set into neat rows. They no longer wake up to the sound of cowbells or sorrowful moos. Instead, when they look out their window, they see another house with another front porch, another square yard, another garden like their own, another man going to work down at

the train depot. The chug and shake of the trains are louder now, trembling the dust of Birch Street so that it dances and twists in the air and makes them cough. Hansford is no longer a farmer; he is a stone mason, hammering his living from the ground with a mallet and chisel as he carves gravestones with weeping willows and hands holding Bibles.

Away in the west, land is claimed for Glacier National Park, preserving the snowy mountains that are taller than the ones in West Virginia, the clear blue streams, the white mountain goats, and the hunting ground of the Blackfoot Indians. The land of the Blackfoot became the land of the public, saved from ravaging miners. Hansford's son with one arm shows him the picture of the mountain lake with white glaciers resting in the crevices between peaks, fierce and ominous. He wants to go there someday just to eat the glacial snow.

In Detroit, Henry Ford sells 12,000 cars, Model Ts, $850 each. Vanadium steel alloy, gasoline engine, rear-wheel drive, three speed, brass radiator, brass acetylene headlamps on a four-seat, open tourer in grey, green, blue, and red with a top speed of 45 mph assembled in 93 minutes. Hansford counts the money in his pockets as the machines bounce and vroom down country roads and city roads and into mountain valleys. Light glints off the lamps and lands in his eyes. The thoughts of a wagon or a train skitter from his brain as he thinks about visiting family in Huntington, traveling to see the ocean, and feeling the exhilaration of driving fast.

1916—

On September 11, the circus rolls into the town of Erwin, Tennessee. This is Charlie Sparks and his Sparks World Famous Shows! A show that is "Moral,

entertaining, and instructive!" He has powdered dogs and powdered girls; he has five elephants lead by the five ton star of the show, Mary the Elephant, the largest living land mammal. She can play 25 tunes on the musical horns without missing a note, and she can swing at a baseball with a .400 batting average. She can murder her handler, Red Eldridge, the wanderer with dust clinging to the bottom of his overalls and in his curly, carrot-colored hair. She can wrap her trunk around his thin waist, lift him ten feet in the air, his hands grasping and flailing, and hurl him into a stand of fruit. Mary can finish the job, trampling over him in a stampede so that "blood and brains and stuff" squirt all over the street, mingling with the remains of broken watermelons and cantaloupe.

It's rumored she snapped because Red did not let her eat a watermelon rind left in the street. It's rumored she had an abscessed tooth, which, when prodded and poked, gave her so much pain she lashed out against her handler. It's rumored she was full of fury and simply became angry: Elephant-bipolarity, a magnitude of animalistic anger resulting in the death of a human being.

They try guns and bullets against her thick hide, but the metal falls to the dust after colliding against Mary's impenetrable mass. They try electric current, but they miss her huge elephant heart. They suggest using the strength of two engines going two directions, with chains around her legs, dismembering her on the tracks. They suggest using the two engines coming together to crush her gray body between them. They propose another routine for Mary's next show. Mary was not going to play "Mary had a Little Lamb" on the musical horns; Mary was not going to swing for the fences. She was going to follow the trapeze artists and swing from the heights of an industrial crane to the chants of "Kill the elephant! Kill the elephant! Kill the beast!"

Her death sentence passed, Mary became human in her act of murder. Perhaps she was too deliberate to make it look like an accident; the look in her eyes, her glistening, long-lashed eyes, held nothing but hate for the human race that watched her do tricks, that tamed her to be a show that she got nothing out of, not even a watermelon rind. She was to be hung like the criminal she was. They did not know her brain was at the back of her skull. A pistol shot to that, and she would be gone in an instant. But they wanted a show, anyway.

Mary's routine was the final act that circus goers could watch at no additional charge, and a crowd of 2500, along with the whole of the Erwin's children, gathers to watch the spectacle on the tracks. Little girls with pink bows and pink cheeks cover their eyes only to peer through the cracks between their fingers. Boys climb on railcars to get a better view, but they are scared too. They have never seen anything that large be killed before, much less hung. Ladies grip the elbows of their men, hands at their mouths to hide a gasp, while the men stroke their mustaches and goatees, acting as if they have served a fair judgment upon Mary the Beast.

This is entertainment and justice, the circus flipped. The acrobats swing from the metal that twists around the enormous neck, cinching tighter the knot that suffocates with rubber gloves so as not to touch the murderer's skin. The elephant is not nimble enough to twist through the air, do a somersault, and land on her feet. She has never done a performance like this before. She goes with the flow, accepting the cold metal around her neck and at her feet.

As she is raised, the noose tightens. Pulled off her feet, she dangles like the jeweled earring suspended from the mystic's earlobe. The crane creeks with her weight,

threatening to snap, like the chains have already done today, breaking her ribs. Does she feel the pain, or is her hide thick enough to make her numb? She spins, coughs once, maybe twice, and then she falls asleep, dreaming of watermelons.

Mary the Elephant hangs for 30 minutes in train yard of Erwin, Tennessee, until the children become so bored or sick or sad that they must go home to their mothers, to their journals, to their pillows to think about what they just saw and maybe cry in the dark of their closets. The circus is over when Mary lays in her grave that is as big as a barn.

What does it mean when people hang elephants?

In West Virginia, Hansford must kill the family dog that has grown too old to walk. He carries it into the woods so that his children do not see. His shotgun is strapped to his back; the metal barrel thumps against his spine with every step he takes further into the woods off River Street in Gassaway. The animal is alert in his arms, excited to be out on the paths he used to roam, seeing squirrels run up trees and whimpering because he cannot chase them. Hansford does it quickly, pulling the trigger on his friend and burying it there in the woods, eyes burning with tears. He stays there for an hour after he is done. He can't go home, not yet.

1920—

Two years after the armistice with Germany, Hansford and Etta live on River Street across from the tracks in Gassaway. He is an engineer, most likely working for the Baltimore and Ohio Railroad. He plays with the steam engine and coughs smoke out of his lungs as trains come and go, shaking the earth as they ramble through town bringing people and taking coal. Whistles and shouts ring from the stone and red brick depot; they

holler for boarding and whistle at the girls who walk by in short, fringed dresses. Women sell caps with bows and feathers in store front windows. Families pose together in photographer's studios, faces solemn but content. Young boys and girls go to the Alpine Theater to watch movie stars and sports heroes like Charlie Chaplin and Greta Garbo, Babe Ruth. Newspapers advertise spring suits specially priced from $29.50 to $87.50. With a down payment of $5, women could purchase a washer and wringer, forcing all dirt from their children's clothes and their delicate lace curtains, forcing the clean to outshine the rest of their day-to-day lives. Pillsbury flour sells for 97 cents. It is the beginning of the Roaring Twenties, jazz music, flapper dresses and dancing, art deco, breaking out of traditions, and automobiles. Prohibition comes with the 18th Amendment. Women's suffrage comes with the 19th, and the boys and girls drink moonshine on High Knob.

1930—

All the glitter fades in ten years. The spring suit wears in the knees and a hole has started to form in the armpit of the sleek coat. Music slows to the tune of the jobless man, tapping his foot on the curb, a metal bowl at his feet and a crust of bread in his hand. The store front light flickers out, and the hats become shadows, specters of fashion that haunt young girls with curling peacock feathers. Looking at their family ten years ago, they see smooth faces and bright eyes. They press the photo to their chest with dirty hands and worried hearts because now those faces are lined with doubt and the eyes never look up from the ground anymore. They cannot wash the dirt out of their clothes; it remains and stains their homes and their stomachs that must eat it because there is nothing else they

can afford. President Herbert Hoover deals with the economic depression after the stock market crash, asking for $150 million to generate jobs with public works. In West Virginia and in the United States, people suffer unemployment, poverty, low profits, deflation, and plunging farm incomes. In the midst of crisis, 3M introduces Scotch tape in an effort to bind the broken back together, but it isn't sticky enough. In Massachusetts, frozen foods go on sale, and grocery stores display icy slabs of pork and frost covered peas in freezers. The peas melt in the hands of children who miss the circus and the hanging elephant.

Hansford and Etta live by themselves on 302 River Road across from the train tracks. They rent the home for $25 a month. Hansford claims the title of engineer, working at the water works. In ten more years, they will be on Lee St. across the Elk River Bridge in Gassaway, paying $6 a month for rent. He is 68 years old and unable to work now. If he had a television, he would see a familiar cat and mouse chase each other in black and white across the screen. If he lived in California, he would buy a hamburger for ten cents at a new barbecue restaurant called McDonalds. If he was a democrat, he would have voted Franklin Delano Roosevelt into his third term as president. If he were a younger man, he would be registered for the draft along with 16 million other men, though the United States wouldn't join the second great war till the end of 1941, though his country was preparing for it by building 50,000 airplanes, increasing the Navy, and aiding the allied Great Britain.

March 12, 1953—

His bedroom is wallpapered with green stripes. The carpet is thick and brown like the forest floor, but softer. There is a picture of Etta and himself on the table beside his bed next to the glass of water that he regularly reaches for due to his cough; he likes to feel the coolness rush into his chest. He thinks it helps him breathe. Hansford dies of a cerebral hemorrhage three days before his 82nd birthday due to arteriosclerotic heart disease, a thickening of the arterial walls. It takes him twelve hours to die.

While he is buried in Sugar Creek Cemetery, up on the hill overlooking the Elk River and the rolling Braxton County, President Truman announces the development of a hydrogen bomb, aiding the efforts of the United States during the Cold War. Dwight D. Eisenhower will become president later that year, and the North and South will come to an armistice on the 38th parallel, ending the Korean War.

1954—

Etta won't have to remember Hansford for very long; she will follow him into the ground a year and a half later. She will lay by her husband beneath their stone two hundred yards from where the Elk River runs through West Virginia, carrying the canoes of her sons to fishing holes and dams. They will tell stories about hearing about wars and plane rides while the river takes them where it wants. The current will move as they move, time no longer a factor in anything except the sun that shifts from dawn to noon to dusk. As they pull their boat ashore, they will say nothing, but they will think about their mother's name in the walls of the old schoolhouse. They will remember her, and they will wish she had seen the elephant hang.

THE OLD KODAK

Slide. Light passes through the lens, curved glass, redirected and bent; the image passes through unscathed. Metal panes close over the glass, stopping the light for a brief moment, enough time for absorption and darkness. In this dark place, the salt and silver begin to work, leaving an imprint of the reflected light on a piece of paper. Something has been captured through a process more powerful than meager memory that flits and flies, obscuring the edges of fingers, lips, and riverbeds. The eye takes in light, bends it, sees something, and shuts, allowing the outlines to linger on the black insides of eyelids in hazy whites, purples, and blues. Slide. We open our eyes and see the effect of time and change destroying what shaped that moment. The image will not stick.

* * *

They sit in the back of a wagon that travels down the dirt road pulled by two horses. Five girls look at you, somber and serene, each with a wide-brimmed hat, behind a driver dressed in black. You have called this picture “A Wagonload of Sugar Bottomites. Roll along country wagon, roll along. May 25, 1917.” You have also called them Sugar Bottom lassies, the young ones from below town. They come from Sugar Creek, where its waters meet the Elk River. You live three miles away in Gassaway, and you followed them that day, across the new Elk River bridge, where they giggled and waved at you as you directed them into place for a snapshot. You called them the Campfire Hikers then. Now they travel on the dirt road on four wooden wheels between trees and valleys and small white houses and rows of wood fences. The five girls sit in a row of two behind and a row of three in the front, facing you, looking out from the back

of the wagon. Mabel Fink is in front, on the right. She has a dark sweater wrapped around her shoulders, wrapped around a white blouse, tied with a dark scarf beneath the collar. Her hands rest in her lap on top of her dark skirt that almost reaches her ankles covered with black boots. Her head tilts slightly, and she looks at you with a shy gaze beneath her lashes, half a smile curling up the left side of her face. Mabel Hays is in the middle, her long, tan skirt draping over Mabel Fink's dark one, hands around her knees. She, too, wears a white blouse with a dark scarf tied beneath the collar. She looks young and loud, the voice of the young women in Sugar Creek. She leads the group, directing them in their journeys along the Elk. She is probably younger than you but not by much, perhaps just finishing school along with the rest of the girls in the wagon. Booted toes, white in the sun, peek out from beneath her long tan skirt that envelopes her knees in folds. She draws your attention when glancing at the wagon. The rest of the gang belongs to her. You took this picture with her permission as they traveled back home. Though she giggled and laughed, she doesn't trust you. The road curves away to the right in the distance, through a patch of pine and hardwood. The wagon will soon be out of sight, the girls gone home. Better snap their picture before they're gone forever, Farrell.

* * *

Before cameras, they had their hands. They painted pictures on walls, on paper, on canvas, on brick. They tried to capture the human and the landscape with pencils and paintbrushes and their own fingers. They told stories through their figures, mirroring human likeness and beauty with sticks and hair. They desired to remember their time and the faces of those who lived in it. They wanted to catch the fleeting curve of the woman's chin, the edge of the sword held by the man in a moment of victory, the slope of a hill

that ended in a pond with lily pads and bullfrogs. They thought that they could make their mark by leaving a trace.

We still think like that.

The world at last brought forth a pinhole and called it *camera obscura*, “dark room.” The Chinese and Greek, Arabs and English philosophized on this small aperture, a hole through which light becomes focused and linear. At first, they used the pinhole to study the sun and the solar eclipse through which they saw rays spread in crescent shapes. They saw the sky darken in a matter of minutes, long enough for ancient soldiers to make peace, long enough to set a time and date, long enough for godlike fingers and hands to expose the flash, the passing of the moon in front of the great light, outlining its perfect curve that contains what it is. In a darkened room, the small hole opened to the world beyond, and, through it, the world was projected upside down on the opposite wall, inverting the lighted image. Yet, as the moon could not secure the sun in its shade, neither could the pinhole secure the picture. Instead, these cameras became popular with artists, who traced the outline of the inverted figure on a canvas, creating more accurate lines and shapes—the outline of a nose here, the brim of a hat above her face, and there, the feathered head of a red-throated waxwing.

In 1839, the daguerreotype removed the limitations of the artist’s hand, allowing the image to draw itself. When silver salts were discovered to darken from light alone, Louis-Jacques Mandé Daguerre and Joseph Nicephore Niépce collaborated on a chemical process that would cause the pictures from pinhole cameras to stick. These men sought a medium that was sensitive enough to light in order to form an image upon it, but at the same time, making that medium insensitive to further exposure so that it could be viewed

in light without harm. By treating silver-plated copper sheets with iodine to make them sensitive to light, Daguerre exposed the sheets in a camera for ten minutes to the streets of Paris and two men shining shoes, and, afterwards, he developed the sheet with warm mercury vapor, creating a lasting image, the *Boulevard du Temple*. He fine-tuned this over time so that images could be recorded with a common salt solution. Sitting still for several minutes, Daguerre posed in front of a blank wall, looking beyond the camera with a light in his eyes, forever sealed on the metal sheet. He became the lighted object passing through the lens and into the black box with his dark mustache and curled gray hair, a black bow tied around his neck. He rested his elbow on a patterned cloth, his veined hand at the edge, bulging fingers pointing downward.

* * *

Behind a downed tree trunk, rotted and skinned of its bark, four young people gather to drink. Surrounded by dark, twisting bushes and old, decrepit trees succumbing to the elements of High Knob, they huddle close together with glass and cask held to their lips. The valley falls away in the distance, allowing other hills and mountains to raise the earth in humps, hills, and points. They drink the good stuff, girls and boys. Your friend Reese knocks back clear liquid from a glass bottle, while Mary holds the clay pot with two hands, tilting its contents into her throat. Kate Boggs stands in the middle of the group, one hand on her stomach, the other extended from her side, as if she were singing an opera, reaching for the notes in her diaphragm, or rehearsing Shakespeare with flare and finality, or releasing a deep belch from the pit of her stomach, something that would be suitable only amongst her friends. A book appears to hover in the darkness near the ground, white with a black, amoeba-like image. It might be sitting on the lap of the girl in

the dress, Miss Meredith, a white collar resting beneath a smile, white hat with a black band around the head. It might be sitting on a stump in the shadows, the stump left over from the fallen tree trunk. It could be your place among your friends, your place reserved when you left to take their picture. You all sit in the woodpile, drinking, rehearsing, singing, and reading, while the dirt clings to the bottom of your pant legs.

* * *

A painted picture of a stylish girl in blue looks down at the dark mechanism in her hand, holding it at her waist. One hand grasps the side, the little metal tab that releases the shutter. Beneath her, the word KODAK appears embossed on the page. She renders herself obsolete on the front of the Eastman Kodak Catalogue, advertising cameras. Real people could do her job. She could retreat into her white house surrounded by fluffy blue and yellow flowers.

Photography no longer existed as the pursuit of only professionals lugging around "a pack-horse load" and a camera the size of a microwave oven. In 1888, taking pictures became an everyday event, "convenient as the pencil." With the slogan, "you press the button, we do the rest," the public grasped the Brownie in the palms of their hands and took 100 exposures of their children, their friends, their neighborhood, becoming photographers in the small towns of West Virginia, Michigan, and beyond. Cameras were no longer only for the wealthy and artistic. The Eastman Kodak Company claimed the "desire for taking pictures of the things that interest the individual is innate in mankind," and so taking pictures became synonymous with their name. The whole world kodaks, they said. Kodakery. They made it easy for anyone to take pictures with film tanks for

developing non-curling film, and Velox paper—chemicals named methanol and acetone converted light to image.

* * *

“A rose between two thorns.” Mary. Duckie. Kate. “Slightly Twisted.” It looks like you just got out of church, standing between two young ladies, one dressed in white, the other in black. You wear slacks and a suit coat, a tie tucked in beneath the collar. Your mouth and body twist as you lean to your left toward Kate, the girl in black. Kate holds the brim of her hat with her left hand, keeping the sun from her eyes or the wind from stealing it away. Mary does the same, holding her hat and resting her arm on a book that rests on her hip. You don’t hold your hat; the bill remains perfectly curved above your eyes while the sun shines down on your nose. Your right arm is tucked behind your back, looking proper. You don’t have a left hand or a left elbow, only a left shoulder because your left arm is missing. The sleeve that would hold it stays pinned to the side of your jacket, making your body look whole. All your shirts are like this. You rub your nub sometimes when it aches, but no one sees the skin. They say you lost it to cancer or gangrene and that’s why it aches sometimes. This prevents you from going to war, prevents you from easily buttoning your coat and tying your tie, prevents you from fully embracing the girls on either side of you. You can give them only half. Yet, your lack of an arm did not prevent you from having friends, from being part of a pack that ran Braxton County and teased young school girls and drank moonshine in the hills and snapped the shutter for photographs. The pictures never expose you as a strange thing; the faces of your friends never label you as odd. Perhaps it was your happy personality; you lost one part of your body to save the whole, a sacrifice that didn’t kill you.

* * *

The effect of a lens. It changes a landscape to a work of art in a simple click. It coerces a person to look and try to be natural. Unless the lens can hide or not be noticed, the lens will attract the attention of a few eyes and smiles. It causes a group of children to line up in rows, tallest to shortest. It makes people pose, put their arms around each other, hold up their prize catch or what they made with their hands. It catches people off guard, flashing their natural light, caught chewing a sandwich or drinking clear liquid from a bottle. It changes the scene from one without a lens to one with.

* * *

My Bluefield School. Children grouped and lined in front of a white building. You teach these children in the one-room schoolhouse. Three windows of glass, one opened, two girls with bows hang out of it, their elbows resting on the pane. One holds an American flag. The children hold at least five American flags in all. The girls stand in white dresses, large bows tying up a bun, braid, or nothing. Some of the boys have hats, round buckets and caps. Some of the boys have no shoes, their breaches rolled up to their knees, exposing pale skin. Some of the girls look shy and scared, hands clasped together on their chest, looking away from your camera. Some of the children smile; some of them frown or look at you with dislike or disbelief. A boy in the front holds his mouth agape, eyes fixed on your lens, while the boy beside him drapes an arm over his knee. A girl in the window looks down at her schoolmates, fingers peeling the paint on the ledge. The girl at the end has her hands on the shoulders of the child in front of her, hair tied back in two braids, while her sibling wears a white bowl-like hat that shades her timid eyes. Some of them stand; some of them sit, legs crossed, legs curled up to their chest, legs

straight out in front, one leg bent up, the other leg laying bent on the dusty ground that looks covered with prickling grass. Beyond the front door of the school, the ground slopes into a valley that rises into another hill. You teach them algebra, biology, English, geography, and ancient history on a black chalkboard, drawing neat white lines across the dark surface; they learn to read, write, and cipher. They come every morning with their metal lunch pails swinging at their sides. You have already filled the stove with wood, warming the room and puffing smoke out of the chimney that curls into unbroken ampersands.

* * *

On my table, rippled black leather covers the square form. It smells old, like an antique shop with aging wood and rusting metal. That makes sense, though; that's where I got it. I wanted one like yours. I imagine yours would be like this. It would just be newer, shiny, no green-rusted dirt in the cracks. You would be able to take the back off to load the film, knowing what would let you do that. I imagine the back sliding off to reveal stained, intricate wood that surrounds the folded-up part. I don't want to break it, so I let it remain whole. I pull the metal tab at the front and hear a soft click as a panel releases.

The camera extends six inches toward my face, revealing burgundy accordion-like bellows with nickel struts on either side. They attach to a flat metal piece that has the circular metal lens in the middle of it. Pull down the metal braces and set it upright. I'll find the shutter, a metal tab, near the lens. It clicks at different speeds: I, B, and T. Instantaneous, bulb, and time. Above the lens, a small black box with glass openings on two sides allows me to find my view. Holding the camera at my waist, I look through the

top. The white window, couch, and curtains reflect up through the angled mirror, hazy and unclear, crumbs of dirt clinging to the reflective surface. Snap the shutter and hear the click of the metal leaves. Though light passes through the lens, catching the illuminated block of windows and the brown couch, it will not fix to anything. It will pass through the bellows and into the depths of the camera where no 2 ½ by 4 ½ inch A120 film exposes it on a sheet. Mabel Hays does not stand in the camera caught in the act of smiling at you while her lunch box bangs against her knees. In the darkness of the camera, she flutters and dies with nothing to bring her back to life, nothing to reveal her has she really was. This camera is like the eye. It looks and sees but it cannot permanently rewrite, fix, or expose the objects in front of it.

This camera sold for $12, while I bought it for $40, advertised as a folding pocket camera, one that transports and conceals itself within the large, bulky pockets lined with cloth in a 1915 coat.

* * *

You don't give them names. You call them "Mere-maids." The three young ladies stand in a wooden boat out on the river, though it's hard to tell how far. The front of the boat must be bracing itself on the shoreline. No ripples stir the water. Two girls stand barefoot, sure of their foundation, one on a single leg on the seat at the back, a foot on, a foot off. Smiling, they have their arms around each other, wearing knee-length dresses and round hats that grew popular in the 1920s. Behind them, the river spreads wide to the opposite shoreline. Trees hang over the shore, hiding actual land. A man sits in a boat like yours, his back to your camera. Perhaps he fishes for catfish, muskies, brook trout, or yellow perch at the edge of the weeds. Perhaps he seeks solitude on the river before

ending his weekend and heading back home. But you decided to bring these girls to your boat and call them mermaids, or just, merely maids. You built this boat and promised them a ride on its maiden voyage; you promised to name it after one of them. Juannie or Kathryn, Nonnie or Ida. You make up this story because the boat is not yours; you sought only to impress. You found it on the riverbank, and the girls decided to impress you enough to take their picture. Further down, you have an old wooden green canoe that you paddle to your favorite fishing holes in search of flathead catfish, walleye, and crappies. You also use your canoe to take ladies out on the river for pleasure rides, though these three have found their own boat. They all look happy except the one on one leg. She leans against her friend in the middle, her bare feet crossed. She looks to the side of your camera beneath a round white cap. She would be shorter than the other girls if she weren't standing on the seat.

* * *

The faces and dark eyes, some hidden beneath hats, rest on black pages with embossed vines scrawl up and down the edges. You write names and titles next to several of them, your name as well. Lowell Farrell. L. F. D. Duckie. White boxes surround the small pictures, framing parts of your everyday memory. I know more lies on the other side of your camera where the object spreads its light through small apertures and blinking eyes, but I'm cut off, cut short, jipped, robbed by the capacity of the lens.

I want to see beyond the photograph and into the life of Farrell. I would color the hills of Gassaway with varying shades of green, from bright to deep forest to laurel to dark moss green, as the sun hits the top most leaves and filters down into the bending ferns. I would color the Elk with reflected light, bouncing blues and browns and emerald

greens as the water curves the valley beside the metal train tracks. I would color your jackets gray or black, painting dust on your knees and above your ankles from where you walked on the roads or waded into the mud, fetching your runaway canoe. I would put a little pink in your cheeks from the wind on High Knob. I would put a little red in your plaid cap, the one you wear when you're with your friends. You would come to me as you existed, alive and in many hues, rather than in variations of black, white, and yellow. I would look beyond the frame and see why this place was yours; I could live with you for a little while and then come home and tell everyone how you slept beneath a cotton quilt made by your mother, how you shot squirrels out of trees with one arm, how you read books about the wooly sedge, the spring peeper, and the northern red salamander that breathes through its skin. But I can't see that. I see what the lens saw, what light projected on the film and what the pencil scratched into its surface—names, places, and dates.

I look back at the past and connect to the eyes and smiles that have remained the same for the past hundred years. I realize we're not much different. We still need friends. We still love our home. We still love the adventures of the wild, cooking over a campfire, canoeing on a river, hunting for rabbits and squirrels. I can be content with this. It is better to have a window than a wall.

* * *

A river trips between you and more hills. A few trees, pines and oaks, dot the sides, grouping around little white houses and barns that have been assembled along a road that drives beside the river. You sit on the other side by the train tracks. You know this river. You know that it is the longest river in West Virginia that remains within the

state’s borders. You know the fishing holes and the fastest route to where you keep your boat. You walk along it often, taking its picture and labeling these “Scenes Along the Elk.” But you won’t remain beside the Elk. You find another river in another town in West Virginia. You walk by this one often as well. You live within two blocks of it, the Tygart Valley River. A large lake is dammed up by the Tygart Dam on this here river, and this structure fascinates you. It has something to do with being recently built by men without jobs who placed the white block stones in Art Deco style to hold back the river’s flood. You take pictures along the banks and call them “Dam Scenes.”

* * *

The folding camera has become a thing of the past. I now have a camera that displays the pictures right after I have taken them on a little screen at the back. My camera is smaller, more compact, easier to use. I can take thousands of pictures on one device and leave them there if I wanted on a little plastic chip. I can project them on a screen and take moving videos. This camera can focus, flash, zoom, and go underwater. In the clear blue of Lake Superior, the digital display outlines the edges of rocks that bear the sun’s rippling rays. I can turn my colored picture to black and white, like yours, with the push of a button. Film is no longer required, just a battery, an SD card, and a computer. I sway in the water as my bare feet as pale as the moon appear on the screen of my camera. Click.

* * *

Three men kneel in a grassy field. Each of them has a gun in their hands. You crouch in the middle, with cap on your head and a pipe in your mouth. I can tell it’s you because you’re missing an arm. You shot well in spite of this.

* * *

We take pictures to remember the elephants that were hung by chains, large throats suffocated beneath the metal. We want to remember what it looks like to see a crane hang the massive beast beside the tracks. We take pictures to rejoice with the returning sailor as he wraps his arms around his girl and drops into her kiss. We take pictures to see the face of the worrying mother, her children hiding against her neck. She places her hand against her chin as her forehead bears the wrinkles of depression. We take pictures to remember the man on the chair with a hand on his hip; facing away from the camera, his back reveals a network of hills, raised and interconnected, bleeding from the crack of the master's whip. We take pictures to remind ourselves that at one time women could be fined if their swimsuits were too short at the beach. We take pictures to pass on the message that "war is hell" and that humans once were the test dummies for bulletproof vests and that new shoes can bring joy to a child in the midst of a world war. Clutching the black shiny shoes to his chest, he throws his head back, smiles, while his feet still wear worn leather with holes, laces untied.

* * *

Just a little of the car shop gang stand beside the tracks. Four men, three hats, two ties, pose between steel rails and buildings. They work the rail cars in the yard near Three Forks Creek that joins with the Tygart River in the middle of town. They inspect the frames for holes, cracks, and rust, ensuring that the rims treads, plates, hub axles, and bearings of the wheels remain in good repair. In the repair shop or the roundhouse, they sit on small stools beside the metal giants with hammers and chisels, pounding out stuck bolts and rivets, cutting into cold steel. They use the alemite grease gun with a pistol grip

and thumb trigger to inject grease into main-rod and side-rod bearings so the driving wheels can move with ease. They feel hard flecks hit their faces; they brush these off and continue to pound and cut and fix the steam and diesels that come down the tracks. Oil dries on their dirty leather gloves, their shirts and pants; they come home smelling like a train engine. They are the maintenance and repair men at the B&O station in Grafton, the car shop gang. You are part of them, but you're not in the picture. You don't fix the cars; you don't use the oil cans or the wrenches. You are the clerk. You keep the books, making sure cars get done on time. Every day you see the trains coming over the rails. Freight cars pull timber, coal, grain, livestock, iron. Passenger trains still pull people from one location to another, servicing them with fancy dining cars and private sleeping quarters. The locomotive still carried America, though cars and trucks made transportation and travel easier. Other things could bind the nation; other things could get products to markets. Still, you will stay here at the car shop as long as you hear the whistle and grinding wheels. Some of them are steam; a few are diesel. They smell different to you though they carry similar loads.

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