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THE SALEING SUBCULTURE

By

Hayli May Cox

THESIS

Submitted to
Northern Michigan University
In partial fulfillment of the requirements
For the degree of

MASTER OF ARTS

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SIGNATURE APPROVAL FORM

The Saleing Subculture

This thesis by Hayli Cox 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.

Committee Chair: Matthew Gavin Frank Date

First Reader: Jennifer Howard Date

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ABSTRACT

THE SALEING SUBCULTURE

By

Hayli May Cox

The Saleing Subculture is a collection of short and flash creative nonfiction essays with influences including travel writing, cultural studies, lyric essays, and memoir. Each essay attempts to contribute to a larger understanding of a unique subculture of yard salers as well as a single woman's family dynamic within the culture. The collection also endeavors to interrogate relationships between people and the meanings they give to the objects they engage with or choose to cast away.

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2017

DEDICATION

For my family, especially my Mom and Dad, without whom these pages couldn't live.

For my Aunt Ida. For the sales.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I have many people to recognize for their role in this collection of stories. First, I would like to thank Matthew Gavin Frank for directing my thesis and encouraging and inspiring me. His exuberance and advice made its way onto these pages and into many of my essays. Despite being busy living his many adventures, he always had time to read mine.

Thank you Jennifer Howard for agreeing to be my reader, for her invaluable comments, her encouragement, and for her infectious optimism.

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I have endless gratitude to my instructors and workshop facilitators at NMU in addition to those already mentioned, particularly Dr. David Wood, Laura Soldner, Dr. Rachel May, Dr. Russel Prather, Monica McFawn, and Lynn Fay.

Many thanks to all my friends and colleagues at NMU who have inspired and supported me in workshops, in the hallways, and in the world beyond academia. I'd like to thank dezireé a. brown and Jason Teal especially for their support and for allowing me to join them on a Midwest reading tour.

Thanks to Mitchell Martin for letting me read my writing aloud to him for revision, ranging from these essays to drafts of important emails.

Finally, I want to acknowledge my appreciation for my parents, my brother, and my sister for their support of my writing, as well as for their love.

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INTRODUCTION

I am called a saler. I come from a family of salers. Not to be confused with people who simply stop at an occasional attractive yard or garage sale, salers will seek out locations with large numbers of such sales, often community wide rummage sales, and make a point of visiting each one. Although some of the reasoning behind the activity involves finding good deals on products, most salers see the activity as a hobby they engage in for entertainment. My family comprises generations of salers, spending every available weekend, weather-permitting, driving or walking from sale to sale hoping to see something beautiful or buy something interesting, all the while bonding at a deep level with each other and learning about people through the things they cast away.

Since the early 1800s, Americans have flocked to churches and shipping docks to buy treasures no longer needed by their previous owners, and since the 50s and 60s they have visited yards and garages with pockets full of change hoping to find things they need or objects that fascinate them. Although most people in the recent decades have used the internet or newspapers to sell and buy used items, many still find joy and entertainment driving or walking down streets adorned with neon signs and full tables. Sales are known by many names, including yard sale, tag sale, garage sale, rummage sale, and estate sale. Some people refer to salers as pickers or rummagers, others use a more nautical spelling and refer to the activity as sailing.

For the most part these names mean the same thing; an individual or small group gathers used items in a location, with the purpose of selling the items to passers by and saleing hobbyists. The sale host may or may not place tags, signs, and stickers on or near objects to signify asking price. The host may advertise the sale in newspapers and online (though online-only "sales" on places like Facebook and Craigslist are not nearly the same experience) and, most often, the host places signs at the ends of driveways and roads. What the signs read is varied and not always regionally determined, though each can signify slight variances and carry a different connotation. An estate sale is often held inside a house, often after someone dies. A moving sale may also be inside a house, but not always. Elaborations on sale type—yard, barn, or garage—may or may not reflect where a sale is held. A rummage sale, my least favorite type, is no different from any other but implies through its name something less wholesome.

There exists a well-worn stigma, one I've experience personally, against people who make a habit, hobby, or ritual of hunting for yard sales. Many people believe that the sole purpose of a sale is to get a deal. Often images frugal, unclean, hoarders arise against those who partake, but the act is more than shopping. It is a subculture of people who often consider bargains only a small aspect of the activity, looking to be wowed or entertained by the act of traveling from sale to sale and exploring the lives of people, gaining brief entry into their space and lives and pondering the items they decide they no longer need. When I was young my mother stopped buying our new clothes at yard sales in whatever town we were living in at the time, after I was teased at school by the girl who'd owned my dress before. I'd tried to lie about where I'd gotten the dress—teal and navy with a turtle on the chest—but the girl had seen my mother there. My own aunts,

who once saled with my mother and grandmother, came to discredit the activity after they grew older and earned more money. When saleing is recognized in literature and popular culture, which is significantly rare, it is often represented in a way which reinforces the stigmas and devalues the subculture.

Often there are classist undertones to some of these examinations of salers. Laura Spencer's *I Brake for Yard Sales: and Flea Markets, Thrift Shops, Auctions, and the Occasional Dumpster* is one of few writings on the topic, and the book focuses on "bargain hunting" and being frugal. Her comparison of yard sales to dumpsters is an unfair one, and leads to many misconceptions. Though she briefly recognizes the activity as a personal hobby, Spencer tends to address crafting items, home décor, and how to hunt for bargains and turn profits. She frequently refers to the objects at sales as things which need saving, which places the importance on the "savior" and undermines the history, memories, and people associated with the objects before she comes into contact with them. The book's title and content fail to signify the distinct differences between flea markets, thrift shops, and other sale locations from the yard, barn, or garage sales at people's homes.

Other books, like Maureen Stanton's *Killer Stuff and Tons of Money: An Insider's Look at the World of Flea markets, Antiques, and Collecting*, are written by people who were not raised in the culture but rather are interested in exploring it through immersion writing, often focusing again on the money and matter rather than the relationships and memories surrounding these subcultures. Most television shows featuring sales, such as *Antique Roadshow*, *American Pickers,* and *Garage Sale Wars,* focus on these same aspects and ignore people like me, who are immersed in the cultural phenomena

involving entertainment, adventure, discovery, and memory-making. I formed many of my happiest memories on sunny summer weekends with quarters in my pockets. I hope to collect the words and experiences of more than just myself, but the myriad families who consider saleing a hobby and a life-enriching activity.

To further understand the cultural phenomenon, I tried to understand its origins and breadth, the nature of collecting, cultural memory, and subcultural obsessions. I traveled along the world's longest yard sale route, The 127 Corridor Sale, down US 127 from Michigan to Gadsden, Alabama where thousands of sellers participated and even more saled. I saled around Canada, finding the laws surrounding yard sale solicitation more rigorously enforced and virtually no sales on days other than Saturday. I searched archives for the places I visited and where I'd lived, finding advertisements in old newspapers next to news updates from WW II, sales run by homemakers, selling women's clothes and household items. Many were held inside houses during the hours men would be working. Now, most newspapers have sections in the classifieds devoted to sales, some have apps and pages on their websites. Most sales I've encountered fall between Thursday and Sunday. Amid my travels, I spoke to and observed other salers, gathering their stories and learning why they liked to sale. Some people bring lists of what they need, dimensions of the space they've set aside for couches and soda streamers. Some salers don't bring money with them at all.

In addition to research more directly related to my thesis subject, I reviewed some historical and subcultural studies, as well as travel writing. Matthew Gavin Frank's *The Mad Feast: An Ecstatic Tour through American's Food* aided me in connecting history and research with memoiristic aspects while illuminating regional cultures of many areas

I saled in. In fact, I read much of this book aloud to my parents on our weekend saleing US 127. *The Smithsonian's History of America in 101 Objects* served as an illuminating cultural study which helped me connect the culture I'd been steeped in with historical events. Many of the objects and collections illuminated by the book—such as the Dorothy's Ruby Red Slippers from *The Wizard of OZ* and *Star Wars* memorabilia— are frequently present collections at yard sales or are commonly specifically sought out by salers. *With Amusement for All* and *American Nations* both offered comprehensive overviews of political and commercial climates in the Americas since colonial settlement, though they did not prove as useful for the way I approached my thesis.

What follows is my attempt to not only explore the subculture, but to highlight its greater significance in American culture as well as what role it played within my family. More than a hobby, saleing became a ritual specifically for my mother, father, and myself. Our love of saleing was passed down to us by older family members and became an integral part of our lives, just as depression was passed down from my grandmother to my mother, then finally from her to her children. The saleing ritual helped us cope with the stresses of surviving and allowed us to connect. In the ways in which church services, cooking practies, and other rituals sustain and unite other families, saleing sustained us.

I've tried to connect the worlds of toddling salers clutching handfuls of quarters, of aged ladies behind makeshift cash registers, and of townsfolk who often see saleing events as breeding grounds for thrifty bargainers. I have collected my experiences, the testimonies of others, images, instants. Through micro moments, photographical elements, and longer essayistic explorations, I hope to illuminate what it means to be an American, a person with depression, and a citizen of a capitalistic system among other

things. I want to contribute to an understanding of the meaning of our relationships with each other and the things we fill our lives and worlds with.

Saleing

Momma is happiest on cloudless weekends with a twenty dollar bill stuck in the back pocket of her denim capris, anklets dangling against tan sandals. With a Styrofoam cup of McDonald's unsweetened iced tea in her hand, Dad navigating behind the wheel, a summer heat blowing through windows. This practice has always been her therapy, and over time it became my own. It had something to do with the aromas of early Sunday meals pouring from houses into garages as we perused, or the fast-paced quest for signs on street corners. Maybe the scent of sunscreen and baby wipes on our faces and hands as we walked up driveways, or maybe none of these. Our champagne-colored Chevy van with a broken fuel gage transported us yard to yard, its trip odometer counting the miles to the next gas station stop. We sought signs with arrows pointing to rummage sales, yard sales, barn sales, estate sales, and even "huge" sales down unfamiliar roads. We stopped

for lunch and talked about the things we'd seen. Goose-shaped ladles, vintage Playboy magazine collections, once, in Alabama, a discriminatory set of iron-cast figurines. We imagined the sorts of people

who had kept them. We imagined our newly bought tables and chairs adorned with bright price stickers furnishing our home. We brought back clothes in reused shopping bags to wash and wear until we outgrew them and gave them away.

The land we charted most was on the border of Michigan and Ohio. We checked yard sale smartphone apps and Craigslist, looking for locations dense with little red pins clustered on maps. At night I cautiously checked the weather, eyed the moon's corona for possibilities of rain. Hillsdale, Wauseon, Toledo, Adrian, and many cities I can hardly recall marked weekends on our calendars. I began memorizing the shapes of cities, the alleys that led to back yards and full tables. We got lost on dusty back roads and city streets named after trees.

My dad preferred sales with mechanical things, tools and unidentifiable metal contraptions, but was interested in exploring every section long after Momma and I stood waiting at the van. Sometimes he'd go for the dresses, the ones with flowers that reminded him of me, and I always agreed they were perfect. They filled up half my closet and most of my summer days. He still buys them for me and sends them 500 miles in re-used cardboard boxes with home-canned goods from the garden we started together and long letters in Momma's soft, half-cursive hand. Momma always sifted through furniture, clothing, and purses but usually bought something for someone else instead. She

liked to see the baby clothes, to pick up tiny fleece outlines of children in her hands and think of those she knew who might need them. Soon our Chevy van, rear seats pulled down to make room, would be filled with matchbox cars, Depression-era glass vases, collectible cow figurines, mason jars full of old buttons, and diverse styles of clothing for just about everyone we knew.

Dad's GPS guided us through countrysides of cornfields, blacktop roads with visible heat obscuring the distance, until a flash of neon urged us to pull over and peruse. I preferred city wide or community yard sales, places we could park and walk about, observing architecture—the kinds of houses we dreamed we might someday have; ones with fireplaces and barns and wooden porches—between sales. Momma said funny things when prices were high, like "Must be the mortgage is due." Some sales were simply undesirable: oversized clothes piled high, VHS workout tapes from the 70s, improbable quantities of golf balls, or an old lady's awful orange Tupperware. Momma had a knack for identifying these sales from the road, scanning the tables, face puckered with disgust. She could also identify the "permasale," running every weekend in perpetuity. She knew there would be nothing new or exciting and she memorized these disappointments by their signs. Unless the sales were scarce and we were desperate, we abandoned these for more promising horizons.

Something in the transience gripped me—we stepped for a moment into someone's yard, garage, or home. Sometimes we were silent, sometimes we spoke to the people running the sale. Always we left, either empty-handed or with a small reminder of that moment, of the person behind a table who no longer needed an item we too would someday pass on. Some of these things I have kept—shelves full of books, elephants

carved from wood and stone, vinyl records with names like Margie and Johnny written on the center label. I have always wondered what these objects might remember, imagined the hands before me turning and lifting newly-printed pages, a woman's hips swaying, her voice singing to the "Dirty Dancing Soundtrack" long before my own. I imagine my mother when she was young and before disease and depression, her cursive where Margie's is. Her slender hands flipping a 45.

When Momma's disease started to manifest, first blinding her in one eye and then making her black out, become dizzy, and go numb, we started shortening our weekend trips. After innumerable blood tests, specialists, and MRI's, they called it Devic's disease. There wasn't much research and the doctors said it was often misdiagnosed as Multiple Sclerosis. Her immune system was attacking her own nervous system and there was no cure. There were no answers. I did research and translated what the doctors said to her, trying to make sense of it for all of us. Antigens, protein protrusions on cells her body didn't understand. My laptop open across the dining room table, I translated jargon into more hopeful words as she read the furrow between my brows. *There's not enough research. Yours was caught so much earlier. They don't really know for sure.* Before her symptoms, we would park at the entrances of suburb communities during city-wide garages sales and walk the streets, visiting home after home until we had too much to carry. As Momma's body betrayed her further, we started driving from house to house, sometimes even skipping these large groupings altogether. I heard her weep through the walls more often than before, her back curved as she pitched herself over knees, weeping on the toilet as I tiptoed past the door and onto purple kitchen carpet for a drink of water. I watched the numbers of orange Rx bottles on the island counter grow.

Before I was old enough to sale with my parents, before the days when they held hands, I went with my mom and her sisters. Then there were always newspapers, classifieds circled, piled in center consoles. My cousins, little brother, and I were locked in the used 90's van of the moment until the sun fell to the horizon, peace kept by old Gameboys and promises of "be good and I might get you something." While my cousins fought over Power Ranger and Pokémon cartridges, I wished I was out there, quarters in my pockets and digging through the remnants of other people's lives. I wanted to rifle through bins of toy cars, buy the Barbie dolls once loved by the girl behind the desk collecting money. Her knee-high converse, fingers texting the same friends she once played house with. My cousins don't remember those days fondly, my brother still cites the heat and crowdedness of back seats every time my parents and I ask him to join us, though he was five years younger and still in diapers then. Despite the shoulder-to-shoulder dampness, I remember looking forward to these trips, watching Momma from a window, a different woman than the one she was at home. Her posture erect, her then-long hair permed and thrown back in laughter at an unheard joke.

Sometimes Momma saled with my great Aunt Ida, her closest friend, and they brought me along. They reminisced and sang aloud to Reba and Dolly Parton while I played with tiny dinosaurs or drew on old receipts, sucking on candies Momma poured

into the plastic wrappers of her cigarette packets—a kind of rationing. I sang and memorized tracks by Paper Lace, Cyndi Lauper, and Three Dog Night. Often, I asked them question after childish question—*Why don't bugs just fly on the sides of the road?*—that they had no answers for until they'd offer me a quarter in exchange for ten minutes of silence. I'd inevitably break the stillness with a cry of "I'm thirsty" to which Aunt Ida, a wide smile pushing her cheeks over her eyes, always replied, "Then open your mouth 'cuz I've gotta pee." That was the thing about Aunt Ida, even back then she could always make Momma laugh.

Aunt Ida always had her own sales at the trailer across from ours, and I'd bounce my pigtails across potholed Sanford Lane with a quarter and gummy, baby-toothed grin. I wasn't allowed to wander far, as the trailer park was frequented by police sirens and populated by people who drew them in, but our 70's trailer was only steps from the sky blue one Aunt Ida furnished with her own yard sale finds. In addition to the usual used goods, she stocked her sale with candies of all sorts and leftovers from an old store she used to own. Ball and paddle games, chocolate Santas, tops that sang when spun. These were among my first sales, my little brother toddling along, hoping for popsicles and a ride on my uncle's scooter he called the "beep beep." I used to beg Momma to let me

have a sale too, and she'd cart out tubs of old purses and clothes my brother and I outgrew, many of which belonged to my sister before. I picked my least favorite bouncy balls, Pokémon cards, and stuffed animals to put ten cent stickers on. My hand-drawn sign at the end of the driveway proclaiming "GRAG SALE," drawing nearly nobody onto our trailer porch or the shadowed space under the carport, the pebbled driveway strewn with the green, fallen roundness of black walnut seeds.

Their teasing made me frown then, but now I miss how Momma looked on those trips with Aunt Ida, her effortless laughter. I know she does too. I miss Aunt Ida's long blonde hair and soft hands, the way she frustrated me worse than my own siblings with her mischievous wit but always had her door open to me right across the street. How she loved sunflowers and papered her walls with them. The taste of the diabetic suckers in her dining room—strawberry banana—that I always preferred over the dum-dums in the other bowl. But when Aunt Ida remarried, her new husband put her in the hospital and she didn't come out. Momma stopped saleing for a while and never welcomed the music the same way again. Now, she says, she has to be in the mood for music. I can't recall the last time I heard her sing. Sometimes her eyes still glaze over as she looks out the window at a purpled sky, remembering voices.

When I got older, able to count and behave myself, my parents brought me with them on their day-long journeys. Momma always knew I loved saleing the way she did, the way my siblings and cousins never would. I took the back seat as my dad drove, his mustache curved up with his lips, his eyes hazel and bright. I pulled against my seatbelt to occupy the space between them where Twizzlers and atlases were tucked between cup

holders and arm rests. We told stories in this space and passed oranges and bananas around, throwing the peels out into fields as we drove by. Now, when I visit home to sale, I find things to furnish my apartment and carry on the family tradition. I pack these things into my tiny, red ‘85 Honda Prelude, a lack of air conditioning, space, and cup holders making it hardly suitable for saleing.

Part of buying used things, cars or otherwise, is that you have to be ready to fix them, to revive and refurbish the old and broken. My father taught me about cars and technology, the way electrons swim through circuits or the impending motion of potential energy. My mother taught me how to barter, to be savvy with my money to get what I deserved. So I test drove Wanda and loved her red color, boxy old style, and how my little body could reach everything, see everything. I noted the squeaks and sounds she made. *She’ll need new wheel bearings*, I told the man, *and with the rust and tires, I’d be willing to pay you $900*. I held out the money, less than asking price, just how Momma taught me, and Wanda was mine.

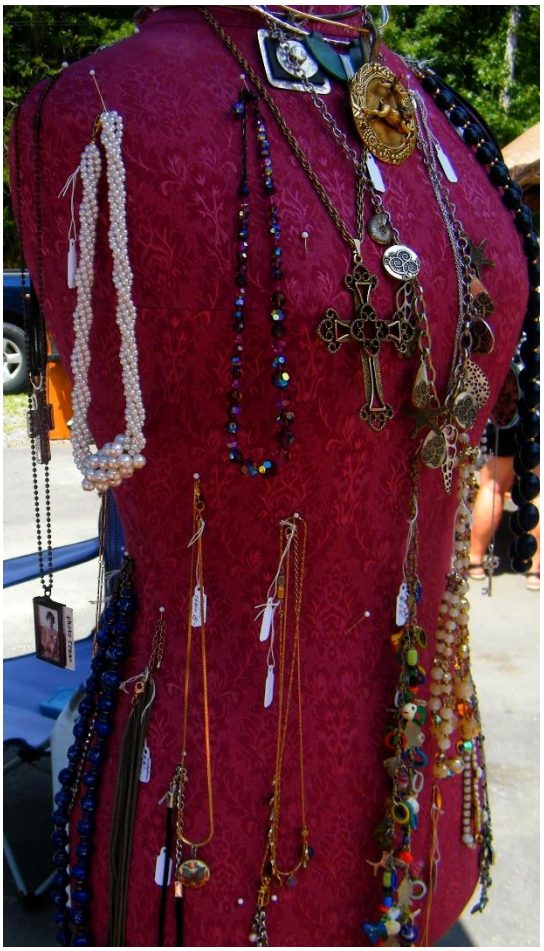
These weekends are the gilded edges of my memories. We withdrew money that should’ve been saved for a new car or a pressing medical bill and stuffed it into our back pockets. We marked calendars with dates of city-wide sales, merely surviving the days of the week, eyes already set on the weekend. Dad worked often, Momma couldn’t. She often woke up to help ready my brother for school and went to sleep again until we got home, house still unclean and Dad late for dinner at six. During the warmer months I checked the weather every day for rain, having inherited Momma’s depression, watching the deceitful forecast change as Monday turned to Friday. Rain was our enemy, cold our greatest displeasure. Momma would lose her smile, would take off her makeup and the

ankle bracelets I made her and even the silver ones my siblings and I bought her for Mother's Day. We needed the sun, the warmth, people with things to sell to keep us together. These things were our North Star, our compass. Without signs and pockets jingling with change, we would drift away.

A rare estate sale sometimes appeared in the winter months. It seemed dark to wish for these things, hollowed out homes with the marked up possessions of people who died, but we did. We tried consignment shops, but there were not many and the experience was far from the same—no sprawling back yards, no faces who owned things before. We forgot how to talk to each other. I finished my homework and went to bed early. I listened to my brother cry most nights in the room next to mine. Sometimes I would crawl into his bed with him or beckon him to me. I knew he was lonely, that depression clouded his mind the same way it did with Momma and me. Yet he didn't even have the weekend. He never came to enjoy saleing—the journey made him nauseous and he didn't understand how it was more then shopping. I always tried my best to find something for my brother on every trip. Just to see him smile.

High school ended like summer, and I had to find my own way. Now the garage sale vacations lead from the Ohio border to Marquette, Michigan when my family can afford to visit. There's a new vessel in my old driveway, a white Saturn Vue with a rebuilt transmission, the back seat big enough to fit my little nephews. After I left for college my dad started taking Thursdays or Fridays off work to drive Momma to her specialists in Toledo, turning routine and ominous examinations into yard-sale excursions and lunch dates. My parents like to call me when they sale. Momma walks through the

aisles of tables, describing things to me. It's silly, but it's all I have. I don't stop at sales without them, and they rarely take anyone else along. Nearly every letter we exchange begs for summer, for time off from school and the perfect saleing weather. Momma hopes I'll find a man up here who likes to sale too, that I'll bring him home. But home isn't one place. It's a collection of garages and yards, of city streets and country miles, of more vans than I can remember rusting out in the driveway. More houses and trailers to fill than I can count on my hands. Convenience store bathrooms and Momma teaching me how to 'hover' over the toilet seat. Dad's indescribable laugh. Banana peels on the side of the road and endless McDonald's drive-thrus and bitter, cold tea. It's been a while since I've truly been home.



I like to imagine the old men behind the cash boxes, asking me what I want to do when I finish graduate school, thinking we were a perfect family. I imagine the woman eyeing Momma as she fingers through old jewelry, perhaps from an ex-lover. Vintage Avon bracelets, individually tagged, tiny silver bands with fat cubic zirconia on my mother's petite hands. She is envious of Momma's eyes, of the way Dad holds her hand as they walk up the pebbled drive. She doesn't know Momma's body, like her marriage, has failed her before. That Momma

fears it might fail her again. She doesn't know that one of those big, Great Lakes blue eyes is blind, and that the other could be at any moment. The old men can't know why I almost didn't take a full scholarship 500 miles away. I imagine they see a happy young girl, perhaps a bit too plump, with ambitions and a future. The woman perceives the family she wished hers turned out to be before she brought out boxes of what remained to sell in her garage. I imagine them imagining us, making use of the things they couldn't in a house filled with secondhand furniture and change in jars on a windowsill. We are so striking and blissful in those moments, buying baked goods and board games, sun bronzing our faces and as we sale off down the driveway past paper signs that melt in the rain, before blowing altogether away.

Spotting Signs

STOP

Oak Ridge Apartments PED XING SCHOOL ZONE Support our Troops SLOW CURVE AHEAD SLOW CHILDREN PLAYING Brown Eggs Custom Doll Clothes DEER CROSSING For Sale By Owner NO Trespassing Share the Road *Barn Sale Today* Shojin Kennels Watch for Motorcycles *Amy's Party* → HIDDEN DRIVE If You Lived Here You'd Be Home By Now

STOP

Welcome Graduates NOW HIRING Open Big Blowout Sale Don't Make Me Come Down There -God BOGO Half Off Last Chance Closing Sale Absolutely No Money Down Open an Account Today Fresh Fish Under New Management Stop In for a Free Consultation Walk-Ins Welcome Make America Great Again WWJD Free Delivery Art Show Today *Yard Sale Saturday Only* → Invisible Fence BEWARE OF DOG Jesus Had 2 Dads NO LEFT TURN ON RED Blue Lives Matter Soup of the Day: Italian Wedding Any Size Drink $1

Please Anything Helps God Bless

STOP

NO STOPING STANDING PARKING NO LOITERING *Temporarily Closed* Use Whatever Bathroom You Want No Soliciting 2 HOUR PARKING VIOLATORS WILL BE TOWED AT OWNER'S EXPENSE *Lost Cat Reward $10* UN EATABLE FEA T 14 99 Stronger Together *Homeless Vet Please Support Your Troops* Get Your Vaccine Today 2 for $3 BRIDGE ICES BEFORE ROAD Are You Beach Body Ready? MERGE RIGHT EXIT ONLY CLICK IT OR TICKET Jackpots Ahead WORKERS AHEAD INJURE OR KILL A WORKER $7500 + 15 YEARS Your LOL and OMG Can Wait FINES DOUBLED WHERE WORKERS PRESENT Take My Hand Take My Life Expect Delays Free WIFI See Your Ad Here Topless Topless Next Exit END ROAD WORK

Closing Distance

Mom's got radar, and I'm getting it too.

She jabs her finger at the windshield, yelling *Garage Sale! Garage Sale!* Dad hits the breaks too hard. Mom reads and points left. *Thursday and Friday, Rain or Shine.* Sometimes lately she jabs at For Sale, at Brown Eggs. Her depth perception is gone. She doesn't drive much anymore, her right eye blind. When she does she can't see me in the passenger seat. She's afraid the other eye will go too, that she won't be able navigate the tables at the sales, see her grandsons grow taller and hairier, her children in white dresses and black tuxes and their faces covered in a tiered vanilla cake like her own had been more than twenty years before. I tell her it'll be okay, joke that I can point out the signs for her. The blindness doesn't affect either of her lacrimal glands, her glasses fog.

When Zanderik was three and still wouldn't speak, my sister and her girlfriend taught him sign language. He'd make sounds I'd come to learn meant *Aunt Hayli*, then he'd twist his index finger into his cheek, *candy,* or peel that same finger for *banana*. My mother had always insisted we vocalize, saying *I can't hear your head rattle*, so they took him to speech therapy. A little dark boy missing chicklet teeth, signing *I love you* to his grandmother in a room full of stutters. She'd sign back still hoping one day he'd learn to *talk right*. When her immune system began attacking her neurons and the electrochemical commotion in her right optic nerve slowed then went quiet, a doctors

suggested she learn braille *before it was too late*. She'd reach for immunosuppressants, Lexapro, and other prescription bottles in places where they weren't, perceive steps where there were only carpet and shadow. *I don't think I could, you know,*— she'd tell me—*If I couldn't see*. Once I watched her sit over her favorite Magic Eye illusion book, a garage sale find, for hours before admitting she couldn't see the shapes in the patterns anymore. That where once there were unicorns and dolphins and sunsets over oceans there were now only flat, ugly patterns wasting on the page.

Vacation

I wasn't even in training bras the first time my family took a saleing vacation, driving a four-door sedan whose color and model I've long forgotten from Michigan to the blue grass and rusty soil of Kentucky. We'd gone to get my sister who'd been staying with her biological father, though after she came out as gay she'd forget him, with his newfound hate, and start calling my dad hers too. I remember a large orange pillow and a wooden dollhouse, among other things, crowding me and my two siblings together in the back seat. The trunk was full as well, a few containers of earth I'd gathered to bring to my science teacher among luggage and yard sale finds. I remember the garages, brick houses, and changing accents of the journey south, the way fields gave way to hills and the trees bloomed as we made our way.

Between sales we waded in lakes and streams, climbed hills, or perused tourist stores. We even crawled into caves, my little brother shouting "echo." Momma nearly had an anxiety attack at the mouth of the longest, waiting for us to return. I took photos of this journey, of mom silhouetted as I looked back at the cave's entrance, of my siblings and me crammed into the back of the rusted white car, the only saleing trip we all took together. I took photos of Dad's hair sticking out of the back of his hat in what my mom affectionately termed his wings, of my big sister and a spotted lizard in the depths of the cave, but the camera fell into the water between the rocks and the images were lost.

What We Do Instead

If we wake to rain we don't go saleing. My mother sleeps in. Dad stays in his robe, unshowered. We might watch a documentary, world wars, early civilizations, places we've never been. Wake mom at one, eat leftovers nine at night, brother stays upstairs in his computer chair. Dad goes down to basement. I find ways to fill the space.

Sometimes we do go and then it rains. If Dad is there we sale around anyway hoping for signs that say *rain or shine.* We try to read the slumped and curled neon paper, follow arrows down long roads to find the address and a closed garage door. *Then take down your fucking sign*, I say. *We should fucking egg them.* My parents allow me this word and we go back home.

If it's just Momma and me, we look for consignment shops and thrift stores. It's not the same. Everything smells like the same detergent, empty picture frames and knickknacks exist out of context. Florescent lights. We pile clothes into a cart. Try them on. Waste the day, leave with nothing.

US 127 Corridor Sale

We plan our trip to Alabama for months—Momma packs wipes and snacks, I pack maps and sunscreen, Dad packs a toolbox. Sometimes he calls me Moon Beam or Little Baby Foo and I call him Daddy Foo. My sister already claimed Sunshine. Dad sometimes calls my mom Momma Cakes, but mostly Hunny. We plan to sale Thursday through Sunday and know we can't stop at all of them, but we've never been the whole stretch. On the drive it's hot or it rains, the smell of spores and pollen only overpowered by those of sunscreen and OFF! mosquito spray. I read my essays to my parents, I read other nonfiction from several books. *Why is it all so depressing? Did we mess you up that much?* I can't show momma most of what I write. I tell her *no* but she still takes a while staring out the window, watching kudzu vines thicken as we move further south.

I decide instead to interview my parents, ask them how they got started saleing though I already know the answers. Dad went with his mom and Aunt Margaret but didn't start going frequently until he met Momma. Before that he walked with his siblings down the dirt road to the Green's sale every year. He remembers kid's grab bags the old couple had put together neighborhood kids, and my brother and his 7 siblings saved up coins. I ask Dad what was in the bags. *Army men, marbles, tops, just toys.* He doesn't know what was in the girl grab bags. Momma had gone as early as I had with Aunt Ida and her own Momma, who had always been her best friends. I ask them for

advice, Dad says, *If they claim it's an antique, it probably isn't.* Momma says not to be afraid to haggle. Aunt Ida taught her this before she died. I recognize the droop of mom's eyes, taste the tightness of my throat remembering Aunt Ida, Nick, other people gone. I realize I've provoked a tender memory and change tactics. Mom lists things everyone should bring when they sale, jokes about a port-a-potty. Dad talks about his barn envy, wishes his own wasn't rotting away.

In Gadsden, Alabama a man named Hugh, who is not a saler himself, has been promoting the event for tourist purposes for over eight years. In the Noccalula Falls State Park we are surrounded by salers and people selling their wares, some tables more craft and flea market than yard sale. We will start here and make our way back north through the weekend. Hugh's accent is thick and he and I are both sweating. His visor soaks around the rim and a woman at his side offers me a bottle of water advertising this park as the official starting point of the sales. He tells me there are 200 vendors in the park alone, that they bring money into the local economy not only at the sales but buying gas, visiting the locally famous barbeque truck.

Hugh tells me he's surprised to see a young person out here, comments that he hasn't seen me take out my phone. *Most people don't start going until they're old or maybe young people just don't go anymore*, he says, waving a paper fan which also advertises the event. I see mostly women, mostly people significantly older than myself. People are wearing tee shirts saying they conquered the Corridor Sales, shopped 'till they dropped. There are more children than young adults, strollers pushing angry toddlers. My parents are observing my interview, smiling. *It;s an America of the past*, Hugh says, *and people come from Canada and all over because nothing rusts around here*. Everyone

seems to be telling me about the rust, and I imagine it must be my northern accent, unsunned skin. I observe some of the collections, antiquated aluminum signs printed with Whites Only, signs with images of pinup girls being spanked over a husband's lap. *Some things maybe*, I think, *should rust*. Behind him is a testament to an America older than he is, a 3,000 pound bronze sculpture of Noccalula, a Cherokee girl who, according to her plaque, was pushed along with her tribe into Creek territory by settlers. *This monument dedicated in honor of the first Americans and the heritage of our people.* Rather than marry to keep the peace between tribes, Noccalula jumped to her death into the falls near where her statue stands erected, braids hanging over the water, one foot forever raised.

Day two of the trip the shifter cable melts. We smell burning rubber, assume the cable rested against the hot engine when we parked our car tilted between road and ditch to stop at sales. My mom is incredibly hopeful, high on saleing. We decide to keep going, Momma holding the break behind the wheel and Dad reaching into the engine and shifting manually. Two men ask if we need help. A woman asks if we're okay, then asks *Yall doing the US 127 Sales?* She's a saler herself, but this year her mom's in the hospital and she's decided not to go without her. Instead she hosts, downsizes. We sale a few hours on our way to an auto parts store where the man gives us the parts we need at a

discount because they'd been on order for someone else who'd never picked them up. Outside a sculpture park in Tennessee we tear apart the dash for over two hours, heat making trees dance through the windshield, only to find out the part isn't exactly right.

We sale a bit further shifting manually, help an elderly woman in a garden hat cover her table with a tarp as rain pours down. A woman changes her mind about selling me a Johnny Cash vinyl just before Folsom Prison Blues plays on the radio. I buy us lunch, baked goods and chips, at a Baptist church in Georgia having a sale to raise money for heat and air conditioning. Someone tells us last year they made enough to buy stained glass windows. We find a store and Dad buys metal wire, works his magic, and he can now shift from inside the car by pulling on it in different ways. It even has a little round handle. He leaves the car this way for weeks after the trip—dash apart and metal protruding, recycled plastic bags of things they forgot they bought tucked up in the hollow places under seats.

A Man Who Sales

I think saleing saved my parents' marriage. I think that's why mom wants me to marry someone who sales. Specifically, a man who sales. Sometimes she tries to hook me up herself, points out men each weekend. That way I already know he meets this requirement. It's difficult for her since most salers tend to be older couples, elderly mothers and their daughters, women. This is before I come out as bisexual, but after my sister says she is gay so I get half as much heat. Dad would prefer a hockey player, mom likes the idea of a doctor. Maybe he can cure her.

My high school drummer boyfriend liked yard sales. I'm sure it's unfair that this is the only positive thing I remember about him.

After high school my parents and I sale our way 500 miles north to the school I chose in Michigan's upper peninsula, stocking half my dorm with the summer's finds. They follow me in my little '85 Prelude and leave for a mini-vacation after helping me carry things in. I get to know my new roommate and decorate my side of the painted cinderblock room while my parents stop at one last sale where they purchased tennis rackets for me to use at the recreational facility. Mom cries when the elderly woman running the sale askes what they were doing so far from home and the elderly woman offers her company to me anytime. I never use the rackets or meet the woman who sold them, but my parents drop them off as a surprise with the hall circulation desk. My

roommate doesn't sale. She wears shoes with toes that make the room smell, yells at me if I don't go to the cafeteria with her. I get a new roommate who does sale until she gets married. I write her letters until she stops writing back.

After I start college I don't tell my mom I don't sale anymore. I don't tell her until much later about assault, about self-medication, about alcohol, about my free visits to the school's Counseling Services office. I'm afraid to tell her I work too hard during the week so I can sleep all day, remember that she used to do the same, wonder if she still does. I call her using Google Voice, a free phone service Dad helps me set up, and ask her if she's been outside. *How are the roses? Is Dad doing a garden again this year?* I hope she's getting enough vitamin D.

Between classes and work I look for love, meet a BMX racer who tells me yard sales are dirty and disgusting, refuse sex and get dumped. I meet someone else with social anxiety who tries to likes sales, who admits he never can and stays home to play video games. We fill our one-bedroom apartment with books, yard sale furniture, and a couch I find on Craigslist. For a while we are in love. Mom approves of him when we move in together but changes her mind when he never leaves the house, hates that I only sale when I visit home. Later I meet someone else and try to stay "just friends" but can't get him out of my head after we stop at a sale in Marquette on a drive to the beach. We don't buy anything. We go to dances together. We kiss. We say I love you and I get scared. I go back to the man with anxiety and he still does not garage sale. I break both of their hearts. One climbs a fire escape, jumps.

Rabbits: Dead or Alive

Between an old blue farmhouse and the nearest Walmart lies the Ohio-Michigan border marked only by a distinct spread of new asphalt on the Ohio side. Between the border and Walmart lie thirty miles of back roads labeled in numbers and letters and lined by thirsty corn stalks and the occasional animal carcass. In the summer, this path is full of signs for garage sales, and somewhere along this path there is a crudely illustrated sign with words painted red: Rabbits Dead Or Alive. When we drove past this my father always read the words dramatically, as if they were an advertisement for an action movie. While I often scowled or held back tears, my father filled the little diesel with a screech that tapered off to a bellowing chuckle as I punched him hard in the shoulder.

Beyond having what my mother called "a heart of glass," I suspect my strong reaction to the sign had to do with the Easter bunny or years of caring for my own floppy-eared pet. Perhaps it was because the old diesel my dad drove was a rusting 80's VW Rabbit, which we always personified as it groaned during shifts up to third gear, termed Sparky Speed after our dog. Perhaps it was my preteen decision to become a vegetarian after being tricked into eating both rabbit and squirrel and then wondering why the species made a difference in my desire to consume the meat.

But now, thinking back on the painted sign suspended somewhere between Walmart and farmland, the yard adorned with colorful Little Tikes cars and house sets,

the smooth driveway and patio behind a house with white plastic siding. The hard, industrial building in the back acre where I imagine the rabbits in cages stacked up to the domed ceiling, bred by adults and handled by little hands. The way the rabbits scream like human infants when their necks are broken with just a twist, orders taken for living or deceased, as the others thump thousands of feet in cage corners. It's the image of death: all fur, no blood.

Bad Lemonade

A little blond girl with dirty bare feet stands behind an overturned wooden crate draped over with a checkered blanket. She's counting quarters over and over again under a large umbrella, towered over by a pink pitcher and a stack of red solo cups. I'm imagining the heat pulling drops of water out of my cells and they shrivel behind my retinas, the quarters in my hands burn through my palms and leave sizzling circles as George Washington laughs, falls to the sidewalk. The little girl watches me approach, anticipates my dehydration and points at the sign, *75 SENTS.* My desert mouth hangs open, I wonder why she didn't write the symbol.

The little girl clasps her wrists in front of her. My parents continue past toward the tables of clothes and my dad says hello to a woman I assume is the girl's mom. *Hi there,* I say, *did you make it yourself?* She shakes her head, *My mom made it this morning*. I remember being her age, dumping packets adorned with the Kool-Aid Man into pitchers, forgetting sugar and mixing colors, waiting for ice to freeze and dumping in cubes. It's two in the afternoon, so I'm skeptical. *Have you had many customers?* She points behind her, *Just my mom*, and I realize she'd only been counting three quarters. I take two, give her two dollars, *Keep the change*. She pours too much in one cup, and I see it's the liquid and not the pitcher that's pink. It overflows, so she fills the other less than

half. I take them both, thanking her. One cup sticky, both piss warm. The girl keeps grinning up at me, so I smile and sip one, nodding with one eyebrow crawling upward.

I hear her count the quarters as I walk up the driveway. I wait before spitting back into the cup.

The Women

After Haidin is born and while Zanderik is forming, my sister joins Mom and me for yard saleing. She used to be too busy to go. It's Friday and Dad is working. There is nobody to watch Haidin, so he sits in his car seat, which he hates. My sister cannot keep him calm. She cannot keep herself calm, and Mom says she has her father's temper. Mom says Haidin learns from her how to react, and all the while I am quiet. Mom pulls over and my sister gets out of the car before the wheels stop, moving to the other side of the van to open the door and yell at her son. My mom and sister fight, they always do. I try to calm Haidin, try to lighten the mood by quoting movies and singing Disney tunes. We end the trip early. My sister does not join again, but sometimes Mom brings Haidin along because someone needs to carry on the tradition.

The women in my family before me have babies earlier than I will, they don't get married first. They don't go to college, Grandma never finishes high school. They live with their mothers, who raise the grandbabies. Nobody gets along because we are too much alike and because all of us cry and yell too often. This is why the women no longer sale together, this and my Grandma's illness, which keeps her at home with a machine.

The women ask me to write her obituary when she dies, after we spend days sleeping on the floor. Days of waking up first every three hours then two then one to drip a pink mixture of Dilaudid and Oxycodone down her throat as her mouth lay open, less

she wake up again in pain and beg us to let her die. Of checking her pulse and blood oxygen, of resting ears on her chest and avoiding her white-shadowed eyes. Days of her daughters and granddaughters piled around a hospice bed in pajamas like children at a sleepover, telling her stories we weren't sure she could hear. Her love of bingo, her distaste for most men, how in her younger days she turned heads as people confused her daughters for her sisters. How she had her first, my mother, the day before her 17th birthday. How she once bit my little brother as punishment after he sunk his own incisors into another of her grandchildren. How, at Christmas just two weeks prior, she'd given me her record collection, the music she'd shown me all the years before pressed into vinyl. A woman who had chosen a voluntary death by dehydration, who had expected death sooner, who would have *cococked* us if she knew we had changed her diaper, knew I wiped the pink-dyed foam from her mouth and sang Elvis to her as she went. All this and the silence of a ventilator turned off for the first time in nearly a decade, *Can't Help Falling In Love* leaving my lips, the sound of women cracking underneath.

Stranger Stories

Just before the Lookout Mountain Parkway Cliff overlooking an Alabama valley, thick with humidity and foggy dusk, we stop at a late sale. A woman in a pink Hunt Like a Girl shirt says hello. Her smile is genuine, I'm drawn to her, I ask her questions. She explains the shirt is a gift from her son with whom she hunts and fishes, a pajama top. I admire bookshelves, regional history on Scottish, Irish, and Native Cherokee for sale. The woman says she was into her heritage, but she'd read them all now. I ask about her son, learn she also has a daughter she hopes to raise strong and empowered. My parents admire a large gold-painted lamp and an older woman with soft grey curls about her head comes closer, says *took years of my life, she did*.

The older woman tells a story: For three days she took her daughter to the hospital, and each day they sent both women back home. Her daughter was sure each time she was in labor, and the grey-haired woman told everyone who'd listen that she'd die if she had to deliver the baby on her own. She and her daughter agreed that she cursed them both, because after day three her daughter, thinking at first she had to pee, shouted from the toilet that she felt the baby coming. *What do I do?* Her mother replied, *Get off the toilet.* My parents and I laugh, the woman's daughter bellows as her mother imitates her shuffle to the living room, hands between her legs prepared to catch the baby if it falls. The daughter imitates her own father dialing the ambulance as the baby was

crowning, chain smoking and pacing at the end of the same dirt driveway where we all stood.

We stay for an hour at this sale, chatting with the woman and her mother. *You should write a book,* I say. The woman shrugs, looks around her yard sale, at the valley's edge dipping behind the house. *I would but I don't know how*.

Yard Sale Dogs

It seems yard sales always have dogs—chained to trees and pulling, lying by a fold-up chair at owner's feet, barking, following, sniffing. On our drive down to Alabama for the US 127 sales my dad suggested I catalogue them. Roscoe, Jack, Sadie, Princess, Fleona. We are always greeted. Arfthur is a stray the owner decided to feed and who's stayed for five weeks. Nester is a service dog, old and prostrate on cold concrete. Gus approaches and lets me pet him all over, his white fur smelling of pepper. Mandy is a large brown lab who gets her own pate of bacon and eggs every morning. I wonder what they think of the sale, objects with familiar smells gathered and new people poking through. I find it easy to love them quickly. Big eyes peering up, surrounded in fur, a conversation starter and dose of oxytocin. *What's your dog's name?*

Some dogs are for sale, and more than a few times Momma fell for them and we took them home. Once we got a Miniature Doberman Pinscher while garage saleing in Aunt Ida's trailer park, a little girl screaming from inside as we took him away. We put a spiked collar on him. I was heartbroken when he went missing, the whispering outside my sister's bedroom window and his intact leash suggesting he was taken. Others braved the road and were buried out back. Now my parents have a Dachshund they bought for my brother which my mother fell in love with, a yard sale puppy locked in a cage. He chases cars, whines when you close any door behind him He tucks his tail between his

legs, pees on the floor, rolls over and becomes erect. My mom is disgusted, calls him a dirty old man. I always blame the cage.

They

Somewhere in Alabama, Heritage Not Hate towers over TRUMP and is followed by No Trespassing all before the driveway. A woman tells me she *hates* when *they* all jump out of vans like that at once, *they* a Latinx family who has stopped to peruse her yard sale. My parents are outside the canopy, perusing antique metal and extensive collections of blue glass, thin porcelain cups. I think of how my nephews' hair feels when I lather soap onto them in the bath, how they both fit into a storage container full of watermelon scented bubbles under a standing shower head, how they hold hands over my chest when we cuddle in pajamas to watch cartoons. How Haidin's hand matches mine and Zanderik still asks why his does not. How their mother is gay and people ask her how she *tripped and fell on it* twice.

Estate

Whiteness overtakes Wauseon, Ohio in winter, and on this particular day the sky matched snow matched me matched picket fence. My mother has always preferred the color of summer, neon signs dotting roadways over the floral hues of spring. I learned my preference from her. On a day we happened to be discussing the absence of signs, the absence of activity and the freedom that comes with the ability to leave the road or sidewalk in casual shoes, another form of whiteness dotted the side of an avenue. The sign was small, not much larger than letter paper, but it read in bold black letters ESTATE SALE.

There's something about estate sales that changes her pattern. Instead of her usual bright *hello* my mother defaults to a soft nod. Someone inevitably says *everything's half off* or *there's more in the basement* or, less often, *prices are negotiable.* Maybe the signs inform my mother, always a lack of neon, always a lack of *huge* or *multi-family* or anything else that might make the sale seem lively and fun. Maybe it was that she'd had more experience than I had back then, an understanding of what was implied by the thick letters cutting through white: *Someone Has Died.*

At this sale, I could smell the salt of tears. At this sale, there was a family swollen-faced behind a desk, a family in frames above the stairwell, a family in boxes all over the floors. In the kitchen loomed piles of cookbooks, silverware the children and

grandchildren had no use for. Grandma's Kitchen, Kiss the Cook, Grandma's Cookies, Best Grandma painted cursive on mugs. In the basement a wedding dress, thin and yellowed. The neck too high, too full of lace. In the living room a couple remarked that the furniture was tacky, the collectables highly priced. The floral cushions of a different era, the knickknack gifts of birthdays and holidays, a lifetime of curios and collections and boxes full of love letters.

There's more upstairs, and I squeezed my toes into a pair of shoes, EU 39. I liked the deep plum color, the tips of flats adorned with plastic jewels among pairs of disagreeable loafers. My mother's smaller feet fit perfectly, but she urged me to take them. She'd had enough of shoes left behind. Above the shoes hung an old woman's clothes—odd paisley patterns and white turtlenecks, a few tasteful dresses on padded hangers I'd wear if I ever had somewhere to be. I gave the woman, likely her daughter, the sticker price for the shoes and observed her wider feet, socked white against scratched hardwood. I wore them until the gems fell out of their silver-gilded frames, until the soles turned to holes turned to scraps and I had to throw them away.

Whiskey Woman

In Crossville, Tennessee, the woman's nails are dirty, small keratin plates cut short on her strong, tanned hands. She has knowing, dark eyes surrounded by the creases of her smile. Her shirt is cerulean but her voice is burnt sienna, rough from cigarettes but warm and full of trust. She tells me this is her first year selling at flea markets, and I tell her this is my first summer visiting them. There aren't as many yard sales around here, and it seems people have decided on common meeting spaces. Last year, she says, she sold all of her old hairdressing stuff. She's been to New York City, Milan, and nearly every other place I hope to visit, but she gave it up to follow her dream and sell the curious things she finds.

Her collections are mesmerizing, and I find myself afraid to touch them. Delicate rugs and fabrics drape over antique chairs, a brass lamp sits heavy on a gold-braided doily. She points to something I

don't see *This is older than the whole United States*, she tells me. She tells me the history of things, where she's found them. She swears heavily but I can tell she's smarter than most people I know. I find a section of records and old books and flip through. Some are on old rugs and décor, others novels and travel books. A man walks up with a satchel, looking important, and looks up titles of books on his phone. He buys a few at a couple bills each, and the woman asks him how much they're worth, pulling at the tassels on her shawl. He's making a profit, he says, and the woman agrees that's fair. She points to the books, *People think I know what I'm doing but I'm not… I'm still trying to learn.* We decide together most people don't know what they're doing.

I set aside a book on the history of soup and a vinyl soundtrack to *One Flew Over The Cuckoo's Nest*. The woman touches my shoulder softly, suggests an opera singer whose name I can't pronounce. I've decided I like her so I add it to my stack. Next to the books and records is a box full of photos of Central Park, taken from a window in a nearby apartment I imagine full of music and incense smells. There are photos from other places, too. Places where the architecture is older than anything I've ever seen. Places where the dress I'm wearing was made. I realize my clothing has been farther than I will ever be and this makes my eyelids feel heavy and droop.

Here, the woman tells me, *look at this*. In her hand she holds a glass container filled with what

look like colored sticks. She gestures to the container and to the records and photographs. She tells me about Long Island, a socialite whose children threw out everything from her storage unit after she died. The woman had waited and taken them from beside the dumpster, saved them for years before selling them. I try to imagine children who could sell or abandon the evidence of their mother's youth and try to shake away images of my own aunts. I imagine these wealthy people's mother, attending operas in the evening and listening to Beatles albums in her flat over Central, her soft ankles peeking out over lace-trimmed socks as she dances. Long, piano-playing fingers pressing buttons on a camera around the world and saving the photos in a hardwood box. The woman gestures to her glass container and tips it into her palm so the colorful glass tubes inside slide out. I see the deep blues and greens, their rounded heads and hollow bodies and realize they have paper inside, labels from bars, clubs, and taverns. *They're her whisky-stirring sticks,* the woman says as she holds the container up towards my nose. I can smell the sweet stick of them. *She must have collected them when she traveled.* The lace socks in my imagination disappear, and instead the socialite woman wears red heels, stockings up to her knees. I like her this way.

One Man's Junk

My parents and I are unwilling to touch anything at this yard sale. Usually we would have passed by, but we've traveled miles down an overgrown back road in Georgia and it's too late now to turn back. We've already exited the vehicle, a man has said hello. There are no tables, but there are totes full of VHS tapes—some which are clearly porn among workout tapes and one labeled *Sarah's 3rd Birthday*. Some items have price taped paper price labels, others do not. There is a vacuum still full of dirt. There's a broken and dented dryer, musty furniture that has likely seen more than one night of rain. Everything smells like spores and mothballs. All the clothes are wet, some of the totes have items floating in the water, including condoms labeled for twenty five cents, tampons expanding in their wet wrappers. The man running the sale tries to convince me to buy a pink rifle, saying *I don't care who you are, everybody need to know how to use a gun*. I have a knife in my bag, but I don't tell him this. My mom bought it for me in Alabama and I would later use it to defend myself in Pennsylvania. I keep my hands to my sides and peer down into the tubs as my mom makes disgusted faces from the car where she'd decided to stand after I pointed out the condoms and milk-crusted sippy cups. My dad asks about a HP laptop for sale, full of bullet holes. The man laughs, *my dad said he'd rather shoot it than get it fixed*, and my dad laughs too. The man offers us the laptop for five dollars. We thank him for his time and walk away.

What You'll Always Find

My dad likes to whisper my name and point out repeat finds, cataloguing failed Christmas and wedding gifts—bread makers, popcorn air poppers—and leftover church fundraiser cookbooks, their pages marked with bible verses. Matthew 6:26, Galatians 5:22-23, Colossians 3:23. Words and phrases I do not know. Someone always has diet books to sell, and it seems in every town there is a yard sale consisting only of maternity and baby clothes and the dozens of diet cookbooks and inspirational texts. *The Complete Book Of Food Counts* in the most recent edition, *Fat Wars,* something by Dr. Phil. Most of the time these items are in garages in subdivisions where grass is cut to code and each mailbox matches the next. Here there are often sings in the grass warning us to walk up the driveway, CAUTION PESTICIDE APPLICATION. I used to want to live in one of these places, be one of the women in the big houses with high roofs, two bathrooms, fireplaces and bricks on the walls. Their wedding rings and soft blonde hair, sunglasses on heads and babies on hips and laps. Drinking pink liquid from glass cup next to the neighbor, who would of course be my best friend, on a Thursday afternoon. I changed my mind later when I went to college then graduate school. When I made sense of the relationships around me and noticed titles like *Boundaries in Marriage* and *The Power of Positive Thinking,* finding I could learn a lot about someone from the items on their bookshelves—books they sold for a quarter or a dollar because they did or did not work.

Household articles and infomercial kitchen mysteries that gained wide appeal only to be discarded en masse. These things have been at garage sales since before I can remember, and it seems nobody thinks to wait until a yard sale to buy their lemon juicers and egg slicers for a quarter. People buy 18 packs of white plastic hangers from Walmart for $1.97 or charge sets of 12 4x6 frames to their credit cards when these things are marked for cents every summer, are sometimes in the free bin. Some frames keep their stock photo inserts, others show cardboard or wooden backing where another photo was taken away. Frames for every occasion and style of décor, from *my first picture* to *love in Paris* to *happily married*

gone unused or no longer wanted, their photos put in albums or boxes or burn piles. In Canada my dad opened his eyes wide and held one finger over his mouth in a hush before pointing at a photo frame which hurt my eyes to look at. *Swarovski Crystal,* the sign read, *$150, paid $399*. Without the sign I might've thought it the same $15 frame that held my prom pictures from high school, boxed up somewhere in my old room. This Swarovski frame came with the original packaging, the note claiming *never been used*.

The Opposite of Saleing

Momma despised hosting a sale almost as much as she enjoyed saleing. I liked hearing the conversations of middle-aged couples as they came and went, measuring tables for their kitchenette or deciding which of my old dresses their granddaughter might like. I'd arrange things to show their functionality and potential, monitor items that threatened to fly away in the wind. Some of the objects were those replaced by our own yard sale finds, some were earlier purchases we decided we didn't need.

Though it was a relief to find, at the end of a long day, my shoebox cash register heavy at the end of the day or fewer full plastic tubs and baskets to store away, I mostly enjoyed the waiting. I liked having my mother at my side, Lipton powdered iced tea in hand, the sound of ice clinking and pages turning in her V.C. Andrews novels. I watched cars hoping they'd slow and turn into our driveway when they saw the signs we re-made the night before when we realized the arrows pointed the wrong direction or one bubble letter was switched with another. We held the dogs as people exited their cars lest they jump up, bury noses, sniff.

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