

THESIS

CRAWLING HOME

Submitted by

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ABSTRACT

CRAWLING HOME

Crawling Home investigates the life of a young woman ready to disrupt the norms around her. The memoir follows the narrator backwards through time from the loss of her best friend at age nineteen, to her earliest school memories, acutely aware of the ways in which she stands out—from being labeled disruptive in class throughout elementary school, to feeling disruptive of social norms through later years as she is diagnosed with a chronic physical disorder brought on by womanhood. Through a series of essays, divided into four parts, the narrator grapples with loss of loved ones, loss of home, loss of security and trust, and the need for answers.

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DEDICATION

For my mom, dad, and brother

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PART I: CANNOT, WILL NOT

“This is my life.
It has been
sifted through the bones
of my body, through
blood.
It is all that
I have.”

-Joy Harjo, *She Had Some Horses*

CANNOT, WILL NOT

I was one month shy of twenty when I watched my dad slip from the house in the cover of dark to relight the assorted candles on my best friend's makeshift memorial—a neighbor's end table showed up overnight, holding flowers and religious figurines. The near-by telephone pole snapped at its base from the initial impact of the large SUV—before it rammed a neighbor's parked minivan— and fell lovingly into the arms of a nearby tree—somewhere in between those points, my best friend was thrown from the car.

When my parents and I arrived at the ICU at UMass Memorial in Worcester, the front desk agent retrieved the social worker from a back room—I pleaded with my mom through breathless expression—*why the social worker?* She said she didn't know but her aura suggested otherwise. Two male doctors explained to the room of family and friends that had gathered: Jackie's brain stem was clean severed, by her own broken skull—there were screams and gasps in frequencies I had never heard. I could only summon the images I did not want—blonde hair soaked in her own puddled blood on our street where her body had landed, her dad wailing with his mouth agape, a family friend collapsing to his knees right there in the ICU, retching, vomiting, and gasping for air.

She was essentially brain dead, the doctors told us, but they'd conduct one last test in the morning. *Good*, I thought, *in the morning she'll be rested*. One doctor explained the rest to us: they would drip cold water into her ear to see if she'd react. I was floored by this, shouting, *the year is twenty-fucking-sixteen and that's all you can do for her? Are you even doctors?*

It was mid-morning when my parents and I returned home from the hospital to a line of news vans and one very unlucky reporter, who was idling on the front steps—the screen door was propped open and resting on her hip. *Are you fucking kidding me?* I shouted from the car window as we pulled in the driveway. *What the fuck is wrong with you?* Then I was darting from the car, slamming the door behind me, *Get the fuck out!* I screamed. My mom chased after me, grabbing my arms and pushing me into the garage—*Please*, she said to the reporter, *please just leave*. My mom slapped the garage door button and dragged me towards inside. I managed to sneak in a few last words as the woman jogged back to her car: *you're a fucking cunt!* Then, in a smaller voice, because I suddenly— yet still too late— realized I was overreacting, *I hope your best friend dies*. The garage door shut between us.

*

At the beginning of the pandemic in March 2020, my brother and I flew quickly and quietly to our parents' new house in Florida—in the summer of 2019 our family bid goodbye to Massachusetts, to the house down the street from where Jackie died in the middle of the road. Vinny came down from Boston, and I from graduate school in Colorado—the four of us lived as one for five months. We dined together each night and listened to my dad, an *essential worker* who fixes medical equipment, recount what life was like out in public—in one riveting tale, a police officer stood atop a gargantuan crate of toilet paper in the early morning at the department store, making sure each customer took only one pack.

Most of the time I was able to assuage my general anxiety by announcing to my family: *I am anxious*. I'd receive warm looks from my brother and father, who understood what I really meant was: *death is in the forefront of my mind*. Occasionally, my mom would ask a follow-up question, something like: *why?* Or perhaps, *do you know why?* which is really just the first

question. I explained over dinner that she couldn't possibly ask a worse question—both because there is no single reason, and if there was, I couldn't afford to face it.

Once, in a frenzy of hormones and red-hot cabin fever, I snatched the key to my mom's car, locked myself in and announced my departure to nowhere. My dad opened the garage door, revealing the thirteen-year-old minivan parked in the driveway, blocking me in. I cried through the car window: *why do you still have that old god damned van? Driving that thing is a fucking safety hazard!* As loud as I could manage: *It's just not safe!*

I didn't yet know what to call my sick, but the symptoms aligned with manic bipolar depression and PTSD from witnessing the car accident, according to my psychiatrist— but to name it did nothing for me. I had already hurled my metal-buckled sandals at my parents' bedroom door, leaving a black indent on the newly painted white. I had already hacked away at my hair in the bathroom mirror, crying hysterically into the split ends that filled the sink: *why didn't I do this over the trash can?*

My parents' neighborhood is filled with retired folks, all elderly—most fifteen years my parents' senior—some more friendly than others, but all incredibly vigilant. It took no time at all for me to get into a fight at the community pool with eighty-year-old Mary, who claimed the title of *pool president*. I overheard her tell two elementary-aged girls, who giggled and splashed harmlessly in the shallow end, that they were being *obnoxious*. I watched Mary walk over to the girls' family and ask them to leave—*Excuse me, excuse me!* I called out to Mary from the other side of the pool, standing up out of my lounge chair, *what gives you the right?* My mom sat up next to me, half excited and half mortified at my audacity. I gestured to the young girls who had retreated to sitting silently on the edge of the pool. Their arms folded tightly around their tummies, their faces red with embarrassment. I exploded with anger masked as tight rhetoric—

You are president of nothing, you have no authority, no documentation—these kids are not violating a single rule and I know because I've read the rulebook (a lie). Go back to whatever dank hole you crawled out of and stay there.

At dinner, my mom disappointedly narrated the events to my dad, who is my biggest fan, who never seems bothered by my boisterousness or the sound of my voice, unlike my mother, who I've seen wince in pain at the sound of my scream, and also my dad's dad, who on his deathbed shouted: *Oh! For crying out loud!* in a fit of irritation after I had nervously shrieked: *Hi, Grandpa!* The room erupted in laughter, for that had been the only thing he said in the last twenty-four hours, and the last thing he'd ever say.

Mary called us before the end of night, crying an apology, which is all it takes for my mom, an ever-sensitive Pisces, to fold. *I hope you are happy*, she said to me after hanging up the phone. *You made an old woman cry.*

Of course I'm not fucking happy! I yelled back.

*

Jackie's death exists in a mirage of images and sensations hovering in the *just beyond*. It is not my long-term memory, no, because that is a home for the old yet recallable, as in the memory of the Boston man who grinned at me with wolfish teeth, admiring my twelve-year-old frame sitting at the end of a park bench—I would still know his face if I were, by some unfortunate circumstance, to see it again.

Her death is less of a memory and more of a grand narrative thread, which I've constructed using the colors and sounds of trauma. The sequence begins with our elderly neighbor, whose minivan shows off its dent to the news camera, *I heard the most ungodly scream*, she says. Then there is a flash of bouncing night sky—running from my house out to the

crash because I, too, heard the crack of the telephone pole and the screams. Next, I am talking to a friend at Jackie's funeral, she claims I had told her that Jackie looked at me when I reached her on the pavement. *I said that?* I asked.

*

My extended family doesn't understand what I do with my life, and I cannot or will not explain it to them. My dad's oldest sibling is Peter and over the 2019 holidays he told me that I am wasting my time in school for something as silly as writing, when there is money-to-be-made elsewhere and if I needed proof, I should look at what he did with his life—a venerated insurance salesman. If I had any brains at all, Peter told me, I'd leave school and start working hard on my future. I confess his Fort Lauderdale mansion was lovely, and as soon as I had made myself seen at the post-holiday, pre-Covid-19 gathering of mildly estranged Florida-family, I ducked into a hallway which revealed an enclosed atrium, accessible by glass doors which remained locked despite my incessant jiggling of the handles. In another hallway, the biggest labradoodle I had ever seen growled at me when I approached its crate.

My Aunt Susan, Peter's wife, caught me investigating a room full of dolls. The intimacy of the moment seemed to prompt her: *you know*, she said, *my daughter Elena is Bipolar. You all with mental illnesses are brave.* I thought immediately about the panic shelter in my closet in Colorado—if I am related to brave, then I am brave's unfortunate antithesis, someone who stays home if the wind is too strong, out of fear I'll be struck with a flying road sign. I understood that Susan was trying to be inclusive, perhaps testing out the power of acknowledgement, but I felt trapped in her cloud of perception—it was four years since Jackie's death, I was almost entirely new, with a whole new set of problems, with my anxiety reaching never before seen heights. If the room of dolls was Susan's safe space, it was my escape room. She continued; *you know you*

can always call me. I fought off a big laugh—imagining myself in the heat of an episode where I cannot tell a donkey from a spoon, I cannot tell a family member from a foe. I asked Susan to show me to the bathroom, though I already knew where it was.

My mom and I ate alone at a table on the patio, in camp chairs which had to be fetched just for us from a faraway storage room. My brother—who is adored by my dad’s side of the family— sat inside at the long dining room table, and I watched through the glass as he seamlessly made conversation. Even though we were alone out there, apart from the table of children, my mom leaned in and whispered, *where did you go before? Don’t leave me again.*

I was inconsolable after the family gathering; it was a two-hour ride back to my parent’s house in Naples. The news of my sadness had reached my dad through a text from my mom—he had to work that day and therefore could not make the trip. He hugged me upon my arrival home and what followed was a long, unabridged story of the history of Peter’s life, in an effort to shed light on his prejudice. According to my dad: Peter joined the Air Force young and when he got back, he found that he couldn’t beat out other college-educated candidates for jobs. With a laugh, my dad recounted the long-ago dinner where Peter verbally assaulted my conservative grandpa, who is the father of my Sicilian mother. My grandpa disapproved of my mom and dad’s union—his daughter has two master’s degrees, and my father has none: back then he was just a machinist in a band, with long unruly hair—and my grandpa made it known to Peter, that night at dinner, that my dad was too uneducated for my mom.

I understand now that Peter’s words only offended me because I am deeply ashamed of my unproductive life— that four days a week I could sleep as late as I fancy and when it is actually time to do work, it is at my desk, on my computer. I lose large amounts of time to

lounging on the deck with a book or even napping, which has become integral to my identity and ability to function. My daily life is entirely internal and to the outside world, I am a lay about—the French call this a *flâneur*— switching life paths every couple of years, starting and then abandoning things, carrying my grief and trauma into each room.

My dad ended with a story about the only other *artist* on his side of the family— his cousin Tara, the photographer, who once broke an arm while crying and stumbling out of her own exhibit after Peter made a *substantial comment*. No specifics could my dad recall, but I understood the nature of the comment to be the same as what he'd told me, *that education is a sham with no guarantees and art is a hobby, off of which you cannot live, and for that you should hope to marry rich.*

*

Two months after Jackie died, I mistakenly went back to school for the fall of 2016, armed with nothing but a bedtime sedative, believing I could live on campus as though I had just been born. My first full-bodied panic attack was over twelve hours long and began on the bathroom floor of my dorm, which I had been stress-cleaning each day with a wet mop, as though I was unknowingly preparing. My suitemates were asleep, apart from one, who discovered me around three a.m., wrapped around the base of the toilet like a crescent roll. I described my symptoms to her, that after waking in the night, I'd been overwhelmed by a force of fear which blurred my vision and left me lightheaded. *My throat nearly closed*, I told her, *and I was choking, gasping for air. I only stopped gasping when the muscles in my legs began to spasm and quake. Even now I'm wrought with nausea.* I gasped the words to her in between

large breaths. *I think I've been drugged.* She stared back for a moment then asked if I had thrown up, or if I was feeling groggy. *Did you drink anything tonight?*

Of course, I hadn't been drugged, and I'd consumed no alcohol, and I suspected she knew as much, luring me off of the tile and into my bed with all of the temporary remedies: ibuprofen, ice packs, water, parasympathetic breathing. I eventually calmed enough to sleep, waking a few hours later to the unpleasantness of room temperature ice packs stuck to my skin. As soon as the campus health center opened, I called to let them know I was sick—I listed my symptoms to the nurse, who fell ever so quiet before suggesting I'd had a panic attack. *Can you stay on the phone while I patch you over to someone, Angela?* I paused for a moment, *Yes, okay.*

The sedative was supposed to help me fall asleep and stay asleep, but instead the panic ensued through the night. I'd wake to half consciousness for short moments—enough to find a suitemate, or my parents if I were home on a weekend, and let them know I couldn't feel my arms or legs, or that I'd woken up standing in front of the window, or in front of the bathroom mirror, or in my mother's lap, on the floor of the hallway because I'd collapsed and hit my head. The last straw was a very expensive ambulance ride to the emergency room, which roused all of my neighbors in the middle of the night, and only revealed that I'd fainted in the Milford house because I was dehydrated—and low on potassium of all things— but most importantly that the sedative was not agreeing with my grief. The nurse handed me a banana and a cup of water.

When we got home from the hospital that morning, I decided it was time to move out of the dorm—I was no longer safe with myself. I took two weeks bereavement time, because that's all I was allowed without dropping the semester and made the necessary arrangements to commute for the remainder of undergrad. I had two weeks to accept my new life. Two weeks to

sleep off my grief with my newly adopted dog, Blaze, curled in a tight ball at the small of my back or against my stomach. But most importantly, with my staggered healing time that fall, I hunted down the unlucky reporter from the Boston Globe and apologized with a lengthy email. To my surprise she was quick to respond with understanding—she shared that her own best friend had died some years ago from cancer, and that they were as close as sisters.

*

Back at my apartment in Colorado—it had been six months since I left for Florida in March of 2020—I ran my hands over the sweaters and scarves that I had been wearing just before I left. I caught myself off guard with a burst of tears and a wave of sadness enveloped me like a hot shower. *I need to go back to Florida. I need to see the lightning crack just beyond.* I could not understand where I had left my sense of self—my internal compass searched confusedly for home and so I arrived back in Florida two days later, on a tidal wave of shame and embarrassment. My parents’ neighbors greeted me with both delight and pity—*ya know, we heard you were back. What happened?* I responded with complete transparency from at least a six-foot distance, if not across the street: *yes, for whatever reason I could not be alone. I feel like a failure!* Some things stayed within the family, though, like that I had been so panicked in Colorado that I arrived in Florida with full-blown vaginal shingles, brought on by sheer anxiety. A doctor I did not know, at a clinic I had never been to, scraped me with an oversized cotton swab. *I know shingles when I see it,* she said with a pause. *So are you vacationing here in Florida?*

By August I had a definitive timeline for my psychiatrist in Colorado: since I moved away from my family for graduate school in 2019, two weeks a month, in accordance with my

period, I become entirely suggestible— hopping on planes, running up my credit card debt with online shopping, feverishly phoning my mother to tell her I couldn't get out of bed and I didn't know why. *Try to relax. Take a hot bath, go for a walk, listen to a podcast, she always said, do the things you like to do.* I'd answer with a series of reasons to why I could not: *I'm afraid I will pass out and drown in the tub, I'm afraid I will pass out in the street, I'm afraid of not being able to hear what's around me.* I told the doctor that I was scared for my safety during this time, that despite being absolutely exactly where I wanted to be in life, when I was in such a way, the only thing I wanted was to leave wherever I was. At first, I was mistaking this compulsion for my intuition, but my intuition would never lead me away from my creative work. *I feel like two different people, but both are entirely me. Have you ever heard of anything like this?* The doctor smiled and nodded, *yes.*

I can pinpoint my PMDD to my first period. As far as I can remember, I have been unruly since elementary school. In fact, as long as I received report cards, I was labeled disruptive in class— or my personal favorite, disruptive of others in class. As a teenager, I was hyper aware of my given characteristics—and this turned me inward. I explained to the doctor, *I do not understand what begets what, does my personality make me more susceptible to raged outbursts? Or have I been something other than myself all this time?*

*

Just days after Jackie's death, I decided I should remove the handle of vodka that she kept in the black ottoman in her childhood bedroom. We were only a few years shy of twenty-one, but I had a fake ID, which has unfortunately been lost to time. I could hear a roar of voices coming from the living room as I entered the house through the front door—the kitchen counters lined with

foil pans of pasta and meat. I walked up the ever-creaking stairs, squeaking in a pattern that reminded me of Jackie's footfalls. I opened her bedroom door to a rush of smells and sensations: to my right, the wide vanity mirror where we once stood in our prom dresses, gluing fake eye lashes on one another. To the left was the ottoman and I shuddered as I inched towards it, recognizing some of the clothes on the floor as mine. I picked up a sweatshirt at my feet and held it to my chest. Suddenly I was stuffing it under my shirt—suddenly I was shuffling around the room, stuffing myself with her clothes. I threw open the lid to the ottoman in a fit of sobs, revealing the raspberry flavored vodka we had been drinking the weekend before. My heart was racing as though I was unearthing her body. I pulled out the vodka and charged to the bathroom across the hallway, crying hysterically into the sink as I struggled to uncap the bottle. I caught a glimpse of my face in the mirror: red, puffy, confused—my recent look. My hand shook the bottle over the drain but I could not will myself to pour it out. My knees quaked with a sense of urgency, *please, please*, I pleaded with my body—I was dizzy and lightheaded, I could feel my blood rushing away from me. I raced back from the bathroom to her bedroom, holding the still half-full bottle of alcohol, collapsing in a ball on Jackie's bed.

I stayed there until I heard someone creaking up the stairs. Jackie's mom appeared in front of me—I sat up quickly, scrambling to hide the vodka when she announced in the doorway that she had long since known about the black ottoman. She sat next to me on the bed and we embraced for a solitary moment before I was able to stifle an admission through my tears: *I know. I just wanted to come over.*

MASSACHUETTS, 2016

For the most part, I was enjoying the comfort of knowing I would get sleep each night—that within minutes I could be zenned the fuck out—but my poor roommates and parents were withering in front of my eyes. I was still so close to Jackie’s death, just three months past in October, that I was being utterly haunted by spirits in the middle of the night in the form of both dreams and apparitions. I’d describe my nights, before Trazadone, in detail to my mom and by the end we’d both have tears welling in our eyes.

I woke up in a total frenzy—like completely out of breath. In my desk chair sat Jackie, with hair especially curly. So vivid was her presence. She was wearing thigh-high boots. When I woke up in the morning, my desk chair was facing me—even though I’d pushed it in, tidying up my whole desk before going to bed.

It was early September of 2016 because I was still living on campus in Lowell. A sensation enveloped the top of my head, like hot chocolate ganache, like when a string of golden lights is plugged in and a very dark room is then lit and you and your lover are seeing the glow in each others’ eyes. Then the sensation spread down my body—both inside and out—but before it hit my stomach I shot up from my chair and ran full speed across the mezzanine, down the stairs and out of the library, onto a patch of grass with some young trees where I buried my feet in mulch.

While I stood in the grass, phoning my primary care physician to let her know I’d had a stroke of some kind, I tried to ignore my intuition, which was pressuring me to consider what I already knew about myself, what my family and friends were witnessing.

Years later I recounted that night to my mother, who was already turning red in the cheeks at the thought of it all:

It was unlike anything I’ve felt—not a panic attack because it ended when I stopped it, not someone’s deceased relative because the message felt intended for me and only me. I

*still wondering what would've happened had I let the feeling envelope my whole body.
I'm nervous I missed something life changing.*

Trazadone was no longer a part of my life after a very expensive ambulance ride and trip to the emergency room, which roused all of my neighbors, and only revealed that I'd fainted because I was dehydrated, and low on potassium, but most importantly that the trazadone was not agreeing with my body—the combination of grief and sedative was making me sleep-walk and sleep-panic. The nurse handed me a banana and a cup of water.

When we returned home in the early morning, I decided it was time to move back from Lowell and effectively take two weeks off from my life. My plan for the two weeks was to play fetch with Blaze in the yard and sleep off my grief—at least enough so that I could commute to and from school after my two weeks was up. In my bereavement time, I took comfort in the smallest things—my next-door neighbors' thick Boston accents yelling to me from across the street as I made my way to the mailbox—*hey how's that dog doin? He betta keep that tennis ball out of the raspberry bushes!*

COLORADO, 2019

When I found my hibiscus plant in a grocery store parking lot clearance section, it was half dead and bare branched, with the energy of a whimpering animal. I brought it home in my canvas tote, which was previously reserved for the more delicate grocery items that could not be wedged into my backpack: a dozen eggs, a loaf of French bread, an heirloom tomato.

I gazed down at the hibiscus for the mile walk home, carefully balancing myself, summoning my center of gravity, so the plant wouldn't tip or waver in my tote. I had snatched it up without a thought, like Charlie Brown after the skinniest Christmas tree. I was looking for something to take care of, and better yet, I had found something I could nurse back to health—something to consume my time that first lonely summer away from my family.

I thumbed its last few leaves and considered where I might put it—the pothos and the wildflowers take up my bedroom window but really shouldn't be separated because they climb on each other like lovers, resulting in a dramatic hive of tendrils.

For a few days I left the hibiscus outside on the deck next to the sage plant, which I have raised from a seedling. I imagined a dynamic for them: the hibiscus is the newcomer, with a haunting past and a jaded sense of self after its blooming season but has found a mentor in the sage plant who is shockingly independent, taking water as it comes, and never once moving from its spot in full sun on the deck.

I watered them together each morning and sometimes again in the evening after yet another day of uninterrupted Colorado sun, which is likely the only thing that kept the hibiscus alive as the last few leaves turned a sickening yellow and fell off. I quickly moved the hibiscus out of full sun and inside—making my way from the deck to the kitchen sink—taking no time to

crack open the slider and shoo the cat away from the threshold. Instead, I announced to him, slamming the door behind me: *I am coming through and I hope you don't get stepped on.*

After I watered its still-moist soil, and the leaves did not instantly reappear, I issued my hibiscus the first in its series of apologies: *I'm so sorry for not being more proactive. I admit, I don't know what you need.*

I decided that I should keep the hibiscus on the highest shelf in my room, where the cat couldn't find it, and every morning I'd bring it out with the other outside plants and retrieve it around two or three every afternoon until one of us dies. This obviously proved to be an impossible schedule for me—I was once in the middle of a reservoir when my watch lit up with a notification from my calendar: *bring hibiscus inside.* I set a daily reminder thinking it would help with accountability but instead it just made me feel guilty when the notification buzzed my wrist in the middle of a grocery store, or on a weekend long camping trip. I eventually stopped wearing the watch.

I complained to my mom on the phone about the hibiscus. *It just seems so confused,* I tell her, *I really thought I could bring it back to life. Yeah,* she says, *I think my plants look sad, too.*

My dad is the one who is deeply connected to Earth—a severe root-chakra human being—a taurus, a musician, someone who can keep a plant alive in every season. *You know what,* I tell my mom, *can ya put dad on the phone?*

In the time that I was able to follow the schedule, the hibiscus grew another round of leaves. The combination of sun and shade was proving successful, however inconsistent. Unfortunately, the weekends at the end of the summer when I'd left the hibiscus outside, wildfire smoke enveloped Fort Collins, completely blocking the sun. It was a good situation only for the

abandoned hibiscus, whose dark green leaves would've been bleached clean by three full-sun days.

The smoke in the air irritated my asthma and sent the birds somewhere else for what felt like weeks at a time. I have seen the years of wildfire damage while camping in the Poudre canyon—whole mountainsides turned barren and crispy from both the initial fire and then however much sun the area gets, bleaching the remains and whatever is trying to grow in. I've hiked up and stretched out on the fallen trees, letting my arms and legs dangle off the sides—*can't we like, at least do more to help the scorched areas?* I asked a friend. *I mean they do but it's just so much land that's lost to wildfires each year in Colorado alone, we'd never be able to tend it all,* said friend. His dog sniffed through tree trunks and woody piles, turning over rocks and pawing at rotted logs. *What's she looking for?* I asked. *Anything,* he said.

I don't remember why I left the hibiscus on the deck railing overnight—perhaps I thought we needed a break from each other; at any point I need a break from everyone. But the hibiscus, at some point in the night, was blown off the very wide railing by a heavy gust of wind. By the time I remembered the hibiscus, it was mid-morning of the next day and I almost dropped my coffee mug on the kitchen tile.

I stood on the deck feeling very dumbfounded. I expected the remains of my hibiscus plant to be scattered in broken branches and dirt clumps across the sidewalk and grass after a fall from the second story. But instead, there was no sign of my hibiscus plant anywhere around the suspected crime scene and that, to me, felt worse than seeing its corpse a couple feet from the cracked plastic pot which likely would've blown some distance away, catching a gust of wind in its hollow inside. I grieved hysterically for a few moments until I convinced myself a neighbor

would bring it back to me—*it fell, so I put it all back together then brought it to you*. In my imagination, I was delighted at the return of my hibiscus and the kindness of my neighbor, *I should bake them brownies*, I said to myself. Instead, I spent the next few days as a crazy person—perched on the deck with my eyes peeled—waiting for my hibiscus to get out of a taxi with a suitcase and strut the walkway to my front door, *I'm home*, my hibiscus would say, *I just needed some me-time*.

When my hibiscus did not return, I turned my attention to the Iresine, which is undoubtedly the cat's favorite plant and the evidence was scattered all over my carpet whenever I returned home from a stretch away—the dark pink leaves strewn across the floor in the tiniest pieces—so decimated were the remains of my Iresine's topmost leaves that it looked as if it'd combusted from within.

Angus! I shouted. *Angus, you slinky bastard!* I stomped through the apartment like an angry troll until I heard a timid *meow* and picked him up just under the shoulders. I held his face to my own so he can see me emote sadness. I carried him to the crime scene, letting his suspiciously long body hang and sway through the air as I plodded back to my bedroom. I put him on the floor amongst the scattered leaves, hoping he'd take a good hard look. Instead he relaxed, lounging out on the carpet, grooming his legs, stopping every couple of seconds to gaze up at me.

In some ways I understand his inclination to shred the Iresine—it's gorgeous, it's hard to look away from it—it's the *popular girl* among my houseplants. But the Iresine is missing depth and complexity to its personality—it's complacent, growing medium-well in most places. It's bush-like, similar to the hibiscus, but more standoffish, looking for water once or twice a week and no other attention. I wanted to long for the Iresine the way I did for the hibiscus, but it was

clear it did not need me the way the hibiscus did, and because of this, resentment led me to sit idly as the cat once more gnawed on its leaves right in front of me—*whatever*, I told him, *its non-toxic*.

About a week after the disappearance of the hibiscus, I was taking out the trash, which required me to walk past the deck of my downstairs neighbors, a deck I only see when I'm walking to the dumpster. On the railing of their deck sat my hibiscus, looking put-together and yet, ever so out of place without me.

How did I— I mean, where were— I asked the hibiscus as I scooped its pot into my arms like an old friend. As I opened the door, I called out to the cat, who came running, *Angus, you won't believe what I found!* I brought the hibiscus back onto the deck, placing it next to the sage plant as I craned over the railing to see if I could spot where the hibiscus had been waiting. As I looked, I explained to the hibiscus: *I was sure I looked all over that initial morning, even brushing through the downstairs neighbors' bushes.*

I hypothesized that the hibiscus must have fallen from the deck railing, landing on the grass below, where my neighbor picked it up and put it on their deck. However, upon realizing that I did not see it on their deck, they must've placed it urgently on the railing so that even the most preoccupied of persons could see it clear as day. But even so—wouldn't I have been able to spot the scattered clumps of dirt? But perhaps the landscaping people had been there that morning, come and gone by the time I woke up. I reasoned with myself this way—concluding nothing, just prodding the hibiscus with questions and oxygen—as I slid its pot into a macrame hanger and situated it in the window next to the wildflowers.

MILFORD, 2016

In the night I stumbled to my dim lit bathroom, tip toeing each step like Christmas morning, desperate to keep still and prolong the thrill. The palms of my feet sink into the cream low-tile carpet until I cross the threshold and the graceful wisp against the fibers becomes a slap against pale green linoleum. I plant my hands on either sides of the deep sink and fall towards the mirror until my nose is on the glass. I whisper our inside jokes and mantras at myself, and a small cloud of breath takes up space on my reflection. I wipe it away with my sleeve and continue, repeating everything three times, hoping she'll show up behind me like some pleasant version of Bloody Mary or Beetlejuice. She'd rise from the dead, drag her bones out of the linen closet and ask me what I want. I'd stammer because I never would've thought I'd get this far, "...an iced coffee, with you, tomorrow morning?"

At her funeral, the heat of the sun beat through my black dress. It soaked me in sweat from underneath. I pulled at the fabric clinging to my armpit and accidentally elbowed the woman next to me. Through her tears, she forced a smile so I figured that she knew who I was. That was her best friend, I'd heard people whisper it all day and they all forced a smile at me.

The priest sang something archaic and raised his hand up with a flat palm to indicate a something unanimous. I watched an ant crawl on the foot of a girl with special needs from my high school who had come to show her sympathies. In the receiving line of the wake, the same girl had hugged me and said, "So what happened, she just didn't make it, huh?" Her mom apologized and pulled her away but I insisted that it was fine—she deserves answers.

They began to lower her into the ground. I watched the ant crawl over and in between the girl's toes. It ran up across her ankle, and sometimes retraced its steps back. I wondered how the girl couldn't feel it, how she could be so out of touch with herself. I told myself I understood why she couldn't even feel it. It was just an ant, a baby ant probably, thinking maybe this person was worth giving its life to explore. And in the moment I couldn't believe she didn't feel it.

By December her grave was covered in snow. With no headstone, she melted flat and unnoticeable into the rest of the cemetery. I thought maybe her parents weren't ready to order one and watch some anonymous craftsman carve out her name. Then I was annoyed that they'd be so petty. Then I was sorry I'd thought that.

I had feared the moment since July. Thinking of her— lifeless— laying underneath what is annually frozen. When I was younger someone told me that coffins eventually cave in on themselves, crushing the skeleton and anything left behind. I thought of how it wasn't in my realm of capabilities to think of her that way, crushed underneath the world that once carried her, as she bounced along with her hair swinging behind in tight and loose curls. I thought the earth had done me a favor; by portraying her light for so long, in a way I could remember that was clean and honeyed. And now I go back to her grave and dig under the snow at the grass, put my hand down flat and hope in some sick twisted way, she is awake underneath and reaches her hand up to meet mine.

FLORIDA, 2019

In southwest Florida where my parents live, where I visit on breaks from school in Colorado, where there is not beach or housing development, there is dense forest—the kind of dense that should I get caught outside in a flash torrential downpour, I can run for cover to the nearest group of trees and remain entirely dry. Walking paths encompass the land around the neighborhoods, going out as far as the brackish inlets of the Cocohatchee river. The boardwalk to the inlet is a valley amidst the mangroves which tower over my dog, Blaze, and me to the extent that we're completely shaded.

The boardwalk is a place of uncomfortable energy because I have visions of Blaze falling off the boardwalk—sniffing and then slipping right off. I've run through scenarios of what I'd do: jump into the water after him and push him up from there, unless I couldn't reach the bottom, in which case I'd have to climb back up onto the boardwalk which is a great bit high from the deep water; find a way to both lift my body and sneak under the wooden railing on the boardwalk, then I'd have to somehow convince Blaze to swim back to the boardwalk from his perch on a nearby low-hanging mangrove tree.

My dad says my worry will age me faster than time. *Just tighten the leash, Blaze won't fall.* He assures me that even if he did, there'd be no immediate danger. The brackish water means no alligators, for they are fresh-water dinosaurs, and the water by the boardwalk is too shallow for sharks—if I should worry about anything, it is the amount that I worry.

After Jackie died, I was in crisis cognitive behavioral therapy, in efforts to re-wire my worst-case scenario thinking. Part of this was explaining to the counselor the situations I feared on a daily basis. I think he was expecting me to keep track of a few, perhaps write them down in the

notes on my phone. Instead, I presented him with my journal, which listed every obsessive thought I had for a full week, along with the times in which I thought them, which put me into the habit of obsessively listing my obsessive thoughts.

2:45pm- I am afraid to drive home from work in case I veer off the road and hit the children getting off the school bus

3:30pm- I am afraid I will choke on the grapes I'm eating for snack, so I stop and put them away

3:35pm- I am afraid if I don't eat my hair will fall out

3:45pm- I am afraid to tell my mom I didn't eat anything today, and I'm afraid I'll never be able to eat again [wonderful wit in face of sorrow]

I learned, over the years, to stop sharing all of my fearful thoughts, because when I do, my mom applauds my fearful thinking, renames it as careful thinking. She reminds me that it's not just the board walk to worry over, but the bobcats, too, and the occasional panther.

I have heard stories of the bobcat who lives in the woods just before the mangroves. *It's vicious*, neighbors tell me, *it attacks small dogs*. The same neighbors told me the same thing upon my second visit except then it was about the alligator who had taken up residence in the nearby lake. Perhaps these were just casual warning, cordial, polite information to inform my stay, but unresolved trauma and grief do not take warmly to casual conversation. It seems that worry and danger haunt the air around me, wherever I go.

I saw the alligator many times, sunbathing in the shallowest part of the murky water. Whenever the alligator did anything, a crowd of retired neighbors would form—*be careful*, one of them tells me as Blaze and I walk by, *that thing could swallow a dog!* I glance over at the alligator, who is entirely dormant and has likely been asleep for hours. Without any movement, Blaze cannot even detect it, unable to discern its shape in the dark water.

On the back trail that weaves through the most heavily wooded area is where the bobcat supposedly lives. As Blaze and I weave our way down the winding trail, I hold my breath when

we round each bend—scanning the scene for the bobcat, who varies in size depending on who is telling the story. My mom claims she’s seen the bobcat while sitting out on the lanai—*it was huge*, she said, *mangey, too*. There were a few times I went rollerblading alone, without Blaze, on the back path. I told myself I’d be able to out-skate the bobcat, whom I imagined might chase after me at full speed—*wild animals are erratic*, I remind myself, *it could do anything*. The truth is unnerving: I am shitty at rollerblading and most things that require balance and if ever there were a wild animal chasing me, it would only take about fifty feet or the nearest turn for me to fall and be consumed and my body would never be found.

On a rainy day in March, I was walking on the back trail without Blaze—something I rarely did—because he’d just gotten a bath that afternoon and the mud would dirty him right up, when a full-sized bobcat rounded the bend in a trot. I had nothing with me except my cell phone in my pocket which would do me no immediate good. We both froze when we saw the other—each of us brimming with suspicion and indecision—*should I scare it off? Even though I am also scared? Am I convincing enough despite the anxiety sweat it will be able to smell any second now? Is there a stick nearby perhaps a—*and before I figured out what I wanted to do; the bobcat disappeared nonchalantly from the path back into the woods. I used my residual adrenaline to run home.

As I ran, I rehearsed what I would tell my family; I survived the inconceivable; *I am the queen of the bobcats, it wanted nothing to do with me, it understood I’d never hurt it, I looked danger in its underwhelming face, I survived-*

MILFORD, 2016 II

Three months before the accident, Jackie walked a resealable pack of licorice from her house to mine, crossing over the spot in the street where she'd soon die. I waited for her in a plastic Adirondack chair on my front lawn. We'd been sharing the family-sized pack of cherry licorice between us for three days. It knew our houses, our switching of hands, our voices.

Licorice was our candy of choice, and we ate it whenever we could justify it— licorice and red wine while watching reality tv about extreme cosmetic surgeries, licorice on the way home from the beach to fight the inevitable sleepiness, licorice from a drug store while we drunkenly waited for a ride home from a party, we'd escaped to look at the stars. Licorice passed between us like emotional currency. We once darted from Jackie's house to mine, during a commercial break, to retrieve the licorice from my room where I'd forgotten it.

Now my dad and I both dream of licorice in different ways on the same nights. He dreams of my mom asking where the licorice is hiding. I dream of my dad and I standing in the kitchen when I tell him I wish we had something sweet; he reaches for the top shelf of the pantry, lighting up with the treasure he only then remembers he's hiding, *look what I've got!* He says as he pulls the shiny pack of red licorice from behind the grape nuts and the bran cereal— the unmistakable crinkle of the package, the unmistakable smell of artificial fruit, the unmistakable taste that is unmistakably different, duller than it had once been.

PART II: HOMES

NEW ENGLAND

My ancestors arrived in New England as many others did, through the immigration port of Ellis Island in the New York Harbor in the early 1900s. They came fleeing the poor conditions in southern Italy and the low employment opportunities in Hungary. My dad's dad, the first of that family tree to be born in America, had only a sixth-grade education before he started working full-time in a factory in his hometown of Wallingford, Connecticut. This was six more years of education than his own parents had while growing up in Hungary. Although my grandparents spoke fluent Hungarian, my dad never learned. He remembers his parents switching from English to Hungarian only to avoid the five children hearing their conversation details.

For those of us who do not have the privilege of inheriting familial stories that explain our ancestors' circumstances and whereabouts—like how they got from New York to Connecticut—we must fill the hole with imagination, speculation. Anything before the early 1900s, on both sides of my family, is lost to time. It seems as though my Hungarian family did not keep detailed records, perhaps because literacy was scarce in the poor agrarian towns.

Southern Italians were notoriously disenfranchised by the north, labeled as poor criminals, which brought them to America in droves during the 19th and 20th centuries; we—my Italian family—speculate that this mass exodus left behind most of our family records. My grandma holds the death notice for her grandpa, which records his emigration to the United States as having occurred in 1903, having been received by his own brother in Hamden, Connecticut, as his sponsor. But it's wrong, according to my grandma, because he worked as a

mason in New York before that; she estimates his correct arrival to the United States was in the 1890s. This means even official documents may not hold the truth of my family.

My DNA is southern European, Italian, of course—from Campania—but also Balkan, and yet something about the way I look leads people to think otherwise; I have almond shaped eyes, which are hooded, so when I smile or laugh, they are swallowed by my round face. Growing up, I did not have eyelids; when I first started wearing makeup, I was confounded by the differences between my eyes and others—I couldn't figure out how to make eyeshadow or eyeliner work; but in adulthood my eyelids grew in, creating space for me to explore with shadow and liquid liner. I also have very dark hair and confusedly light green eyes. Everyone else in my family has brown eyes—my brother, my father, my mother, my grandma and grandpa on my mom's side, my cousins; all brown except my Hungarian grandpa whose light eyes I supposedly inherited.

My dad's mom died before I could meet her and my grandpa died in 2010, but he started to fade around 2009, when I was twelve—which meant I was still too young to imagine the scope of life; I was too young to imagine I would ever forget what my grandpa's living room looked like, or that the only picture in the living room hung on the mantle, was of me, looking ever so plump, with a belly sticking out in my old corduroy bell bottoms on the first day of first grade. He was always telling me I was getting chubby, while my mom's side of the family, the Italian side, would tell me I was beautiful—a healthy glowing ball of light—*Lucia, Angelina Lucia*—my great aunt would say to me, tenderly stroking my hair as though I was worth my weight in gold.

My Italian grandparents are still alive and well, in their mid-eighties and shuffling about their house in Florida. My mom's mom has a steel-trap memory which comes in handy when I

prod her with questions about our family tree—my mom’s dad had open heart surgery in 2018 which means, in my mom’s opinion, the lack of oxygen to his brain, and the amount of anesthesia required for such a long surgery, affected his memory and recall. He is also somehow *softer*, which is a word my aunt uses to describe him, now that he says *I love you* at the end of a phone call.

WALLINGFORD, CT

I used to go to the dump every weekend with my dad and his dad, who everyone called Gus—short for August, the month in which both Gus and I were born— which I loved because I could gaze down into the massive hole in the earth that was filled with refrigerators and furniture—*it's cool how the earth simply swallows it all up*, I remember thinking. I didn't yet know the words *environmental crisis*.

After driving home from the dump, my dad once took the long way back to my grandpa's house on Sylvan way to show me the house where my grandpa grew up on Cherry Street. My dad sensed my affinity for history at a young age, bringing Vinny and I to historical sites in Boston—the catacombs of the Old North Church, the USS Constitution—known to Bostonians as Old Ironsides—and my favorite place, Paul Revere's house.

From the passenger seat of the car, my grandpa said, *what are we doing here, Jimmy?* My dad explained that he wanted to share this piece of history with me, his daughter. *What the hell does she care for?* Said Gus.

Throughout our time in Grafton, we traveled most weekends to Connecticut to visit our withering family members—Gus, who was seeing faces in the walls, and convinced a Romani family was living in his guest bedroom. My dad would fix things around the house or suture the tall tomato plants to the chain link fence in the backyard. Occasionally, my grandpa would let me watch TV with him, on the only TV in the house, in the room which used to be the bedroom that him and my grandma slept in when my dad was young. By the time I was young, the bedroom had turned into Gus's TV room with two armchairs. The room had a small walk-in closet, where

my grandpa slept on a twin bed; the mattress was so old; apparently it was slept on, in childhood, by either my dad or one of his four siblings. I would ask my dad why his father slept in a closet, and he could not or would not tell me. I wondered, as the Could Nots and Would Nots began to add up, if other families were as strange as mine, and if I, inevitably, was strange.

We would also visit my *grandma* Jane, who was really my mom's mother's stepmother—Jane was only nine years older than my grandma and the two were close, despite the fact that Jane lived in Connecticut, never leaving the place in which all of my family grew up, in Wallingford, and my grandma lives in Florida. I hope this isn't confusing because in most ways it is very confusing—and trying to put the pieces together when I was very young felt near impossible. I couldn't understand why Jane was so close in age to my own grandma, and no one seemed comfortable telling me that my great grandpa had married, somewhat scandalously, a woman who was at least fifteen years his junior.

At Jane's house, my parents would help her clean and my dad would once again fix things, which likely gave him a strong sense of purpose. Vinny and I would watch *Nick at Nite* on the TV in Jane's living room until we fell asleep on the couch.

I was young when Wallingford was a part of my life, basically first grade to eighth grade, which was when my Gus finally passed, when all I cared about was catching a glimpse of a fairy in the woods behind my house and when I would next get my grubby little hands on some candy—more often than not, when my family traveled by minivan to Connecticut or Florida or wherever we were going, we'd stop at a Cracker Barrel to use their restrooms because it was clean and you could walk right in. Afterwards, Vinny and I would pour ourselves over the candy, feeling extreme anxiety about spending only however much change we had between us. We usually got candy sticks, which were fifteen cents each. My preferred flavor was root beer, and I

remember Vinny's mouth looking ever so blue raspberry as we stabbed each other with the sharp tips of the half-dissolved candy sticks.

I sometimes blame myself for not being able to foster an intimate relationship with my grandpa, who was always showing me little things like when he used one piece of bologna only for his sandwich but pressed the rim of one of his old tin cups to the bologna, cutting off the outer edges to not only fit the sandwich bread but add another layer of bologna. *This is how I trick myself into thinking I've had two pieces*, he said.

His workbench in the basement was filled with retired peanut butter jars which held nuts and bolts of years past. The lids of the plastic jars were held to the rotating mechanism by nails through their centers, then the jars would screw on and off the lids. He also had an antique bench vise like the one from the movie *The Orphan* (2009), which the main character used to the device to crush her arm for attention. I imagined my tiny arm in the jaws of my grandpa's vise, getting tighter and tighter like a blood pressure test. There was also a laundry chute, which Vinny and I were not allowed to use per the request of my mom who envisioned us falling through. It was only a hole in the ground, hidden behind the door of a closet, but it fascinated us so. When grandpa was looking after us, Vinny and I would sneak into the closet and drop things down the shoot, putting the laundry basket in slightly different positions each time—charging from the upstairs down the narrow wooden steps to the basement, lit by single hanging light bulbs and one florescent light box on the ceiling which buzzed to life at the flip of the switch. Under the fluorescent-lit side of the basement, there were cabinets of canned goods, dating back at least a decade, there were things my grandpa had canned himself, in more repurposed jars. In the basement there were jars upon jars upon jars—a lifetime of jars and spiders.

BARBARA JEAN STREET, GRAFTON, MA

When we moved from Gus's house into the Grafton house, I was in second grade. It was shrouded in oak trees that dropped mass quantities of acorns on our shaded deck. Chocolate, our chocolate lab, would spend afternoons lounging on the deck, eating the acorns, and sleeping in the chinks of sunlight that shone through the trees. The trees were problematic, though, because they were so old and hung so low to our roof that under the weight of the very dense New England snow, we were gambling that the branches would snap right off and clobber us.

Eventually, in that tree-shaded house, my mom finished her Master's degree, and passed her licensure, becoming a special-education teacher for medically fragile students in the state of Massachusetts, specifically Grafton—and subsequently Milford—which meant we were now a two-income family and the first signs of change came in the form of home renovations. My dad and I painted the whole inside of the house over a period of a few weeks and both caught pneumonia. He also replaced the entire house flooring with hardwood, which changed my life, because it was bright and glossy—I can still see the red hues of lights and tree ornaments glinting off the cherry notes in the hardwood floor as I sneak around on Christmas morning, counting how many things were mine.

The trees in the backyard were eventually trimmed—more like hacked, in the ugliest way—until they were no longer a threat to the house, and then a little bit more. The deck went from shade to full sun overnight and the amount of insects and rodents appearing in the house began to dwindle. I was glad to see the spiders gone because spiders are unpredictable, especially the ones that jump, but my dad would always remind me of the ways in which spiders did favors—*they*

eat the mosquitoes, and the stink bugs, and the inch worms, he'd tell me, they do more around this house than you kids.

In the summers, because we did not have central air in the Grafton house, my dad would install a big noisy air conditioner in the kitchen window above the sink. The air that the unit produced smelled like Wet Dog. My dad lost hours tinkering with the machine, trying to get to the root of the problem. My mom nicknamed the ac unit *big yellow* because it was old and yellowed from time and it kept us cool, but at a certain cost. Eventually, we all received units for our bedroom windows, and I kept mine on sixty-nine degrees at night—which I was allowed to do, because my room was so small that my usage hardly showed up on the energy bill.

My dad refurbished an old snow blower from the fifties—which belonged to my mom's grandpa—but he kept it running in perfect condition throughout my life, until they left for Florida, and my dad gifted the snowblower to our neighbor in Milford, Mr. Filosa. It was bright orange and self-propelled and made clearing the driveway almost easy.

One particularly harsh winter, in the Grafton house, my dad came inside after hours of shoveling and snow blowing. He had hat hair like he usually did when he came inside from working in the yard. He retrieved Vinny first, from his room, then me on the couch, *I want to show you something*, my dad said to us. My brother and I exchanged a speechless dialogue. We all walked down the basement stairs, through the unfinished basement, carpeted in some places and plain cement in others. He didn't ask us to put our shoes on, which confirmed we were in trouble, and this was not a trip to see a fallen bird nest or a strange animal footprint in the mud. My dad knelt in the garage and showed us the busted and bent auger on the snowblower. *Can you guess what did this to the snowblower?*

I could have guessed, because I knew the answer, but his demeanor suggested this was a one man show for the time being. He quickly produced various garden tools that I'd stolen for no good reason—a trowel, a hand pruner, both of which were in surprisingly good shape—there were also at least two bent wickets from our croquet set, which we made good use of in the spring and summer with Chris and Noelle, because none of us were video-game kids. It was realistically all my fault, but my dad didn't make assumptions like my mom did, so Vinny and I stood there—because he is not a snitch—and felt terribly bad about our carelessness. I didn't understand then that the care my parents put into their house and their material possessions was a representation of what they've accomplished. Just because we could not afford a two-story house did not mean we didn't deserve hard wood floors, or a snowblower, or a nice lawn.

There was once a chipmunk living in our dryer—not the whole time, but for a couple weeks at least, it supposedly invaded the walls when a bough of a tree led it right to our roof—and there was a squirrel who lived in our walls much longer than the chipmunk. We would all hear the demonic scratching at night. For the rats, my dad set the snap traps in the attic, and the sticky traps in the basement—I used to watch him pour the sticky substance onto the small plastic tray—I would gently press my fingers into the one in the basement when nobody was around; I wanted to see if it could trap me. One fateful day I came across a dead rat in the sticky trap. My dad hurried over with a plastic bag—*why do we kill them?* I asked him.

It's too hard to catch and release them, also they spread disease. The squirrel situation was different—he caught it in a cage and we all oohed and ahhhhed then drove it to a wildlife preserve about five minutes away, where it ran off into the day. What if it comes back? I asked. It never came back.

AGNES ROAD, MILFORD, MA

My dad and I bond now over our DIY projects—I used the same wall brackets to hang the shelves in my bedroom in Colorado as he used to hang the shelves in the garage in Florida. *Sturdy and inexpensive*, my dad said about the brackets. The screws that the wall brackets came with, I could not find wall anchors for, and I was worried because I knew I would be drilling into drywall, which is always risky, but the screws were long enough that I'd do it anyways, and it would not be perfect but functional enough. My dad is a meticulous man. Projects take him a long time because he must measure and remeasure, and level, of course, and then level again, mark lightly with a pencil, drill pilot holes, etc., but we have always done projects together, and I have always noticed that learning to do things the right way takes longer, and usually requires more attention.

I personally like the look of weeds growing in a yard. I think it adds a certain flare to a situation. With weeds and natural fauna, comes insects and a bit more habitat—more to offer the butterflies and bees who don't want to come so close to a back porch where there might be fat pots of black-eyed-Susans and calendulas but also big rumbling humans.

I don't know what switches in a person to make them suddenly care about plants, but it seems to happen with age—it's not that I didn't care about the earth, I always have, but going to a home improvement store—overwhelming and overpriced, the shelves are too tall—and spending an afternoon weeding in the hot summer sun felt like cruel and unusual punishment. But my parents were committed to eradicating the weeds, eliminating everything that did not fit their picture of our home. *Pull it out by the roots or this will have all been for nothing*, my mom

used to say, and yet pulling weeds out by the roots has seemed to me since childhood acutely sinister, because I never understood why we couldn't just plant on top of the weeds, or beside them—if bees like dandelions, then what's the point of ripping them out for daisies, or butterfly bushes, which my mom grew every year in Massachusetts. Imagine how glad a bee might be to grab pollen from a dandelion and a daisy, or a sunflower, or a black-eyed-Susan. What if we spoiled the bees with abundance?

Jackie once told me that our neighborhood in Milford used to be apple orchards, that the land that my old Milford house stands on, and the surrounding houses, was once orchard land. Jackie's ancestors used to own the orchard land—I tried to find evidence of the existence of an orchard in Milford dating back to 1870 but it seems more realistic that it was a small private apple orchard for the family and not a public one like I had imagined, with hayrides and a petting zoo. I do remember, though, that one of my neighbors told me he once got in trouble for sneaking apples off the property when he was a kid in the 1950s.

That is why we had a series of old apple trees in our backyard in Milford, which served as shade for Blaze in the summers. The crab apple trees were the only ones to produce fruit and Blaze would constantly mistake crab apples for tennis balls during fetch—he would grab a crab apple at full speed, then frantically spit the apple to the ground and panic, for a moment the search was off then suddenly back on—most labs would eat the fruit, or at least investigate it, but Blaze's primary concern has always been *the ball*. He is still this way; he even sleeps with one nestled beneath his chin. When he is anxiously waiting to receive his ball, you could hand him a treat, a piece of cheese, a lump of peanut butter, a rack of ribs, and he would not move, would not risk taking his eyes off the ball for a single flit of a moment.

Regardless of the land's recent history, it has been something else for much longer. The only apples native to North America are crab apples, and I feel like that's common knowledge, but I should not assume, so yes, it is true that apples, as we know them—though I shouldn't assume that we all know them the same way—were brought from England by the colonists, though apples originated in Asia¹ hundreds of thousands of years ago. Perhaps apple pie is not the all-American dessert. The crab apple got its name for being small and handheld, roughly the size of a small crab—crab apples are the estranged cousin to red delicious and honey crisp—an apple adjacent. I've found some recipes online for what to do with crab apples and there was crab apple jelly and tarte tatin, and poached crab apples in sugary syrup—anything that involves balancing out the sour with enough sweet.

My dad used to make the most delicious apple crisp in the fall in Massachusetts, not with crab apples though, but with honey crisp apples and oats and brown sugar. He prided himself on substituting healthy alternatives—applesauce or Greek yogurt in place of butter, whole wheat flour, mashed bananas for sugar. The results were always delicious, and my dad would have to remind me that I could have only one serving per day because I needed to save some for the rest of the family.

I tend to overeat by accident, by not paying attention, and sometimes deliberately. I still repeat to myself, as I wash and prepare my fruit for the week: *four strawberries is the serving size*, because that is what Dad would tell me as I carefully chose the rosiest and ripest strawberries from a batch he'd just meticulously de-stemmed and cleaned. He always found ways to tell me I was being selfish without ever calling me selfish, like the time I left a bloody tampon on the floor of the shower that we all used, and he discovered it, came into my room, and said *come here*, so I went there, and I was absolutely mortified because I obviously meant to

throw it out, but I forgot about it because I am absent minded. He said nothing other than that for the entire interaction, but he pointed at the tampon and he glared at me so hard that his look told a story: his daughter is careless and gross and despite her good qualities, she needs to be better. He walked out of the bathroom and I hastily cleaned the mess and the whole bathroom and my room and vacuumed the upstairs and we never spoke of it again.

Just before my parents moved out of the Milford house, just before I left for Colorado, I was tasked with cleaning out the bins of photos and artwork that Vinny and I made in our early years. Blaze was next to me on the concrete floor of the back room, in the same spot where one of my friends was murdered in a murder-mystery party game, which I wrote myself—my friends and I, all dressed in 1920s fashion, shrieked, and sobbed, and Sarah, who was playing the wife of the man who died, pushed her way through the crowd of us, screaming *my husband my husband*.

I started sorting and realized I hadn't felt the sensation of construct paper in a long time—even the noises that the paper made, as I shuffled it through my hands, and against other papers, it was ringing a felt sense. The photographs took a long time to sort because my parents kept doubles, if not triples of the same sets—they also kept the negatives, always, and even as I sorted through them, frisbeeing things into the garbage bag, my mom begged that I be gentle with all the negatives.

NAPLES, FL

If my dad's love language is cleaning, mine is being messy. I have never been a cleaner and I still am not. It surprises my parents, whenever I am visiting in Florida, and I wash my bed sheets for no apparent reason. *Why are you washing your bedding?* My mom might ask, looking utterly dumbfounded, *did you bleed on them? Spill something on them? Were you eating in the bed?* The truth is that I now wash my bedsheets unprompted because it is something I can control, something small I can do to prove to myself that I have say over what I sleep on, and some days, more than others, I need to sleep on a clean sheet.

Now that they don't have a yard at their little condo in Florida, my dad finds things to fix and clean to fill his time on the weekends. It is not uncommon to wake up in the early morning and find my dad on the tallest step of his twelve-foot ladder, dusting the ceiling and walls. He once cleaned the insides of all the light fixtures throughout the house and he frequently hacks away at any overgrowth in the surrounding woods. I like to remind him that their community dues have paid for very talented and efficient grounds keepers to do the yard work, all they need is to be notified—*no need*, he says, *just this one spot is bothering me*.

By seven a.m., on any given Saturday, he will have already taken Blaze for his morning walk, fed him, and dashed off for the grocery store with a full list for the four of us, and a full list for my grandparents, who he drops groceries off to in the afternoon. If you ask him, he'll say otherwise, but he must control the groceries. Vinny and I offer profusely to go to the grocery store for the family but my dad refuses, insisting that only he knows exactly what to get from Publix, then Trader Joes. It's gotten to the point where Vinny and I must physically remove my

father from the kitchen and place him on the sofa, with the dog, to relax—we are a good team, my brother and I, when we clean the kitchen, but I often find my dad at the sink the next morning, rewashing at least a few items—too kind to draw attention to my carelessness.

TAKE A BREAK

When I was in middle school, I was nipped on the heel by my friend's miniature poodle as I entered her house. I was so shocked by the dog's confidence that I was a threat to its family, that I, too, was convinced something was wrong with me. I don't know if it is because of this that I feel exposed to animals who do not like me—the rare upset dog that I am not on the same page with, the cat who yowls when peeled from her hiding spot to be introduced to me—and I am forced to ask myself, *what are all the threats that I pose?*

Up until Jackie died in July of 2016, my parents' attitudes around adding a dog to the family was an unyielding *no*. But by October of that year, when it became clear to my parents that my grief was overtaking me, dulling me from the inside out, they secretly started looking at dog rescues and humane societies. They needed to pick the dog themselves, perhaps as a last stitch measure of control in a time when their daughter was not entirely safe with herself. It was my mom who finally caved as we stood together in the kitchen, small talking about dogs I'd seen that day, fighting a smile, biting her lip, stalling her words, until I shrieked like a person with a new purpose, at what I understood her to be saying. As she struggled to get the words out, she looked at my dad, who cannot help but giggle in the rare moments when my mom gets sheepish.

He explained that he and my mom visited the humane society a few days earlier and met a black lab named Blaze, who was found, with his brother Benji, running full speed on the highway in the breakdown lane. The owner surrendered Blaze first, because he once supposedly snapped at Benji over food, but a month after Blaze came home with us, the shelter called, asking if we wanted his brother, too. We all felt bad for Benji, who we'd never met, because we

could still clearly see Blaze wince in fear when I'd lightly scold him for shredding my favorite books, or for knocking over the trash can. He gets, as my mom says, *disgusted with himself* when he misbehaves.

My parents wanted a lab because they aren't risk takers; they wanted a relaxed dog, a dog that would not destroy the house in our absence, a dog whose behavior would be predictable and familiar. They were looking for some kind of reincarnation of Chocolate, our chocolate lab from my childhood. She was a good dog for my parents, a sweet and calm girl who was about four or five when they rescued her. Chocolate came on most of our trips with us, sprawled out on the third row of seats in the way back of the minivan, where I'd sometimes sit in my teenage years, when I could not stand to be one seat closer to my family.

My dad recalls that when Vinny and I would play in the driveway, Chocolate would sit at its edge, close enough, but not too close to the street, protecting her territory. When we did yard work, Chocolate would lounge in the sun and eat the acorns off the deck, eat sticks, eat grass. If I wanted her to hang out in my room, I'd have to lure her in with treats and shut the door behind us, at which point she'd station herself at the door, listening carefully to the movement in the house. When Chocolate would come with us to Wallingford, to visit my grandpa, he would say things like, *you could never rob a bank with this dog around* because she would sprawl out, all eighty pounds of her, in the center of his small kitchen, because that's where the adults always were.

Blaze is the opposite of chocolate in every way, except that he is as spoiled as she was. Instead of falling asleep in the sun, belly full of acorns like Chocolate, Blaze's head is inches from mine as I rake the dead leaves from under the shrubs. He spits his ball into the pile and dives and rummages until the pile is no more. If we simply ignored him, he would identify the

closest neighbor, which was usually Mr. Filosa, who loved Blaze but loved his raspberry bushes more, and he'd run to that neighbor, dropping the ball at their feet. This includes, but is not limited to, 93-year-old Lou across the street, and Mr. Filosa's grandson, who was all but three years old when we first got Blaze.

When his behavior was too much, my dad would take a deep breath and announce to Blaze, *take a break*. At which point Blaze would trot to a shady spot and plop down—tongue hanging out one side of his mouth while the ball took up the other, clutched between his upper and lower canine teeth. I have adapted this clear and concise command into my life; when I am in a state, when a multitude of emotions are claspng tight around my throat, I announce to myself: *take a break*. It is amazing advice, the kind of advice people pay for.

After my parents moved from Massachusetts and Florida, to be close to my mom's parents as they seem to age in leaps with each passing week, my mom and I speculate whether or not Blaze misses Massachusetts, and I use this as an opportunity to speculate whether or not my Mom is missing it, too. She says things like, *I'll bet Blaze misses the neighbors, and the fireplace roaring on a snowy evening, the sun porch and all of my decorations on the sun porch*. My dad still won't admit one way or the other, even as southwest Florida traffic consumes more and more of his energy—but it's clear he misses a house and a yard and a workbench. Because the condominium complex has hired professionals to clean out the gutters of my parent's small two bedroom condo, and landscapers to mow the small patches of grass, and arborists to cut the heavy limbs off of the old trees in hurricane season, my dad must find new and inventive ways to stay busy on the weekends. If he is not on his twelve-foot ladder dusting the walls and the ceiling, he is giving the front door a new coat of paint or blowing the leaves off the driveway.

Sometimes he and I will sit together on the driveway in lawn chairs—my dad with a vodka soda, me with a kombucha, Blaze with a stick—and we will sit in silence, or make small talk about the dog, or I will tell him about all of the things I am afraid of, and he will remind me that I'm a *tough kid*.

Now I take great care to show both of my parents that I respect the work they put into the little things, that I am growing slowly out of the fire of girlhood— I no longer throw my phone from my bedroom window when I am not receiving texts from the boy that I like. I no longer cry in the driveway in the pouring rain, lying face-up and barefoot on the pavement, my neighbors calling the house phone to ask my mom if I was okay. I know what it means for my parents that their space is orderly, and their affairs predictable, and their experience of loss controllable, and so I know what it means for my parents to have adopted a dog into our lives; happiness so fleeting.

PART III: GIRLHOOD

*I am the edge of a glass
that cut. I am blood.*

*I am this fiery snail
crawling home.*

-Charles Bukowski, Tonalities (1970)

HOLLOW

In elementary school I monopolized recess—my friends and I, under my command, would rehearse the plays I had written, casted and directed. In an impressive display of forethought, I have kept the last page of one script from a play I wrote in third grade. It reads:

Troll: thank you for coming I have picked who is going to move away Dandelion fairy, Lily fairy, and Rose fairy you are going to move away.

All Fairies Respond At The Same Time: oh my

In the closing scene, the characters take turns saying goodbye. They say things like *I'll miss you* and *I hope to see you again soon*.

I knew what kinds of things you are supposed to say in that situation; by third grade, I'd already attended and left four other schools, as my dad's job moved us up the East Coast. I was practiced in saying goodbye.

The play closes with a line from the narrator:

So Sarah Jane once again has no friends but Lily comes to visit her often. And that is the end of our play.

(everyone takes a bow)

I felt bad for the character of Sarah Jane, who loses everything; her reality seemed harsh, but I was a ruthless playwright, the kind of kid who would title a play *Hollow*. I flipped the paper over in my hand, where I sat in the basement of the house in Milford, cleaning out my bookshelves post high-school graduation, where I found the cast list:

*Lily fairy—Shannon
Dandelion fairy—Caileen
Rose fairy—Michelle
Rose bud fairy—Rebecca
Troll—Rachel*

Narrator—Daniella

Sarah Jane wasn't on the cast list, nor was I—as the director I couldn't remember if I'd casted myself—though my sneaking suspicion was that I did and sure enough, at the top corner of the page, where I had written the director's introduction that I would read to the imaginary audience on imaginary opening night. Next to my name, in the smallest print: Director and *Sarah Jane*.

DISRUPTIVE IN CLASS

My first year in Grafton was second grade and at some point, I was caught red-handed writing strange incantations on a bathroom stall. I can't remember what I wrote and when I called the elementary school a couple years ago—in my never ending quest to remember what's been largely forgotten—to ask if they had any such record of me, they seemed so flustered by the question—switching the phone back and forth and asking me to repeat what I was looking for again and again—until eventually I was told that they clean out their records every ten years or so—which seems to me like there's no point of keeping record in the first place.

I love to speculate but I also love facts—but the facts aren't there because they rotate every ten years. I am guessing whatever I wrote on the stall was about death or sex because I remember the principal telling me she was ashamed of me—*ashamed? Ashamed of me? Why don't you give me a writing utensil and release me back into the bathroom and I'll give you something to be ashamed of*, is what I wish I said in response but instead I just sat cross-armed in the serious chair in the principal's office. I had an accomplice. Her name was Maddie and she lived on the other side of the Barbara Jean Street. In the principal's office she was quiet and was sobbing into her hands.

It's okay, it's going to be okay, I said to Maddie.

It's not going to be okay, the principal said, without looking up, as she sifted through manilla folders for our home phone numbers—the joke was-on the principal because both my parents worked, she would greet with a sigh of frustration, my family's answering machine. I'm assuming she tried my mom's cell phone after that, but I don't remember.

The only other thing that stuck with me from second grade is that I was not the type of student that will read the instructions. My teacher created a sick and twisted test in which the directions clearly stated *not* to answer any of the questions. I, however, did not read the directions until I glanced around the room and saw the smug faces of my classmates sitting self-righteously in their tiny chairs, hands in their laps, pencils resting on their desks. I feverishly erased what I'd written but there was no hope. There was no hope because I write with pressured intent—the darkness of the graphite was nothing compared to the indents my words made on the paper. I failed the test, the first of many; I still remember the acute sting of feeling dumb.

Later, in eighth grade math class, while my teacher was explaining basic algebra, I would hum just loud enough that she'd turn around from the white board with a red face and glare slowly around the room, evaluating each face for signs of humming—which it turns out is entirely maskable; I could be taking notes, fidgeting with my backpack, or sitting absolutely still, and all the while I looked utterly plain. This went on for a while, until my teacher announced that she'd narrowed the humming down to one side of the room, then strode proudly towards the rows of desks on my side: *it's someone over here*, she said, spinning her point finger, other hand on her hip. I knew I had to retire from humming, because getting caught would undo the fun, getting caught would turn clever and cunning into dumb and disruptive in an instant.

This was the same teacher who made me stay after school for extra help, because she was concerned about my performance in math, about my ability to keep up with my peers. This was kind, though a waste of time, because I could not make myself care about math, this would never be my path. If anything, I was worried about my peers keeping up with me on a social and emotional level. *I have an older brother, I remind myself, I'm mature beyond my years.*

Still though, I stayed for extra help and I completed my assignments—the word problems that I could not make sense of—because it’s what my mom made me do, what her mom made her to do, and the mom before her. A matriarchal lineage of teachers, starting with my great grandma, who taught people to sew, then my grandma, who taught grammar to elementary schoolers, then my mom who taught in the chronically dismissed and under-funded world of public special education for fifteen years. I never saw myself following the pattern; I knew exactly what I wanted to be from the moment I could write: a writer. I would be the break in this chain—though I admittedly woke up one morning and found myself to be an educator—I vowed not force my child’s hands at their disinterests, to not let them feel dumb over a performance they are not meant to do.

Eighth grade was the year of sitting alone in the hallway, at a single desk, facing the wall, because I could not be quiet in woodshop. I got a detention in art class for saying I wanted to *punch babies*—the teacher had a baby and took serious offense—obviously, though, I would never punch a baby; I’ve never punched anyone, and I didn’t even know any babies then. It was one of the many unfortunate expressions of my childhood: *Ew, that’s so annoying, it makes me wanna punch babies!*

I regretted it immediately, the visceral guilt surfaced in an instant; there I was, being disruptive in class, in a very major way. I’d been caught red handed, outwitted, dumb. I certainly learned my lesson during detention, where I sat with another kid from class who was in detention for stealing another classmate’s iPod. I felt incredibly guilty then, like a violent maniac—*would she note in my permanent record that I was a threat to babies?* is what I was thinking at the time.

What I've learned in my short amount of time teaching: students are often not listening and it's not their fault—for every student who can sit still and be fully engaged for any amount of time over thirty minutes, there is a student who cannot, will not, because within them it does not feel right.

In freshman year math class, my best friend Alexa was sent to the principal's office for violating the dress code. Our teacher explained, in front of the whole class, that Alexa had worn a tank top with too-thin straps the day before and having felt so guilty over not writing her up, needed to rectify the situation. As Alexa walked to accept the write-up slip, I stood up from my desk and made some kind of protest—I can't remember what exactly I said—but we, both then and now, compare the situation to the scene out of the 2007 movie version of *Hairspray*, where Zac Efron stood up from his desk and announced to the teacher, in defense of Tracy Turnblad: *kiss my ass*. Alexa remembers the teacher threatening to write me up as well if I didn't sit down and control myself. *Her outfit was distracting*, said our teacher, *disruptive*. I sat down.

INTERNAL COMPASS

Flying disorients me. There is no way around it; I must constantly look truth in the face when I am headed to the airport, which is the first moment that it's too late to turn back: *will I feel lost when I get where I'm going?*

I have a friend who was a flight attendant to earn money for grad school. When she first told me, I asked, what she says are the strangest questions she's been asked: *What does it say about humanity that everyone claps after the plane lands? What on earth does your soul think of being so far from the ground so frequently? Does flying so often affect your period?*

My family drove to the few faraway places we visited—from Massachusetts to southwest Florida every other year to visit my grandparents, from Massachusetts to the very top of Maine, where my mom, dad, brother and I would stay at the Bar Harbor motel and take the public bus downtown for dinner. The drive to Bar Harbor, Maine from Grafton, Massachusetts might take a solo traveler about six hours, but it took my family anywhere from seven to eight with all of the bathroom stops and eventual coffee stops when my brother and I were in high school.

We played brain-quest trivia in the car. My mom and I each took turns reading the questions because we knew the least number of things, while Vinny and my dad volleyed correct answers. My dad always won in the end, having the inevitable advantage of years on his side. He collects and curates information like no one I know; his steel-trap memory holds onto the names of my childhood friends and classmates, and the strange things I did when I was little—like sneak away in the blink of an eye to bail water from the toilet onto the bathroom floor or army

crawl from the house with my ornate Chinese umbrella which was a gift from my Hungarian aunt, to show the kids in the neighborhood after my mom told me I couldn't.

The running joke with my family is that my internal compass points in strange uncharted ways. I imagine the hands of a compass swinging wildly inside of me. I can't make sense of direction, which admittedly, might not be my problem as a member of the Google Maps generation. When we'd drive from Massachusetts to Florida, my favorite game was falling asleep then waking up some time later to ask frantically what state we are in. Sometimes my brother would say something like *Montana*, which I knew was *not* on the way to Florida. Even when we'd drive from Grafton to Connecticut every weekend to visit with my grandpa whose dementia was growing increasingly worse, my brother could effortlessly direct my parents from the highway to my grandpa's house, to which he was congratulated for his brilliance—he was, after all, in the gifted class, unlike me, whose strange gifts I didn't yet know.

My dad is known as *Fred* because his Hungarian-speaking family would call him, according to my dad, a word that sounds like fee-da-gesh, meaning fidgety because my dad is chronically on the go, then two of the five siblings teasingly called him fredgesh. From this story, my brother and I have been able to identify a Hungarian word that fits the sound profile: *ideges* pronounced ee-da-gesh, meaning fidgety. I had goosebumps as I listened to, over and over, Google pronounce the word to me. The problem with the story: my dad remembers the word *fideges*, which, as far as we can tell, is not a word. As I said, my dad's memory is reliable, which is unfortunate to our investigation, an investigation that stands still—despite our theories of memory and time and language— as to where the crucial letters *f* came from.

This loss of memory and loss of familial linguistic awareness feels heavier than necessary to my brother and I, who are left to speculate about the transformation of *ideges* into *fideges*. Perhaps my Hungarian American family, specifically my great-grandparents, who coined *fideges* combined fidgety in English and fidgety in Hungarian, but language is mysterious and disrupted by personhood, by individuality and by family.

In the basement of my grandpa's house on Sylvan Way in Wallingford, Connecticut, my brother and I would whack each other with the garden stakes from a metal bucket. The concrete basement housed my grandpa's workbench—above the workbench were old plastic peanut butter jars with screw-top lids, nailed to a wheel-type mechanism hanging from the ceiling; allowing you to swivel the wheel until you identify the right jar, with the right type of nut or bolt. The strange system made me wonder if it is the lid we are taking off the jar, or the jar we are freeing from the lid. There were clothes lines with pulleys hanging from the ceiling, where my grandpa would hang dry his clothes and towels because he did not have a dryer. The steel bulkhead was painted brown inside and out; in the summers I would sit on the warm bulkhead and watch my dad and my grandpa tie the tomato plants to the chain-link fence—trying to imagine my dad as a child, running around the backyard with the two hunting dogs who *stayed outside*.

As for my grandpa himself, there is much I can't remember— probably because I was always feeling the need to share my thoughts, to make outward my inner dialogue before I could forget. My grandpa would say things to me like, *if you keep talking so much you'll be dumb from not listening* and *if you keep talking so much, a bug is gunna fly in your mouth*—and he was right, on both counts; as I am losing memories of my grandpa with time and age, what more of

him I would have if I had paid attention and a bug once flew into my mouth at recess in sixth grade while I was talking.

When my parents took Vinny and I to Florida to visit my maternal grandparents, we'd make the twenty-three hour drive in two days, leaving day one at four or five in the morning, then driving until seven or eight at night, where we'd reach Virginia or one of the Carolinas. The best part of that miserable drive was hearing the accents change as we traveled further south—Starbucks staff are much friendlier the further down the east coast you go—until you reach Florida, where you cannot be sure what to expect. By the end of the second day of traveling, I'd be in tears—by the last time we did the drive in 2014, when I was seventeen and Vinny was nineteen, on Christmas break home from college—my breakdowns were anticipated. It would start with a crabby afternoon and evening, while I held onto every strange comment my mom made about how much I was snacking, until I eventually burst into a fit of hysterics after being woken up from an already inadequate sleep which I could not easily slip back into. Through fits of frustration crying, I'd unbuckle my seatbelt until my mom scared me back into buckling it or roll down the window on the highway until my dad turned on the child lock. I'd say things like *let me out of this car or I'm going to freak the fuck out and what state are we in because I hate it!*

At least, by car, I can feel the strange distance between places— I could witness the different versions of myself in the mirrors of the Wendy's and McDonald's bathrooms down the east coast because they are free to use and usually clean and right off the highway. But flying goes by so fast, I feel obligated to arrive at the new place as the person I was when I left, regardless of time zones, regardless of being both *far away* and *suddenly there* all in one day, I have felt each mile I've ever traveled.

My grandpa did small things for me that I understood to be acts of love. From Aldi's, he'd buy boxes of Honey Buns and bags of Cheetos, which were foods my parents did not buy. Each time he'd hand me a honey bun, or a bunch of Cheetos in a repurposed country-crock container, he'd remind me that I should only have one serving, because if I ate too much, I'd get chubbier—a comment that I'd now consider violent and spend three days crying over.

My brother and I slept in rickety twin beds, in the room that used to be the master bedroom. Even then, I considered what it must have been like for my dad, to return to the house where he grew up, with a family of his own, and a young daughter claiming to be communicating with the ghost of his deceased mother—my grandmother who I never met, who died from ovarian cancer after my parents got married. My dad tells the story of his mother's funeral, where the only one crying among the stoic Hungarians, was my Italian mother. I remember my dad explaining to my pediatricians that he was worried about the hereditary risk of ovarian cancer—it is always strange to seem him worry. Which meant, I too, was worried.

Between mine and Vinny's twin beds, was an end table which held a lamp and our boom box, which we used to listen to Shel Silverstein audiobooks—I still remember the sounds in his poem about a peanut butter and jelly sandwich. For these reasons I became attached to the house and this time period of my life, and by the time my grandpa died when I was in eighth grade, I held the fortitude to remember eat detail of the house as I walked through it one last time. The top of the refrigerator where the honey buns stayed, where I could not reach them, the two tweed sofas in the living room which faced each other, where I'd twiddle my thumbs and watch Vinny

play his Gameboy, the laundry chute which I was to stay away from. These were the spaces where I first understood I would eventually forget who I was when I was there.

PART IV: HISTORY LESSONS

OLD STURBRIDGE VILLAGE

It was on a third-grade field trip to a colonial living museum in Sturbridge Massachusetts, that I watched a group of boys from a different school antagonize the chickens who roamed around in groups of two or three—I do not know how many chickens makes a flock or a brood.

We shuffled into the one room schoolhouse. The original wood floor was so badly warped, that the further into the classroom you went, the higher off the ground you were. The tall-backed wooden benches reminded me of church pews, yet so short in the length of the seat that my chubby thighs had no real estate. The tour guide pulled a dunce cap from a cupboard and asked for a volunteer—I have never been one for volunteering on stages, and I was not allowed to share hats. My mom always cautioned me against putting public things on my head; *once you have lice*, she'd tell me, *the only thing you can do is shave your head*. This, of course, is not true, I realized in adulthood; there's many ways to get rid of lice, but my mom is one for scare tactics.

The tour guide chose a boy from the front row, placed the cap on his head and ushered him into the corner, his face inches from the wall—*This is what would happen if you misbehaved*, she said, and the schoolhouse erupted with laughter at the strange audacity. But I, a student who accidentally misbehaved, couldn't find the joke. Minus the dunce cap, I was often isolated to the back of the room, whisked into the hallway, or plucked from the cafeteria table and placed at a lone chair next to the teachers. At least I did not have lice, I thought, like the kid with the dunce cap surely would.

All the buildings in Sturbridge Village were built on site for the purposes of the living museum or transported there from older places across New England. The most interesting fact

about the parsonage—a house for the clergy, provided by the church— isn't that it was built in a different part of Massachusetts in the late 1700s, but that it was painted white upon its arrival in Sturbridge Village. Greek inspired infrastructure made a revival in New England in the mid-1800s, which is what the living museum wants to portray—on their website they call it, unironically, “the whitening of New England.”ⁱⁱ The once brown and practical parsonage was suddenly a grand white.

Taken from Charleston, Massachusetts in the 1950s, to be moved to the village, is the home of the Towne family. Originally built in the late 1700sⁱⁱⁱ by Salem Towne Sr., and inherited by his son, Salem Towne Jr., it should not be confused with the actual place of Salem Town, Massachusetts—which split from Salem Village in 1692, taking with it, the affluent merchants who controlled the ports^{iv}. The house had lavish furnishings, according to the *Old Sturbridge Village* website, which reflected the career identities of Mr. Salem Towne Jr. as land surveyor, justice of the peace, farmer, businessman^v.

The website mentions *laborers* and *hired women*, for both the homestead and the farmland. This era was pre-abolition, though the Massachusetts Constitution of 1780 abolished slavery, some eighty-five years before the US Constitution would adopt the thirteenth amendment in 1865^{vi}, Massachusetts was not free of indentured servitude, or negligible wages for workers; this distinction between *laborers* and *hired women*, leaves me with something to be desired—some admittance of truth in transparent language.

I can track my affinity with New England history to this age because I had the resources and exposure to know a vivid version of me in a colonial life. I imagined myself tending to the house and the animals, helping my mother by the hearth, struggling to haul tin pails filled with milk back to the tiny house from the barn, but at least I could go to school—my favorite thing. I would've been a girl in a heavy dress with a dunce cap, facing the wall, and now I can suspect my knuckles would've been red and chapped from a meter stick. After school I would've run home with my primer and my slate in a book belt, slung over my shoulder, stopping only to throw rocks at the boys who antagonized the flocks of chickens who'd meander around the village—I would've known that a flock is a gang of adult chickens, and a brood is the gang of youngsters.

The affinity only grew as I got older, and I had to reimagine my role. It's not that a puritan woman's life wasn't multifaceted or worth living, but historically tucked under the wing of a husband. Covertures left women's rights to their husband—completely submissive in economic and social matters. Sure, this wasn't uncommon for the time, but did not fit my childhood fantasy. Even had I been a spinster poet in puritan society, an educated artist and legal owner of my own property, my social status, at best, would've been non-existent. At worst, I'd've been burned at the stake as an outcast, a witch on the outskirts of town, at the edge of the wood, not to be trusted. In adulthood I learned that the only respectable position for a single woman was as a widow; and therein lies the spark of curiosity—no, not even curiosity—the necessity to untangle the good-enough-truths, the need to undo the shiny whitening.

The last time I visited Sturbridge Village was in 2018, it'd been years since I was there—perhaps a decade in the making—and the gap in my memory showed. The village felt strange

and empty, displaying white men in each shop: the blacksmith, the cobbler, the ceramist. The schoolhouse was empty—to my shock and horror, there was no teacher-character waiting to greet myself and my boyfriend at the door, telling us to take a seat and pull out our primers. I sat in the old wooden seats and remembered my ten-year-old self, feeling chubby and strange. Not so much was different, except I understood what was missing. I couldn't spot any women, *perhaps none showed up to volunteer that day*, my boyfriend suggested, a measly weekday, but my sneaking suspicious proved right upon minimal research in the car as we headed to Cracker Barrell afterward: women would not fill such roles. Not only would women be relegated to affairs at home, which I suppose I knew yet never truly swallowed, but education was vastly different based on gender^{vii}; girls learned only to read, so they could decipher the holy bible, yet grammar was off the table, reserved for the boys who were pursuing a college education^{viii}. Contrary to popular belief, women did not make up the majority of teachers, and when they were teachers, it was reading only. All other subjects—history, language, arithmetic, theology—were taught to boys by men. Of course, there were women who outstepped these bounds, perhaps women with progressive influential fathers, who allowed them to work in their shops, or persuaded merchants to foster business-like relationships with daughters or matriarchs.

Cracker Barrell was sour that day, and I was preoccupied with thought, overwhelmed at the idea of having to reimagine my colonial life. I felt betrayed and lied to, inherently limited, wracked with pain for those disenfranchised across New England history. It is easier, I suppose, to put the whole fifth grade class in the schoolhouse and pretend we would've sat together, integrated and wide-eyed, ready to learn how to express ourselves through poetry, or how make sense of numbers; it is easier than the truth, which would've crushed me—or so the adults say, the same adults who want to ban books, ban critical race theory, label it all as guilt-mutton-soup.

It is exactly this—the avoidance, the half-truths, the whitening of New England that fuels my search for reality.

BOSTON

It was a Boston December in 2019, when my friends and I dodged the thick sheets of ice masking the cobblestone roads. The Clydesdales at Faneuil Hall were dressed in their Christmas garb. It is impossible to pet the horses, who are usually parked like cars in a row, waiting for someone to approach the buggy and ask for a ride—it is only when the buggy drivers leave their station and cross the street for a cigarette that I have been able to sneak up and offer a horse a small pat just above the nose. Still, I always remained ready to run from the buggy drivers who are not evil at all, just fiercely protective of their horses, and rightfully so. Around the corner from the Clydesdales is the bar where my five-year high school reunion was held. Around another corner is the restaurant where I lost my first tooth on a plate of nachos.

Just past Faneuil Hall is the Haymarket which is my favorite stop because of the colors and smells of the fresh produce on the weekends. Sometimes in the summers, on our way to red sox games, my dad, my brother and I would stop for strawberries—Haymarket is one of America's oldest and longest-running outdoor markets, established in 1820, with a diverse cast of produce vendors at deliciously low prices, there was guaranteed foot traffic and it was important that I *stayed close* to my dad.

And of course, past Haymarket is the North End of Boston, famously Italian-American—though the North End has switched hands a few times in terms of the highest demographic, meaning in 1880 the North End was predominantly Irish Catholic until the southern Italians showed up in literal boat loads starting in the 1890s, including my great grandparents. Now it is, of course, *little Italy* with world famous Italian-American bakeries, where the cannoli's are not

soggy, but piped into a freshly baked shell upon order. But the north end is also home to things even more enticing for me: the old north church and her narrow catacombs, Copp's Hill which is Boston's oldest cemetery; the first tomb stone is dated 1659—I have seen this tomb stone, it's small and weathered but unmistakably there.

PHILLIS WHEATLEY

Phillis Wheatley was a black revolutionary war-era poet who was born in 1753 in West Africa, kidnapped in adolescence from the Senegambian coast^{ix}, and purchased by the Wheatley family of Boston when she was child. It is true that Mary Wheatley, Susanna and John Wheatley's daughter, taught Phillis to read and write English. She also encouraged Phillis to publish her poetry, which started appearing in newspapers around New England when Phillis was fourteen^x. It is also true that the name of the slave ship which brought her to the new world, was called *The Phillis*^{xi}. I have seen Phillis's grave at Copp's Hill, I have reached out and touched the stone, feeling incredibly dissatisfied that history will never know her birth name.

Phillis, in her 1773 published collection of poetry, *Poems on Various Subjects, Religious and Moral*, which is officially the first collection of poems published by an African- American poet^{xii}, shares a few lines about her life before Boston in the following excerpt,

*I, young in life, by seeming cruel fate
Was snatch'd from Afric's fancy'd happy seat:
What pangs excruciating must molest,
What sorrows labour in my parent's breast?
Steel'd was that soul and by no misery mov'd
That from a father seiz'd his babe below'd:
Such, such my case. And can I then but pray
Others may never feel tyrannic sway?*
"To the Right Honourable William, Earl of Dartmouth"^{xiii}

The poem was written for William Legge, who in 1773, was the newly appointed secretary of state from England to the colonies^{xiv}. By her own admission, Phillis had parents, who would've been sorrowful at her disappearance. She does consider her fate cruel, and her circumstances as snatched from a happy seat, which appears in strange contrast to her most famous poem, "On

Being Brought from Africa to America”, where Phillis writes, “Twas mercy brought me from my Pagan land,/ Taught my benighted soul to understand/ That there's a God, that there's a Saviour too...” (1773).

Phillis is allowed to ponder the complexity of her situation, she is allowed to both miss her home and be content in her new one, but it's unsettling to know that the puzzle will never be complete, that history will forever be missing necessary pieces—both the end pieces and the middle pieces—and countless individuals are content with the holes, taking the picture for what it is: a half truth, an adjacent truth, a good enough truth. An example of this flawed thinking: because little of Phillis’s surviving poetry reflects on her childhood, her birthname, or her family, we assume it must not be important to her, or relevant to her evangelized adulthood—it either doesn’t occur to us, or we disregard it, filling the holes in the puzzle with the sludge of our own assumptions. It is as much possible that Phillis did write in detail about her childhood, or her life before Boston, but that work never made it past the publisher.

Phillis Wheatley’s poetic evolution is unique to say the least; her work, which considered her position in Boston with the protestant Wheatley family, as having been saved from her pagan land^{xv}, was not well received by other formerly enslaved poets like Frederick Douglass. Henry Louis Jr. Gates, in his 2003 essay from the *New Yorker* wrote that Phillis’s work proved too black for the white critics in the eighteenth century and too white for the black critics now^{xvi}.

Phillis’s work challenges the adjacent-truth slave narrative I learned; I assumed that she must have been brainwashed by the Wheatley family, by religion, by something that could explain her complacency of having been kidnapped and sold for an unknown amount of money to a family that owned her for twelve years. Because so little is known about Phillis’s life before she was kidnapped at age seven, it is entirely possible that her own community sold her into

slavery, or that her kidnapping saved her from deplorable conditions in West Africa, either by the hands of her own family, or by the hands of the colonizers who controlled the slave trade.

She was eventually freed by the Wheatley family in 1773, when she was twenty, but that was only after her first book of poetry was published in England; there was low interest in New England to publish a black poet's book, though the white protestant community loved her poems in newspapers and periodicals because it actualized and justified slavery of pagans in need of refinement. I also cannot help but wonder about Phillis's decline in publishing success once she was emancipated, when Susanna and John Wheatley no longer took her to England to pursue a publisher. It seems that Phillis was partly tokenized as a refined and evangelized slave and once she was a free woman, something changed in the way people received her work.

Phillis, after emancipation, married, and had children, though none of her children survived early childhood. Her husband, John Peters, a free black man, was imprisoned for debt in 1784^{xvii}, and Phillis, having no applicable trade skills besides writing the savviest verses, was left to fend for herself as a scullery maid—but she died that same year from complications in childbirth, and the infant died shortly after—Phillis was only thirty-one years old. Her legacy lives on evermore, as an abolitionist with a way with words, which is, in my opinion, the greatest weapon against injustice.

*'Twas mercy brought me from my Pagan land,
Taught my benighted soul to understand
That there's a God, that there's a Saviour too:
Once I redemption neither sought nor knew.
Some view our sable race with scornful eye,
"Their colour is a diabolic die."
Remember, Christians, Negros, black as Cain
May be refin'd, and join th' angelic train.*

Phillis Wheatley, "On Being Brought from Africa to America"

There is a bronze statue of Phillis in Boston, on the Commonwealth Avenue Mall, along with bronze statues of Abigail Adams—the second first lady—and Lucy Stone—fervent abolitionist, and suffragette, also the first Massachusetts woman to hold a college degree. The statues, built in 2003, are a monument on the Women’s Heritage Trail. The monument, designed by New York artist Meredith Bergmann, presents all three women interacting with their granite pedestals in different ways. Rather than standing on top of them, Abigail Adams is standing tall, arms crossed, leaning her back against it; Lucy Stone is sitting on hers, pen in hand, looking eye level, as though she is having a conversation with you; Phillis is sitting at hers like a desk, one hand cradling her chin, deep in thought, a direct call to her most famous portrait, the one printed in her first book from 1773^{xviii}.

Bergmann said, “I wanted to portray the women as having come down off their pedestals, making a feminist metaphor literal and concrete”^{xix}. Pictures of the monument show people sitting on the granite next to Phillis and Lucy, kids getting up in their faces, wrapping their little arms around the women’s necks, climbing like a playground—therein lies the power of public art, the ability for the people to interact with the work, to imagine themselves in the person’s bronze shoes, wrapped in the ripples of bronze fabric, leaning over Phillis’s desk with Phillis, thinking about what she’s thinking; though only statues, this seems like a practical rehearsal of empathy.

PAUL REVERE

The North End of Boston is also home to Paul Revere's house, where I visited as a kid and eventually as an adult. I have photos to commemorate these times—always standing in the same spot where I stood for a photo as a kid—right under the hanging wooden sign that reads “The Paul Revere House.”

The sign was installed in 1895 to keep the building from demolition, hoping to lure tourists to the property. This is something I know because I have toured his house many times and seen the tin cup on the kitchen table, staged as though someone was just there. But when I was young, I certainly imagined Paul Revere standing outside on a small ladder—because the house itself is quite small—hammering the sign in place. He waves to a neighbor. A horse and buggy trots past. He takes a deep breath and says to himself: *I'm Paul Revere and this is my house.*

Paul Revere was a transparent man, born and raised Bostonite, abolitionist, and working-class citizen whose trade was silversmithing; there is something so approachable about him. My kinship is with the house, too, because whenever I stand in front of it, I am ten years old in a Red Sox t-shirt and baseball cap, and my dad tells me to smile for a photo. Now my friends shower me in Paul Revere themed presents for every holiday—mugs, key chains, postcards—and I receive them all behind a well of tears; not only do I admire Paul Revere as a man, but his memory has become something of a bond between my Massachusetts friends and I—*that was Paul Revere and that was his house. It was his house when I was young, and it will still be his house when I'm gone.*

Before Paul Revere lived in that house, there was Increase Mather, whose reputation proceeds him as one of Boston's oldest assholes—a staunch Puritan, responsible for most of the anti-witch literature that made its merry way north of Boston about twenty miles to the seaport town of Salem, resulting in one of the greatest phenomenon's of all time, the Salem Witch Trials.

Increase also wrote an account of King Phillip's War, which is the term for the mass genocide of the Wompanoag, Nipmunc, Pocumtuck and Narragansett tribes in New England between 1675 and 1678^{xx}—only deemed a *war*, because the tribes fought back. King Phillip is the English-appointed name for Metacomet, or Pometacom, who was the chief of the Wompanoag, and son of Massasoit. It was Massasoit, with the help of my old friend from third grade, Squanto, who first initiated peace with the English settlers, saving them from starvation in the new world by teaching them to fish in their rivers, hunt in their woods, and tend the often-untenable rocky east coast landscape.

In his account, Increase Mather made clear his opinions on apostacy, or rejection of religion, inordinate pride of apparel and hair, drunkenness, and swearing^{xxi}. These sins, in the eyes of Mather and the puritans, caused god's disapproving wrath, resulting in a community infiltrated by witches, devastated by bad weather, and susceptible to brutal attacks from the Native Americans.

Mather did, however, make clear in his account, that the English *slaughtered*^{xxii} men, women, and children alike in their raids on Native villages. Unfortunately, Mather undermines any sense of reality with his claim that the Colonies were fighting a defensive, unprovoked war, against treacherous enemies^{xxiii}.

Increase Mather was a paradox in a wig, criticized by historians and rhetorical scholars for double-stepping^{xxiv}, contradicting himself in every other sentence. Witches exist, yes, according to his 1693 book, *Cases of Conscience Concerning Evil Spirits*, however, he viewed spectral evidence as illogical, improvable, and therefore inadmissible in court. Mather rejected testing accused witches with things like swimming, or reciting the lord's prayer, because he viewed this as superstitious^{xxv}; he did, however, believe that expression of sexuality, or sexual activity was evidence of witchcraft.

In 1687, King James II proclaimed his *Declaration for Liberty of Conscience*^{xxvi} which decidedly made England, Scotland, and subsequently New England, places of religious freedom. I am sure there were many people who took offense to this declaration, but none so mad as Increase Mather himself, who made haste to KJII to complain. I suspect he rehearsed his speech on the very long boat ride. He would, at all costs, continue to persecute freely.

In retrospect, it is all very strange, that the first colonists arrived to escape *religious persecution*—which is what we learned in history class, not that the Puritan pilgrims first landed in Holland, where they experienced freedom of religion, but decided to look for a place less occupied, less threatening to the longevity of their English identity^{xxvii}. It appears that the Puritans were not looking to escape religious persecution by the Church of England, but were looking for a place to persecute religiously, amongst each other and others, a feat they clearly accomplished in the new world by accusing and murdering each other under the guise of witchcraft and by evangelizing Native tribes by threat of death.

SQUANTO

In third grade we celebrated *Indian Day*, because early Massachusetts history appeared in our curriculum for a fleeting moment—we learned a strange series of lies: there were once *Indians* where we live now; the role of the *Indians* was to welcome the Europeans; the *Indians* acted as liaisons to the new world. We made vests out of brown paper bags and drew on them with crayons—pictures of things like cattle and horses and bows and arrows—back then I mistook *bow and arrow* for *bow-n-arrow*. In big croc-pots were vats of corn chili, and what people have come to know as New England clam chowder with its white cream base, but really it is the bastard child to clear broth chowder, which the tribes in the northeast would have authentically served and introduced to settlers—beans, potatoes, corn, and quahog clams^{xxviii}. I don't like the texture of clams, which is a fact I keep to myself in Massachusetts, the second-largest clam disrupter in the US,^{xxix} second only to Maine, which is four times bigger than Massachusetts and has four times as many clams; and yet Maine, according to the 2020 Census has only 100,000 residents, whereas Massachusetts has over 700,000.

There are two federally recognized tribes in Massachusetts, the Wampanoag Tribe of Gay Head (Aquinnah) and the Mashpee Wampanoag Tribes.^{xxx} Massachusetts state recognized are the Nipmuc tribes, who have over 600 members according to the Nipmuc Nation's website, along with a disclaimer that states,

To all Citizens of the Nipmuc Nation as well as any Individuals of Nipmuc descent,

Please be advised that Nipmuc Nation and Nipmuc Nation Tribal inc. have not been disbanded, dissolved, or changed our name. We are still the only legally acknowledged representatives of our Citizens and the Hassanamisco Reservation. We are committed to our sacred trust of protecting our democratic rights as citizens of the Nipmuc Nation. Currently, We are in the process of aggressively pursuing legal action against those who

are trying to undermine our democracy by spreading fraudulent claims. Please do not remove yourself from the NNTC role, especially since we are expanding. We will keep all our citizens informed as the situation evolves.

In Peace and Friendship, NNTC Council^{xxxii}

This information was easy to find and effectively disproves the claim that the Native Americans were once here. No adults questioned Indian Day; not the parents who volunteered to make the food, and not my third-grade teacher, who once said, in front of the entire class, that I was a *brat*. Despite *Indian Day* and the social studies unit of early Massachusetts history, my teacher must've forgot to mention that the Nipmuc reservation is located in Grafton, Massachusetts; the very town we lived in.

My family lived in Grafton for six years, my brother and I growing from second and fourth grade to seventh and ninth, attending tree lighting ceremonies each Christmas in the town center, going on fieldtrips to the *Willard Clock Museum* in Grafton, which is an old Victorian-style house where people made clocks. I hardly remember it because machines and mechanisms aren't really my thing, unless suspiciously ingenious like my grandpa and his spinning jars. The issue is clear and heartbreaking, the truth is not too complicated to explain, but that I was swindled and subsequently ignorant about the place I've considered a home for so long.

I recently unearthed a photo of myself and my dad from that afternoon. He volunteered often as a room parent, the only dad amongst the many moms. I am wearing the paper bag vest and a name tag with a clipart picture of a deer. My dad is wearing a Red Sox shirt and his nametag has a tipi and a hedgehog. Around my neck is the scarf I crocheted for weeks instead of going to recess—it was only about two or three inches wide and the length of one of my arms at the time. The other girls in my class made long elaborate scarves, often more than one. *This one is for my mom, this one is for my grandma, and this one is mine*, said Rachel Iafolla. My teacher

thought I ought to crochet more like red-haired, even-tempered Rachel; she tried to help me, tried to explain that I was using too many colors, switching to new yarn every few lines, but Rachel's scarves were boring, and everyone knew it. They lacked personality and pazazz, unlike my one measly scarf, which told a story with each color.

I am embarrassed by the photo—not because of the scarf—but because *Indian Day* was an appropriative sham and all the adults failed to realize, including, unfortunately, my father. No one was suspicious of the creamy clam chowder. No one bothered to initiate a relationship with a native historian, who perhaps could've regaled us with authentic characteristics of early northeastern Wampanoag livelihood and practices. Instead, we listened to anglicized versions of Native American fables from a cassette tape and boombox while we practiced our cursive handwriting—straight back, feet on the ground, pencil couldn't lift from the paper. I still can't, for the life of me, figure out how my feet, flat on the ground, influenced my handwriting.

We learned about a man from the Patuxet tribe of the Wampanoag, who lived off the coast of Cape Cod, on what is now Plymouth, Massachusetts. We knew him as *Squanto*, which was the English settler-decided version of his real name, Tisquantum, which I was shocked to uncover years later. We learned that he was a classy native man because he could speak both the language of the Wompanoag and the language of the settlers—because of him, because of his communication skills, the first Thanksgiving would happen. Applause. Clam Chowder.

We did not learn that in childhood, Tisquantum and twenty-three other Patuxet^{xxxii} were kidnapped by the English and sold into slavery in Spain; snatched right off the shore of the Cape Cod Bay^{xxxiii}, where my family beached every summer. After an unknown span of time, Tisquantum found himself to be a man returning home, gripped now, with a fluency in English

after escaping from Spain to England. Unknown to Tisquantum, his entire tribe, his whole family, had succumbed to what historians believe to be combination smallpox and tuberculosis^{xxxiv}.

Kids are too fragile to handle the reality of history, is what I've heard people say, which inherently breeds the avoidant adjacent stories as a good-enough-truth: Squanto lived here. Squanto was smart. Squanto taught the settlers how to plant corn. Squanto knew English so he was able to trade corn and talk about corn. It's because of Squanto that we have corn. I

In contrast, the entire elementary school would celebrate Colonial Day each year. There was even a local colonial costume vendor, who would wheel her racks of costumes into the cafeteria after school for the week before Colonial Day. My mom and countless others would spend upwards of one hundred dollars to rent their kid full colonial garb. I would wear a heavy cotton dress and petticoat, which made me feel like Elizabeth Swan in the first *Pirates of the Caribbean* movie, when she falls from a tower after the Commodore proposes, fainting like a feather right over the edge of the stone turret, plunging into the rocky water below. There was always a bonnet and an apron, which I would've stripped off by the middle of the day, letting my sweaty tangled hair swing wildly when we played cricket at recess.

We read from the famous New England Primer and practiced our cursive letters in chalk on black slate. We also made tin fixtures for candles and the candles themselves—for which, I always required supervision from an aide, because I could not be trusted to keep my fingers out of the hot wax pots.

In fourth grade, the school changed its allergy policy, which meant we could no longer have food or pets in the classroom. *Indian Day* never happened again, the same way we could no longer watch our baby chickens hack in the incubator, the same way I could no longer bring

peanut butter sandwiches to lunch, even if I sat far from the *peanut-free* table, and yet Colonial Day reared its fat head onward.

LIZZIE BORDEN

I'm not going to bother defending Lizzie Borden, it's obvious to me that she killed her father Andrew and her stepmother Abby; but what gave it away was her laughter at the scene of the crime. As the Fall River, Massachusetts police moved about her house, between the two dead bodies, it seems that Lizzie could not contain her excitement. Her laughter was not hysterical or uncontrollable; witnesses testified, at Lizzie's eventual trial, to her calm and collection, a woman perfectly in her wits, unable to hide a smile of satisfaction.

I know that people have different and strange reactions to things, like when my dad received a letter from the federal government explaining they've traced countless hours of pirated movie streaming to our house, which meant, to my brother's computer. My dad shouted, waving the letter around as Vinny giggled, tears welling up in his eyes.

Lizzie famously destroyed a dress by throwing it into her wood-burning stove and when Lizzie and her sister Emma—who history suggests was not an accomplice to Lizzie but stood by her regardless—insisted that they destroyed the dress because it was *old* and *dirty* claimed the women, *three months old*.

Lizzie was found not guilty for the murders of her father and step mother in a perfect storm of underexperienced police, in the year 1892, when evidence was limited, and the only suspect in question is was their thirty-two year old daughter with no priors, close ties to the community and no apparent motive.

I have my own theory, that Lizzie shares the same disease as me: PMDD (premenstrual dysphoric disorder), which can mimic even the worse symptoms of mania seen in people with

Bipolar I. Unless medicated properly, PMDD is serious and dangerous, as one serious symptom is anger. Lizzie was known in the public eye to be even tempered and pleasant in social settings, even teaching bible school to children on Sundays, except close friends and family reported her to be a bit neurotic and unpredictable sometimes—petty theft, pathological lying, and with a strange hidden rage.

It's also clear that Andrew Borden terrorized the women in the house, that he was emotionally abusive and destructive, once killing all of lizzie's pet birds that lived in the attic of their barn^{xxxv}. To the rest of the Fall River community, the Borden family was respectable and frugal; Mr. Borden, though cold, was a respectable and trustworthy businessman, and Lizzie and Emma were fed and clothed—though both unmarried, they were very social—they had friends and some influence in the community.

In reality, Lizzie had nothing of her own, no money, no means of leaving home, absolutely trapped. A cold and isolating home life, combined with severe mental illness, is my guess as to where it all went wrong.

Because Lizzie was acquitted, she was able to inherit her father's money, and the estate, which her and her sister Emma promptly sold and moved into a mansion with an indoor bathroom in the wealthy part of fall river. They named the mansion Maplecroft, which I love.

Based off of newspaper interviews and court testimony, it's easy to tell that Emma was suspicious of her sister but for whatever reason, perhaps sibling love and drive to protect outweighs all else.

There is also a possibility that Lizzie didn't kill her parents. According to reports, a neighbor supposedly saw a horse-drawn carriage dash away from the Borden house around the

time of the killings. It's also true that Andrew Borden was a man with enemies in the name of a long and storied business career. Perhaps there is something the police missed in Andrew Borden's history, and perhaps that one neighbor was credible, despite the others in the neighborhood denying that anyone had come or gone. Besides, the nature of the murder is the biggest clue, both Andrew and Abby Borden were killed by blows to the head with an axe. Andrew was struck eleven times and Abby was struck about twenty times. In the basement of the house the police found the suspected murder weapon, an axe head next to its broken handle.

The overkill suggests the obvious: intention and passion. The difference in the number of strikes between Andrew and Abby confirms what the people of Fall River claimed about Lizzie, she hated her stepmother, and she hated her father for loving her stepmother, but she hated her stepmother just a tad bit more.

When I toured the Borden house in 2019, the main selling point is that it's haunted, haunted by the spirits of Andrew and Abby and even haunted by the spirit of Lizzie, who some say is doomed to live with her parents forever. The house did not seem haunted to me, who was there just to grovel over old-timey places, staged as though they've just been lived in. I was frustrated that they've since put a bathroom in the house, because it's a bed and breakfast now, when it did not originally have indoor plumbing, which was a huge point of contention between Lizzie and her father, who despite his wealth, would not pay for a bathroom.

CALVIN COOLIDGE

In US History junior year of high school, I wrote my final report on the Great Molasses Flood of 1919, which claimed twenty-one Bostonians and injured over one hundred more. I got a ninety-five on my five-page report and my best friend Alexa got an eighty-three on her ten-page report on the life and times of Alexander Hamilton. It was clear to us that our teacher had not read our papers, just merely assigned a grade—perhaps out of a hat—and when it came time to take the big exam at the end of the year, I knew almost nothing and stared at the papers, flipping them, and flipping them, looking for a question I might have known the answer to.

The molasses flood of 1919 was caused by a lack of proper maintenance on the tank and unusually warm weather in winter; 2,300,000 gallons of hot molasses spilled out into Boston’s North End, creating a fifteen-foot wave at an initial speed of thirty-five miles per hour^{xxxvi}. Locals joke that you can still smell the molasses on a hot summer day as you walk down Commercial Street. There is a book that I skimmed for my history paper: *The Dark Tide* by Stephen Puleo, but finding it too thorough, I went back to Wikipedia for highlights.

Calvin Coolidge was elected to his second term as Governor of Massachusetts on January second of 1919. The molasses tank exploded on January 15, 1919. This means John Calvin Coolidge, a career politician, had a very sticky situation on his hands. There was not much he could do, though, because the aftermath of the molasses flood resulted in another flood of lawsuits, costing the city over 100 million dollars in current terms. In fact, his fellow politicians accused him of “effectively doing nothing”^{xxxvii} throughout his presidency. He did, however, love

to speak publicly; he held press conferences weekly, wishing to hold a presence in every American household—which is why I find it odd that I cannot find evidence of an address to the people of Boston post-molasses flood.

Coolidge Corner in Brookline is where I first saw the *Blair Witch Project* with some college friends in an old timey movie theater. It's where I got my nose pierced, where I went thrifting, where I purchased my schoolbooks from a second-hand bookstore. Back then I didn't know who Calvin Coolidge was, perhaps a famous movie producer or an important businessman.

Coolidge, during his presidency in 1924, famously barred all of Asia from entering the United States—including Japan—in a gross attempt to preserve the homogeneity^{xxxviii} of the American identity. According to historians, this was the harshest most stringent immigration policy yet; blatantly racist, with no tangible benefits and unprecedented downsides. The Immigration Act of 1924 was one of the many catalysts of the Great Depression of the 1930s—the post-WWI American culture was suddenly draped in desire to *keep to themselves*. Coolidge's denial to participate in the league of nations affected trade and relations with every country.

The effects of a harmful presidential administration, especially in an economic sense, are often not seen or felt until after a successor takes office. In this case, it was Hoover who came after Coolidge, and was more or less useless in pulling the country from the depression, which would last a decade, not including the economic aftermath and psychological toll that would breathe on the necks of generations to come.

MARIA STEWART

Alexa and I took a tour of the Museum of African American History. Everything about the museum was shocking to us, starting with the building itself, which is only a stone's throw from Suffolk University, where Alexa went to school for four full years, and she'd never once heard of the museum, or the black heritage trail. Our tour guide was a white man named Tobias, who admitted openly to the crowd of us who were there for the tour, that he was a white man. After the tour, Tobias took Alexa and I around the nearby alleyways which served as routes on the underground railroad. *Oh wow*, we said, feeling strange about the streets we'd stomped up and down for years, shouting *Hamilton* lyrics and sipping our iced coffees.

By 1780 Massachusetts was inching towards abolition, Tobias told us, but at that point, it'd been hundreds of years of slave trade, and genocide against the indigenous tribes of the Northeast, so Alexa, Tobias and I quietly refused to celebrate a too-late doctrine—especially since we know that Boston is historically racist and violent, especially South Boston, where the beaches were still segregated in the 1970s.

It wasn't until 1836 that written law said any slave brought to Massachusetts was effectively free, which meant *slavers* and *slave hunters* who were paid to track down escaped slaves in the North and drag them back to the south were shit out of a luck.

The south was upset by this and the nation began to tear. In 1850, as a last-stitch effort to keep the south from mutiny, Congress passed the Fugitive Slave Law, which required Northerners to help in the capture and return of slaves fleeing the south, despite whatever progress Massachusetts was making. The years between the first rumblings of abolition and

official abolition started with lawsuits by free blacks against the Commonwealth of Massachusetts, for having been wrongfully captured and sold into slavery.

Maria Stewart is the famous feminist suffragist abolitionist that neither Alexa or I knew—originally born in Hartford, CT, which is the area where both my parents were born and raised. In adulthood she landed in the free black community of Beacon Hill in Boston; this is where the museum of African American history is located, along with the heritage trail. The small bustling community of black Americans was resilience in action. The neighborhood is home to the first black meeting house and church in the country, as well as the first public school for black children, who had been historically barred from reading and writing.

Maria Stewart was forced into indentured servitude at the age of five but despite her circumstances, she taught herself to read and write from scripture. She arrived in Boston from Connecticut with her husband who died only a few years after their marriage but still she powered on, like women do, and the racism she experienced in Boston led her to write the first-ever political manifesto written by a black woman^{xxxix}.

She is technically the first woman of any color, to speak publicly in the United States, to a crowd of both men and women, reading her own manifesto.¹ She was an inspiration to Sojourner Truth and even Frederick Douglass—who had both passed through my hometown of Milford, Massachusetts in the 1800s— and to abolitionists and feminists everywhere.

¹ An excerpt from Stewart's speech in Boston, 1832, "methinks there are no chains so galling as the chains of ignorance—no fetters so binding as those that bind the soul, and exclude it from the vast field of useful and scientific knowledge. O, had I received the advantages of early education, my ideas would, ere now, have expanded far and wide; but, alas! I possess nothing but moral capability—no teachings but the teachings of the Holy spirit." <https://www.blackpast.org/african-american-history/1832-maria-w-stewart-why-sit-ye-here-and-die/>

And yet there I was, at the museum, staring at her words etched in granite outside of the meeting house, wondering why I'd never heard her name, feeling heavy-headed with my dissatisfaction and shame of not knowing.

POMP'S WALL

It wasn't until I arrived at Minute Man National Historical Park in Concord that I understood there were two separate battles—contrary to popular belief, the battles of Lexington and Concord were not just one large battle on one large field that stretched over town line, but a slew of messy guerilla warfare, appertaining to rebels. My friends and I stood for a photo at the bridge where British troops were ambushed by an angry band of American Minute Men from the towns of Lexington and Concord. Many of the Minute Men—who are called minute men for being able to take up arms at a minute's notice—were veterans of the French and Indian war^{xl}.

When the British retreated from the North Bridge, the Minute Men were hiding in the woods, shooting from a distance, and throwing rocks. On our way out of the park, a man in a neon vest, dressed as a park ranger approached us, asking to serenade us with a ballad. He claimed he knew the most famous ballads from every language, and we need just pick a language and he'd sing it for us. *Mandarin*, I said, because it is the most complex language I could think of. *Mandarin*, he repeated, before taking a deep breath and delivering a low-toned ballad. He was an amazing singer, but we all agreed, as we walked away in confusion, that it didn't sound like mandarin at all.

In West Medford, where Alexa lives, in a haunted apartment building built in 1893, there is a clawfoot bathtub. The apartment itself is on a downward slope with age. The first time I visited, I was chopping veggies at the kitchen counter when an overwhelming sense of dizziness and celestial presence consumed me—my vision blurred and the hair on my arms rose and I

looked around for the thirty-five year old man whose spirit I sensed. I politely asked him to leave and lit a candle in the living room in lieu of sage—anything can be anything. I never felt him again. The hard wood floors in the apartment are shiny and old and beautiful, dawning a dewy finish that reminds me nothing of the original hard wood floors in the upstairs church of the African American meeting house—the floorboards clearly have integrity, don't get me wrong, but are so weathered with time that I thought I might fall through.

Up the street from Alexa is the house where Amelia Earhart lived before taking off for her big flight from the airport in Quincy, Mass. We secretly speculate that she was somehow killed, not in a plane crash, but for being a woman—like, perhaps she landed somewhere or made it to her transcontinental destination, but she was killed by her copilot and the plane was destroyed and sold for parts to a scrap metal enthusiast. It's just hard to imagine that any remnants of her were never found.

After Amelia Earhart's house, we walked to the Brooks Estate, which is an old Victorian mansion originally built in 1660 but donated by the Brooks family to the city of Medford in the 1940s—it was used, then, for veteran housing and eventually a nursing home until everyone realized that it was a priceless historical building; I guess they kicked the old people out, because the estate has been managed by resident caretakers since the 70s^{xli}, yet wasn't officially protected under conservation restrictions until 1998, almost 350 years after it was built.

The website for the estate keeps suspiciously brief, listing *fun facts* like “Native Americas camped here in the summer while fishing in the Mystic River” and “Brooks Pond required moving 76,000 wagonloads of muck over a six-year period in the 1880's” (Medford-Brooks Estate Land Trust, Inc.). This is a delusional way of saying that the Pawtucket natives would visit their stolen ancestral land every summer to stock their dwindling resources.

Walking from the estate back to Alexa’s apartment, we happened upon an old brick wall about one hundred feet in length and four feet tall—I showed my dad a picture and forced him to estimate the length and width; he could have told me any series of numbers and I would’ve believed him. The plaque next to the wall reads *Slave Wall* and was built in 1765 by an enslaved man named called *Pomp*, who was taken from Africa and brought to Massachusetts—I tried to find information on his name, whether it was his given name, or a Phillis Wheatley situation, but found no information—the plaque was only placed in 2006, just a measly plaque, which of course mentions the thing that Massachusetts holds very dear and remains very prideful of, “In 1783, Massachusetts became the first state to abolish slavery.”

If there’s one thing I know about American history, it’s that we painfully attempt to shout the good things over the bad. The plaque forgets to mention, under gaslit fog, that Medford was also one of the first major hubs of the transatlantic slave trade, second only to Boston and Cambridge, which was a big deal for the little farm town of Medford, which took advantage of legalized slavery in 1641^{xlii}.

The full transcription of the plaque mentions Pomp’s name only once, and despite being such a skilled craftsman that the brick wall he built on his own has survived almost two hundred and fifty years, the wall is still called *The Slave Wall*. Alexa and I decidedly refer to it as Pomp’s Wall, because he fucking built it. I ran my hands over the brick, admiring the craftsmanship, and all the years of New England weather it survived. At the bottom of the plaque, right above where it says, “MEDFORD HISTORICAL SOCIETY”, an embossed block of text reads, “DEDICATED MAY 27, 2006 BY JAY B. GRIFFIN, PRESIDENT.”

COPP'S HILL

Alexa and I unsuccessfully scoured the harbor walk in the north end for the Molasses Flood Monument, which according to Google Maps, should've been easy to find if the area weren't under construction. I even returned alone, the following day, when Alexa was working, to see if I could locate it with fresh eyes. The *monument* was really just a measly plaque, but it was on my list of historical sites to see before I left for Colorado, and I desperately wanted to cross it off. I never found it.

A stone's throw from where the molasses flood monument should've been, is Copp's Hill Cemetery, where the oldest graves are from 1660. The Mather family tomb is there, along with a plaque about the fire and brimstone nature of their puritan preaching.

I'd be lying if I said I wasn't fighting an urge to spit on the grave of the men who I blame for the witch panic in New England, but instead I cleaned it mercilessly, taking great care to wipe dirt from the lettering as I did for every grave I visited. Because the tomb is raised like a tabletop, I ripped a page from my journal and pumped some graphite out of the mechanical pencil I stole from Alexa's apartment and rubbed until the words on the tomb appeared on the page.

It wasn't that I wanted a keep sake of the Mather tomb, but more so that I wanted a keep sake from Copp's Hill, and most of the other graves are simply too old to be touched by anything other than wind and snow. Paul Revere is buried in the Granary cemetery, which is next to the Boston Common and behind the Boston athenaeum. His actual head stone is measly, roughly the size of a Pomeranian with a full blow out; there's only enough surface area on the grave for it to

say: *Revere's Tomb*. Since his death, a monument has been added right next to the original grave where people still leave fresh flowers and shiny pennies—which is a cool representation of aspects of America that he may he wanted.

It is estimated that there are approximately one thousand black and brown bodies buried at Copp's Hill sans grave markings. Only the most influential free blacks were given head stones—Prince Hall, Sarah Ritchie, Abel Barbados, and Thankful Lutwych are named on the Copp's Hill Map. I waded through the grassy overgrowth to Abel's grave, where I used my bare hands to wipe the dirt from the letters of his name. I found the grave, not by his name, but by the map—A-2 is his plot, because the A quadrant is where the black people are buried, where the grass is especially unmanicured—I noticed, I noticed. Abel and his family were prominent free blacks living in the beacon hill neighborhood and part of the black freemasons in Boston, founded by Prince Hall.

Hall was born enslaved but freed after the Boston Massacre—I don't know why, exactly, because there is already very little known about his life, despite him being a very truly amazing man, and what is known about his life is accrued information from accounts of white folks—he was listed as a free black man of Massachusetts in military records from the revolutionary war^{xliii}.

All these people, though, except for Prince Hall, have regular head stones, and some I could not even locate, which is partially why I spent an hour and a half at the hill, searching in a frenzy and looking over my shoulder at the front gate, waiting to be kicked out by security that never arrived because I stayed until after hours. There are also no available records or accounts of Thankful Lutwych, there is no account of a Lutwych family at all.

The summation—or thesis, if ye will— of Cotton Mather’s 1706 essay published in Boston, “The Negro Christianized” goes like this:

The State of your Negroes in this World, must be low, and mean, and abject; a State of Servitude. No Great Things in this World, can be done for them. Something then, let there be done, towards their welfare in the World to Come.

And in case those notions are not clear enough, Mather provides a metaphor:

...you may justly imagine them crying to you, in terms like those of the Child whom a Lion was running away withal; Help ! Help ! I am yet alive! O Souls deaf to the cry of Souls, Pity, Pity the Souls of your Negroes, which cry unto you, Have pity on us, O our Masters, have pity on us, whom the holy God, has justly delivered over into a woful Slavery to the Powers of Darkneß :And, Oh ! do something, that the light of Salvation by the glorious Lord JESUS CHRIST may arrive unto us.

In the scenario laid out, the slavers are the lions, and faith in Jesus Christ is the only thing capable of freeing slaves from the lions’ jaws. I know that some people will think Mather’s doctrine is progressive for the time, that he is preaching for *salvation* of *negroes* in the best way he can for his time period, but that’s a bunch of hog wash. Not only is the Christianization of black and native slaves objectively forced assimilation and subsequent erasure, but there’s always been abolitionists. The quakers have been around since the sixteenth century, and aggressively opposed slavery before any other religion in the new world. Not only that, but there were entire communities of people throughout the world who opposed slavery from its very beginning: those enslaved. What more do we need? How much longer will we chalk things up to time, as though, in the grand scheme, we are not neighbors to the sixteenth century?

In 1780, when Massachusetts passed its state constitution, one very brave woman, who had lived some thirty to forty years as a born slave, attended a reading of the doctrine. Elizabeth Freeman, known as *Bett* before fighting for and winning her freedom, sought out the help of an abolitionist lawyer and sued her slaver under the Massachusetts pretense of *all men having been*

born equal. One major issue, though, according to her lawyer Theodore Sedgwick, was that the law clearly states *all men* are equal—Sedgwick didn't want Elizabeth's case to be thrown out simply because she was a woman—so they sought out a manly man called Brom, also enslaved, from the estate where Elizabeth and her daughter were enslaved, and they won the case. Because of Elizabeth's courage and intelligence and poise and bravery, she lived the rest of her life as a free woman with a paying job—she began a massive wave of lawsuits from enslaved blacks against their owners—and three years later Massachusetts did the thing; slavery was abolished, yes, but there would be so much more to figure out. This isn't a case of white saviorism, it doesn't impress me that Mr. Sedgwick was a man of common sense, it's a matter of one woman's pursuit for freedom despite a world against her. Elizabeth famously said,

“Any time while I was a slave, if one minute's freedom had been offered to me, and I had been told that I must die at the end of that minute, I would have taken it—just to stand one minute on God's earth a free woman—I would.”^{xliv}

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- ⁱ <http://www.americantable.org/2011/10/apples-in-america/>
- ⁱⁱ <https://www.osv.org/building/parsonage/>
- ⁱⁱⁱ <https://www.osv.org/building/salem-towne-house/>
- ^{iv} <https://www.grant.kyschools.us/Downloads/Salem%20Map%20Article.pdf>
- ^v <https://www.osv.org/building/salem-towne-house/>
- ^{vi} <https://www.nationalgeographic.org/thistday/dec18/slavery-abolished/#:~:text=On%20December%2018%2C%201865%2C%20the,people%2C%20from%20Kentucky%20to%20Delaware.>
- ^{vii} <http://people.ucls.uchicago.edu/~snekros/New%20World%20Times/History%20and%20Misc/History%20and%20Misc.html>
- ^{viii} http://people.ucls.uchicago.edu/~snekros/The%20Colonial%20Column%202015/Lifestyle/Entries/2015/11/11_1.html
- ^{ix} <https://www.newyorker.com/magazine/2003/01/20/phillis-wheatley-on-trial>
- ^x “
- ^{xi} Doak, Robin S. *Phillis Wheatley: Slave and Poet*, Minneapolis: Compass Point Books, 2007.
- ^{xii} <https://zsr.wfu.edu/2013/poems-on-various-subjects-religious-and-moral-by-phillis-wheatley-1773/>
- ^{xiii} <https://www.poetryfoundation.org/poems/47706/to-the-right-honorable-william-earl-of-dartmouth>
- ^{xiv} <https://commons.marymount.edu/williamearlofdartmouth/close-reading/>
- ^{xv} <https://www.poetryfoundation.org/poems/45465/on-being-brought-from-africa-to-america>
- ^{xvi} <https://www.newyorker.com/magazine/2003/01/20/phillis-wheatley-on-trial>
- ^{xvii} Page, ed. (2007). "Phillis Wheatley". *Encyclopedia of African American Women Writers*, Volume 1. p. 611.
- ^{xviii} <https://www.amrevmuseum.org/collection/phillis-wheatley-s-poetry>
- ^{xix} <http://bostonlitdistrict.org/venue/boston-womans-memorial/>
- ^{xx} <https://connecticuthistory.org/americas-most-devastating-conflict-king-philips-war/>
- ^{xxi} <https://digitalcommons.unl.edu/libraryscience/31/>
- ^{xxii} <https://digitalcommons.unl.edu/libraryscience/31/>
- ^{xxiii} “
- ^{xxiv} http://salem.lib.virginia.edu/people/i_mather.html
- ^{xxv} <https://famous-trials.com/salem/2048-asa-inc>
- ^{xxvi} <https://web.archive.org/web/20040227140532/http://www.jacobite.ca/documents/16870404.htm>
- ^{xxvii} https://www.washingtonpost.com/opinions/five-myths-about-the-pilgrims/2013/11/22/9f93e822-52c1-11e3-9e2c-e1d01116fd98_story.html
- ^{xxviii} <https://indiancountrytoday.com/archive/they-stole-our-soup-the-native-origins-of-new-england-clam-chowder>
- ^{xxix} <https://www.fisheries.noaa.gov/feature-story/new-england-mid-atlantic-states-lead-nation-volume-and-value-several-key-fisheries>
- ^{xxx} <https://www.brooklinema.gov/DocumentCenter/View/20453/IP-Tribe-Information->
- ^{xxxi} <https://www.nipmucnation.org/>
- ^{xxxii} <http://mayflowerhistory.com/tisquantum>
- ^{xxxiii} <https://nativephilanthropy.candid.org/events/tisquantum-squanto-a-patuxet-indian-is-kidnapped-and-enslaved/>

xxxvi <https://usso.uk/1919-the-boston-molasses-flood-and-the-year-of-violence-and-disillusion/>

xxxviii "The Immigration Act of 1924 (The Johnson-Reed Act)". U.S Department of State Office of the Historian. Retrieved February 13, 2012.

xxxix <https://www.nps.gov/people/maria-w-stewart.htm>

xl <https://www.pbs.org/wgbh/americanexperience/features/patriotsday-minute-men/>

xli <http://www.brooksestate.org/history.php>

xlii <http://www.brooksestate.org/pdfs/BrooksFamilyMedfordHeritageTrailShortVersion.pdf>

xliii <https://www.pbs.org/wgbh/aia/part2/2p37.html>

xliv Douglas R. Egerton, ed., *Death or Liberty: African Americans in Revolutionary America* (Oxford University Press: 2009), p. 171