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American Cuerpos

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by

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Abstract

On election night 2008, a child is conceived by two Barack Obama campaign staffers—Daniel from Seattle, Anza from Honduras. *American Cuerpos* is a novel about the body and the body politic, about what it means to give birth through the eyes of both mother and father.

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Chapter One

We are alone, together. My baby suckles a rubber nipple. I look down at his cheeks, listen to tiny gasps as he draws liquid from the bottle. Does he think I'm his mother? Does he wonder why she isn't here? Does he blame me for the chalky formula, for damming a river of breast milk? The plane climbs. Cruising altitude brings the stewardess and her beverage cart. She lists a dozen drinks. Beer is free on international flights. Coffee is fresh-brewed, pictures of the Space Needle on the cups. I shake my head and say, "No gracias," which earns a roll of her made-up Honduran eyes. Her wheel catches a burp cloth and she tosses it onto my diaper bag.

As my baby empties the bottle, I feel myself play the role of father. I once was an actor, delivering speeches by famous playwrights, mostly men. I played Sir Oliver Cromwell, Hamlet, Joe Dimaggio. A play isn't simply performed—it's mounted, as they say—so on opening night actors feel like they're going into labor themselves.

Don't look for my name in lights. A ski accident ended my acting career at nineteen—skier versus tree, and the tree won. During silent hospital days, wires wove through my mandible. Food through a tube. I made a slow climb to confident speech. Though mine wasn't some grand disfigurement, a scar slopes from ear to chin. It's enough to make me self-conscious and alarm the baby. The stewardess tries not to gawk. Everyone gawks.

My more lasting injuries were internal. A tree limb punctured my small intestine. The doctor's ultrasound found liquid floating free—pancreatic juice, bile, chyme, and

blood. Not the cocktail you'd order from a beverage cart. My abdomen looks like I've had a Cesarean. Unlike me, the baby is perfect, a blank map, an odometer set to zero. He gurgles when he snores, dreaming of the womb. Those days before diaper rash. We drift between clouds and clearings, the baby through sleep and wake. My gaze strays out the oval window.

Seattle. Sea Town. City of Sea Men. City of Mariners. City of Locks. City of Lakes. City of Timber. City of Chief Sealth. Chief Seattle. City of Amnesia. City of White. City of Latinos. City of Black. City of Coffee. City of Low Pressure. City of High Pressure. City of Flights. Jet City. City of Birth.

When we reach the Cascades, the plane noses into clouds. I close the shade. Maybe I should tell my baby a story. And I realize I have only one to tell. The story of his mother and me, which is to say the story of my baby himself. Of how his heart pumps young blood through a young wrinkled body. Of father's long nose and mother's topsoil eyes, her wing of hair, blacker than inside suitcases. Anza's voice is stronger. If she were telling this story, the child wouldn't be distracted, wouldn't grab the air with his fists. Alas. I hope we'll return together: father, son, and mother. In Spanish, to hope also means to wait. I'm not much of a storyteller, nor a convincing actor.

We are seats 31C and 31D on a Taca Air flight. We will fly east before turning south, spanned by one seatbelt. The stewardess pulls her curtain shut. The rest of the plane goes dark but a circle of light illuminates us. We are aromatic from spit and sweat, formula and hand sanitizer. We are alone, together.

Chapter Two

I remember the car radio slipping between stations as I drove to pick her up. Arm out the window, I adjusted my antenna. Someone interviewed a mayoral candidate. Seattle's political body is sick, the candidate said. It needed to get well. His words plunged into static and rattled around my station wagon. The political body. In Anza's mother tongue, El cuerpo político.

She waited at the gas station curb. Rain sheeted onto the toes of work boots. Anza wore jeans and a hooded sweatshirt, dressed for manual labor, for lifting or digging. I assumed she lived nearby—a South Seattle neighborhood where apartment buildings crowded each other for a better view of the highway.

"That's a nice sticker," she said through the rolled-down window, noticing a red 'O' on my bumper.

I opened her door. "With what they pay us, fringe benefits matter. Do you ever take home any free coffee? It's Central American."

Anza shook her head.

"Me either," I said, steering us toward the highway. "Decaf is all I can stomach."

"Decaf is not coffee," she said, and looked down at her phone.

Back at the campaign office I often watched Anza—her hours at the phones, following the call script. She wore navy skirts just above her saucer-like patellas. Earth-toned sweaters. Her work attire matched her subdued efficiency. Occasionally, though,

she got another Latino on the phone, trilling her r's and settling into a twangy Honduran accent. I would put my calls on hold and fruitlessly attempt to translate, taking in her voice.

Today was different. Today her torn gray hood supported a ponytail that reminded me of my mother's paintbrushes. Air vented through the window and finer hairs wisped behind her ears in the animated way you'd expect eyebrows to behave.

"Thanks for the ride," Anza said, as we began to climb toward the mountains.

"No hay problema," I said. My Spanish came out falsetto and kind of womanly. "I don't mind waiting after my event—you sure you don't need a ride?"

She slapped a Greyhound ticket onto the dashboard. The gesture reminded me of travelers showing passports to customs officers. "I am still sure," she said. "This is the last weekend for the apple harvest and I will stay for the whole thing."

I shrugged, repositioned my hands on the wheel, and gazed at the November morning. Trees lining the highway transitioned from evergreen to subalpine, snow resting on their boughs. The grade flattened and the stump-filled waters of Keechelus Lake reflected purple gray light. Rainclouds dried out. We were only two miles from the family cabin. I might have told Anza about how my grandfather timbered the timber himself, about the fireplace's river rocks and limestone. Or how the surrounding hemlock trees make better floorboards than jousting partners.

"So what will you do when the election's over?" I asked. The radio seesawed between two stations and my words sat unanswered on the dash next to her bus ticket.

"My visa expires after the election," she said. "So I'll go back to Honduras."

I swallowed my disappointment, which tasted like dandelion, and thumbed through a mental encyclopedia. Honduras. Dictatorship or no dictatorship? Did they have beaches? Were they close to the Panama Canal? Did bananas grow there? I found purchase only with the capital city, its name retained from Spanish class: Tegucigalpa. "Tay-Goo-See-Gaul-Paw," I said. "Does your family live there?"

"My father does," she said. "He has a radio show. Mostly I grew up beneath the cordillera. White people visit for tours of coffee factories."

Yeah, I thought, she probably sees me as one of those assholes. Backpack, digital camera, money belt, Hawaiian shirt. People might assume my scars were from some thief's machete. Not that Anza fit my impression of a Central American villager. Not with her political science degree from the University of Washington, our shared alma matter. Supported by a diversity scholarship, she'd graduated just five months back. The over-opinionated and over-caffeinated white girls from our office speculated that Anza had been "hooked up" and "probably given a free ride." Mostly I hated these girls, because they reminded me of myself. But my own equally reductive point-of-view still told me that Anza must have viewed the United States through earnest, appreciative eyes. These were eyes I now recklessly watched: irises the color of topsoil. Long lashes that curled. A redness near the lower lid which made me wonder if she had allergies.

My tires hit the rumble strip and I pulled back into the lane, shrugging shoulders like a kid caught at the cookie jar.

Anza straightened her posture in response to the swerve. "How about you?" she said. "What will Daniel Rose do after the election?"

"Maybe I'll volunteer with the VA," I said. "My friend is a medic in the army. He says veterans always come home messed up."

"Then they shouldn't go to war," she said.

Anza opened a *Seattle Times* newspaper. She held it with both hands against the open window's shuttering breeze. Her bus ticket floated from the dash and fell to her feet. She read intently, head swiveled line to line like a typewriter carriage—not that I'd ever used a typewriter. Anza rotated a pen between ponytail and hand, underlining passages which especially struck her. She whispered to herself, in such a quiet alto I couldn't tell if she spoke English or Spanish. Since there was still no decent radio, I asked if she'd read a little louder. She apologized, said no, and dove back into the paper.

What if she read about her chauffeur? Sure, a profile of a man who no longer digested alcohol, caffeine, spicy food. A man whose jaw ached at night, molars ground to stumps. A man who quit acting to study kinesiology. A man who wanted to know how bodies worked since his no longer did—but whose EMT work never took him far. Would this be worth the ink?

While Anza flattened her sweatshirt under the seatbelt, my anatomical vocabulary flared up. Protrudent ribs formed her thoracic cage, the xiphoid process centered like an apple core. Spurred hipbones, the anterior superior iliac crests, knuckled against her belt

loops. The bones of her face—mandible, maxillae, zygomatic—had sharp, unerodable angles. Hers was the tremendous skeleton of a tremendous functional body.

My passenger turned the page toward the politics section. I saw color-coded diagrams, pie charts, number and figures, poll numbers and predictions, reds and blues and purples. The body politic was newer to me; I'd only been involved a few months.

I shifted from fifth to neutral. The Yakima Valley spread before us like a pop-up book. Canyons slit yellow hills, stamped by agricultural plots. Wheat fields. Vineyards. The red and green pimples of apple orchards, their sicksweet smells. Though I considered myself fully Seattle, eastern Washington filled blank spaces on the map.

We pulled off the highway. Anza directed me down a frontage road paralleling tree farms, manicured rows of birch trunks. While the sky had mostly cleared, clouds shaded portions of the washboard road. Anza now read the sports section and her pen brushed quicker across the newsprint.

"You're watching me again," she said.

"I'm sorry," I said. "I didn't know you liked sports."

Anza smiled and said, "Deportes are my heart. If I had nothing else to do, I'd watch baseball all day long."

Something inside me ached, a red slow burn. I told her I played high school baseball; she didn't turn from the paper.

"Do you think the Mariners will get hitters?" she said. "They need more offense."

"I wish I knew you liked baseball in September. My father's a cameraman for the Mariners, he can always get free tickets."

Now she turned. She licked dry lips and frowned at my empty offer. "And I would have worn my Ichiro jersey," she said. "You must go to lots of games."

"Not many," I said. "I can count last season on one hand."

She crinkled an eyebrow. "I would have gone to every game."

"Eighty home games? Buena suerte. Anyway, I don't like taking things from my father. Since they got divorced last spring, it's become a thing."

"There are worse things than too many baseball tickets."

"I shouldn't complain."

Anza scrutinized me. "So are your scars from a sports accident?"

"I don't think skiing counts as a sport unless you race."

"Maybe a gringo sport, but it's not for Hondurans."

Anza's attention made me self-conscious and I ran a thumb along my jaw, paralleling my scars' atrophic groove. I said, "What's with all the underlining? Is there a test later or something?"

"Yes, a test," she said. "I need to get an A."

"No, I'm serious. Para que es estas lineas?"

"Please," she said, "your accent is mierda."

"It's the best Garfield High School could teach me."

"I'm reading the newspaper later."

"You're reading it now."

"Now I read, later I read en voz alta. You know what it means?"

"With a high voice?"

"Not so bad," she said. "But voz alta means I will read out loud."

"I already asked you for that. You turned me down."

Anza looked toward a tree farm, rows of smoky gray bark. "You're not paying me," she said.

"That's true," I said. "I could though."

"Yes, I'm sure."

"I mean you didn't ask. Just like I didn't ask you for gas money."

"So that's why you wanted to give a ride back. Daniel, I will pay you."

"Keep your money."

"Turn in there," she said.

We crested a hill and I caught the silhouette of a double-wide trailer. A vestibule covered tables where men and women played cards. Along the chainlinked perimeter a sign read: *Day Worker Center/Centro de Jornaleros*. I slid to a stop near the open gate. Latino card players turned our way, folding hands and readjusting ballcaps.

"If you're looking for another job," I said, "you've got some competition. There must be a dozen guys here."

"Until the manzanas are gone, there's plenty of work for everyone. And with extra money in their pockets, they pay to hear newspaper stories while they work."

Anza quickly lifted her backpack and got out. She stood bending her knees until they clicked, looking around as if she didn't know the white guy in the station wagon. "Thanks for the ride," she said. "Be seeing you."

"Nos vemos," I said back, but she'd already crossed through the gate.

Workers absorbed Anza in a noisy greeting. They dressed in similar costumes, boots and jeans, and even from the parking lot I felt overdressed. A man said something about El Jefe. Another said something about El Gringo. As I turned the car around, card players pointed to their work-ready bodies and in accented English yelled "strong arms" or "strong back." The day worker center diminished in my rearview and the frontage road became the familiar thing, its washboard and potholes, its light muted by tree farms.

Anza's aloof confidence reverberated as I drove toward the VFW hall. Her smooth transitions between English and Spanish. Her smoother transition from station wagon to the company of farm laborers. Anza was as comfortable in office attire as work gear. In my home state, she was the one at home.

I made it halfway to town before noticing something on her floor mat. It was the Greyhound ticket. Wrinkled and waterlogged, I brought it to the light. Actually, it was a voucher. Good for any one-way ride. I placed it on the passenger seat as a stand-in for Anza. How much do Greyhound seats cost anyway? Twenty bucks? Thirty? It had been years since I'd taken the bus, since my high school bussed me in to provide white diversity. One part of me felt ready to just give my speech and race the sun west to Seattle. Another felt obliged to return this item to my disinterested Dulcinea. And I

would play the role of Don Quixote with a station wagon—an opportunity for chivalry, which I'd heard wasn't dead. Plus my office reimbursed mileage.

When I returned to the day worker center, a man was padlocking the fence. He had a huge mole on his stout nose. I asked him in Spanish if he knew where Anza was. In English, he told me yes, at the Seneca apple factory. "Sabes donde esta?" I said in shaky Spanish. We parried a moment longer between languages until I gave up and copied down his English directions. "Say 'hola' to her for me," the man said. "We love having Anzana here."

Row upon row of older model Chevrolets and Fords filled the factory parking lot. An enormous Red Delicious emblazoned a wall. Fucking apples. Sugar oxidizing into rust. Mealy flesh and cork meat between teeth. Plastic skin. Applesauce was the only food I could eat after my accident—through a tube, through mother's spoon, mixed with grape juice or milk. Weeks of nothing other than applesauce. My state's iconic crop, and I couldn't stomach them.

Nose tucked into shirt, I pushed open the double doors. Conveyor belts on either side sent green and pink spheres into waiting workers' hands. They separated bruised ones into barrels I assumed were for applesauce. They washed the rest in huge water basins. Dull apple skins glowed bright when workers shot wax from hoses. The wax gave off a car wash smell that couldn't hide the sicksweet. Conveyor diesel. Water. Wood. Body odor. Apples came from trees. That's all I wanted to know about them. Now I was inside the belly of the beasts.

I walked upstream from the work line as if seeking the source of the apples. Galas and Pink Ladies for the refrigeration tanks. Red Delicious and Granny Smiths and Fujis wheeled toward waiting truck beds. Latino workers pretended not to notice me but they noticed me—even while moving at speeds I could barely fathom, my hands would've gotten caught in the machinery, blood tattooing apples en route to Seattle.

But my most pressing concern wasn't apples or the workers washing and separating them. It was Anza's voice, I heard it. It beat on my ear drums. One word after another arrived with the constancy of the streaming fruit. Her unmistakable Spanish accent I knew from campaign calls. Her precise syllables rose and fell hard, the trilled Spanish 'r' over the factory's mechanical sounds.

I moved toward the source of her voice. A staircase came into view with Anza at the top. She stood against the railing. In one hand she held a megaphone and in the other a newspaper, reading to workers below. My coworker was turned in profile, pages held open like a moth's wings. Even from this distance I knew it was the same *Seattle Times*. The story was something about a bridge. La Puente. Something about money/dinero, and fifty employees/empleados. I couldn't tell if they'd been hired or fired, if the bridge was being built or demolished. Nonetheless, Anza delivered this bridge story with animation and poise. I shambled toward the base of the stairs where she spotted me. "Dame un momentito," she announced to the factory.

"Sigue," I said. "Continue reading about the puente."

The conveyor sounds regained their prominence. Workers turned toward me, saying "Oye gringo" and "Que pasa, Scarface." The paused reading distracted them; fruit

piled up. My face turned into a Red Delicious and I gazed stupidly up at Anza. From my perspective she loomed large, a gigantress. Her musculature seemed profane, quadriceps and hamstrings contoured by denim. I started to climb the first step, her Greyhound voucher held as a peace offering.

"What are you doing? Don't come up here." She tromped down and met me on the wood floor. We faced each other, carrying the factory's super-attention, piles of unsorted apples growing, rotting.

"Your billete," I summoned the word for ticket since I hadn't a prayer for *voucher*. "You left it in my car."

"I know where I left it." Her swollen cheeks further swelled. Sweat painted her throat. "You need it to get back to Seattle," I said.

"I can buy another."

"Now you won't have to," I said. "And I wish I had a Mariners tickets for you."

"You don't like going," she said, lips rising to a smile. "Keep it, Daniel. Your tip for being my chauffeur."

The factory's vital signs were paused. They wouldn't go back to work until Anza read and she wouldn't read until I left. I could think of nothing else to say. Nothing to explain away the disruption. So I stuffed the voucher into my wallet and stumbled backward.

"Nos vemos," she said, or at least that's how I remember it.

And I said, "Be seeing you."

I retraced my steps along the factory floor and shoved open the doors. The freshest air known to man greeted me. I drove double-time and pictured Anza climbing that staircase, projecting her voice through the megaphone like an Upton Sinclair union leader, like Eva Peron, like a girl I hadn't begun to understand.

The VFW hall tucked behind a shopping mall, anchored by a sporting goods store and two buffet restaurants. Made from aged cedar planks and red brick, the building predated the mall, and was perhaps resentful of its blocked afternoon sun. Then again, the shades were drawn. A sepia fifties-feel glazed everything inside: plastic-covered pool tables, burbling coffee pots, minifridges of Rolling Rock and Bud Light behind the bar. A few men swiveled on stools and sipped long neck beers, while others played spiritless shuffleboard. None looked recently arrived nor did they look drunk, just part of the décor. They took no notice of me.

In front of the assembly room a chalkboard hung from chains and two eyehooks. *Candidate Forum. Free Coffee Served.* I checked in with a man, wick-thin, whose beard couldn't hide severe acne scars. "You're too young to be a veteran," he said. "And don't give me any of this ROTC nonsense."

I wasn't too young, I told him, and added how my best friend had recently returned from Afghanistan. A snake tattoo with a brigade number hissed from the side of his neck. I explained that I was with the Obama campaign and demonstrated my box of sundries—pins, stickers, fliers—as though the event sign didn't hang behind his chair.

“Candidate forum,” I said, pointing. “Free coffee.” Reluctantly, he passed me a nametag. Veins overran his hands like blackberry canes.

I plastered the nametag across my chest, crookedly parallel to the shirt’s yellow pinstripes. The assembly room held uneven rows of folding chairs and felt like a high school gymnasium minus the students. Two long tables and a podium occupied the stage. I wended through the space, facing furniture and stained-glass windows that might’ve been plastic. The heady scent of Sharpie lingered like bad cologne. No matter how many speeches I’d given, I still felt tight of chest and thin of breath. Go a couple months without speaking and you’ll know what I mean. Since my head was elsewhere, I double-checked my talking points. They were composed on a notecard that had been creased and folded so many times its inky quadrants were ready to separate.

Attendees ambled toward their seats. They wore Wrangler jeans and wool shirts. Work boots. Belt buckles. Ballcaps. Sideburns. Jackets with fleece collars. A regular eastern Washington fashion show. Each carried a beer or a coffee like they were ticket stubs. I don’t mean to describe these men in generalities, and yes they were all men, and all white, but that’s how I saw them. Within two seconds I knew them and they knew me right back. Leather shoes. Pinstriped shirt. My long delicate nose that contrasted a Frankenstein jawline. City kid. A nervous-looking feller.

The check-in guy told me the Republicans would speak first, then the Democrats. I asked where my opponent was. He nodded toward the back of the room. A man in a cowboy hat instructed two others in seersucker shirts where to slide a cooler. The

Republican contingent showed up in a flurry of Howyadoings, glad-handing the vets with ease. The man joined me onstage, his hat looking like a prop.

"I'm Peter Bennett," he said. "I represent the county business bureau. I'm also running for third district commissioner."

Bennett cracked chalky mints while he spoke. Red stripes on his cowboy boots matched his hat. He struck me as the type who gained agrarian credibility by mentioning an uncle's dude ranch. Then the man clapped me hard on the left scapula, forcing me to drop my notecard. I left it there like an old receipt.

"May the best man win," he said. Then, as though the best man were naturally he who spoke after the proverb, Bennett started in. He pulled hands together in prayer, or to keep a butterfly from escaping. Given all their beers and coffee, the audience listened with surprising decorum.

"Good afternoon. I'm here today to represent our local business community and the Republican Party. I represent farms, meatpacking plants, wineries, grocery chains. This county is a beautiful place. A real family community. It's been varnished and tarnished by outside sources, goods we used to make here in Yakima County are now manufactured overseas—in India, Brazil, Mexico. Over there, they have no respect for our way of life. Then we've got folks who come here looking to take our jobs. They come illegally. They don't pay taxes. They jam up the hospitals. Many don't speak English. They're not Americans like you and I. Then we wonder why unemployment is high. Our jobs have been picked like the fruit we grow. And we need to get the fruit back. American fruit. The Republican Party is about bringing the fruit back, real jobs to real Americans. And I will make sure of this."

Bennett finished by zeroing in not on his own policies as commissioner but on up-ticket candidates—John McCain for president and the Republican candidate for governor. Something about state's rights. Something about small government. Tax cuts. Free markets. Mr. Bennett finished his opening salvo with a God Bless America. The audience clapped and rang bottles against chair legs.

The hot buzz of feedback greeted me at the microphone. I tucked shirt wrinkles beneath my belt. Sun dipped behind the mall and warmed the stained-glass panels, spears of dusty light cutting diagonals between the stage and the audience. Men murmured; some went for drinks. I was trying to speak in a vacuum. A room of white guys and I had no suction. They'd all fought somewhere and now saw anyone browner than a piece of paper as the enemy. Thinking about Anza, and the Seneca factory, and the card-playing Latinos, I said fuck-it and went off-script.

"My name is Daniel Rose. Born and raised in Washington State, and for another week I work for Barack Obama. Now I know some of you don't have jobs; I can see that by the shuffleboard and drinking during work hours. And I heard Mr. Bennett speaking about jobs shipped overseas, immigrants taking jobs away. These are good points. I join you in applauding him for that, and for his hat matching his snappy boots. But if you think Republican candidates will do anything to improve your situation, you've had one too many Rolling Rock. I just want you to remember that the current Republican president lost jobs for this country. He's driven wages down to the bottom of the well—big industrial farms don't produce middle class jobs. They produce pickers, gatherers, threshers, nameless labor. These are my opponent's companies. And he wants you mad at the day worker center down the road? At Pablo and Miguel picking apples you wouldn't pick for five pesos a barrel? They aren't rotten apples themselves. These workers are the harvest, the real American fruit."

I'll spare you the rest. My soapboxy offensive lost the crowd. Not that I had them in the first place. The Republican entourage led a chorus of "boos" and "that's bullshit" that sent me back from the podium. While getting booed by men in seersucker is usually a compliment, somehow this defeat stung—an unconvinced chorus.

Peter Bennett clapped for me and cracked mints with increased vigor. "That was a nice speech," he said. "A real nice speech."

"Thanks," I said. "Those are nice boots. They're very clean."

He squinted at me as though my face drifted in and out of focus, his eyes a dark brand of blue—night-sky just before the stars. We shook hands, his strong one encircling

my narrow carpals and metacarpals, their surrounding joint withered from months of typing and driving. This exchange extended into a protracted grip-test, and with a flimsy snap of the wrist I pulled free. Bennett pointed to the cooler he'd brought and said, "Don't forget to sample some local goods on your way out. Courtesy of Pablo and Miguel." He cracked another mint and joined his friends.

Onto the beverage table I slid a few Obama stickers and then sank my forearm in the icy cooler. Five types of apples bobbed like driftwood, cuts of vacuum-sealed meat and tiny wine bottles. The cold eased the ache of my wrist and I grabbed a Gala.

I tried filling a styrofoam cup with decaf but the urn only sputtered. Bearded and acne-scarred chin jutting forward, the check-in guy said, "You're dripping."

"Thanks for your help," I said, slow to realize he meant the apple not the coffee. I mumbled a half-hearted apology and exited stage left.

In the parking lot a shiny Ford truck glared at me, black with bright rims and tinted glass. Vanity plates said *Bnnett*. The apple dripped its final drops near my feet. I checked over my sore shoulder and made sure I was alone. No one was exiting the VFW hall, nobody watching from the sporting goods store. No one needed to see this. For a moment I would be the ballplayer my father had wanted. I weighed the apple in my hand, about baseball heavy, and flung it against the truck's windshield. The core exploded. Seeds shrapneled. Meat slid across glass in a tight arc that came to rest on the wiper blades. Applesauce. This is how professional political campaigns are run.

The highway climbed back toward Snoqualmie Pass and Seattle. My race with the sun lost, stars dropped into the sky like flamboyant stage props. I looked for Orion, or at least his cinturón. Night indifferently absorbed me.

Chapter Three

For years I worked as an EMT in the Seattle airport. And like all travelers, I watched other people. Only I wasn't traveling anywhere—paid to sit and observe, keep my anatomy books handy, be prepared for patient exams. I read magazines and saw too much CNN. My world was glossy pages, the glass of televisions and windows. On occasional clear days I glimpsed the mountains with bitter reverence. Yet for a good while I enjoyed my job—driving around in a golf cart, a gurney in the back that inclined to scoop up injured parties. With my mug of decaf rattling around, I careened down hallways surrounded by the organs of travel.

It wasn't long after 9/11 when they hired me. I overheard families asking why they couldn't greet the planes anymore. "We're not terrorists," they said, "we live in Montlake." As the years went by, terror alerts flashed green, blue, orange, yellow, red in some shitty rainbow. It never actually rose up to red but I knew it was there: "Severe Risk of Terrorist Attacks."

I watched TSA agents pat new body parts. Random searches were far from random; a turban or hijab equaled automatic feel-ups. Speakers of foreign-languages stayed silent. If travelers held anything besides navy blue USA passports, an invasive delay was guaranteed. Flights were missed, families separated, stress levels skyrocketed. Days blurred and colors ran.

You can't stay neutral on a moving golf cart. Homeland Security breathed down my boss's collar and I started asking patients for travel documents before examining

them. I remember asking a wheezing asthmatic which country he was from; he told me Venezuela, and I had to ask about Hugo Chavez before giving Albuterol. The connection to terrorism was frayed at best. My boss said travelers could weaponize their bodies, spread infectious diseases to America from our airport. I was the first line of defense, they said. But no pay raise. No extra benefits. Just a golf cart and new protocols. I didn't even get a sheriff's star.

Every week shackled teams of men and women marched. They marched toward a Homeland Security flight. Deported to wherever. And they waved at me, like I could unchain them with the power vested in my blood pressure cuff. Their illegal blood flowed. Their illegal foreign lungs breathed American air. Welcome to the United States. E Plurbus Unum. Vayate. See ya. So who got those air miles?

Airport employees weren't safe either. I sat in my cart and watched Homeland Security deport a short order cook from Eritrea. Then there was Andres, a watch salesman, who marched in chains with an athletic stride. I sat in my place, did my job.

On a rainy Thursday, the airport dispatcher called me about a pregnant woman whose water had broken. The dispatcher didn't tell me this woman was shackled for deportation. I took her into the privacy of an empty flight gate. Her jeans were deep blue from liquid. I asked if her contractions had started. She smiled and said they hadn't. I asked if she'd had ectopic pregnancies or C-sections. She took my hands with unbelievable strength. "Please, can you help me?" she said in a Mexican accent. "The water is from my bottle."

"What do you mean?" I asked, fighting off her grip.

With eyes like tractor beams, she said it again: "Please, can you help me?"

And I couldn't. Homeland Security joined us. They picked her up by the wrists and led her away. I watched them throw away the water bottle.

"Muchas no gracias," the woman called back.

I stayed in that empty gate a long time. An airplane taxied past and lifted into the sky. A 6:05 flight to Reno. The afterimage of this woman's face wouldn't blink away. News buzzed on the television. A young senator from Illinois addressed a crowd. He didn't look like other politicians. Obama looked different, like someone who might be led through the airport in shackles. And he spoke with wisdom, empathy—better medicine than I had. America could do better, Obama said. And I knew he was right; I could do better, too. So one last time I careened my golf cart under the blue-yellow glow of the arrival and departure signs. I turned in my ID and said adios.

A few months later, it was election day. For campaign staff the morning started early. Though I wasn't first to the office, I arrived with enough time for a quiet interlude. The letter 'O' decorated the space with stickers and posters to convince you that all other vowels had been discarded. Someone drew eyes inside two O's on a whiteboard—Barack Obama's paternalistic gaze. The candidate commanded: Get to work, one last time, you've brought me from long shot to sure shot, now bring my vowel home to the Oval Office, I don't care if you're American or Honduran, man-woman-or-child, just finish what we started.

I'd never had a dog in the fight before. Never cared about elections. I hoped Obama would set the clock back to 2001. Eight years erased. Shackles unshackled. The U.S. was like the *Pugilist at Rest* statue, only all pugilist and no rest.

My last campaign job was to assign canvass teams. I used a spreadsheet color-coded by neighborhood. Seattle. City of gerrymandering. Our office sat at the south end of Lake Union tucked under the highway's elevated shoulder. The edge of downtown was southwest of us and to the east was Capitol Hill; it crested and revealed Madison Valley, Lake Washington, and the east-side suburbs of Bellevue and Redmond. We hoped to canvass neighborhoods in every direction with insistent door knocks. Chartered shuttle buses would bring voters from apartment buildings and retirement homes.

The districting maps taped to the walls looked like circulatory systems, Republican red and Democrat blue, blood changing color from oxygen-rich to oxygen-poor. I assigned myself a foot route up toward my old neighborhood, then circling back for phone-banking and lunch. Anza had been assigned to come with me. Call it the hand of god. I printed the routes and tacked them to a bulletin board near the coffee machine, waiting for my Honduran to enter.

With casual flair Anza strode in and checked her day's assignment. She wore her usual black leggings and matching black skirt, a few inches below the knee. Her sweater was pumpkin-colored with gray buttons. She set down a thready backpack and fired her computer up. I couldn't translate her body language any better than her Spanish, not for lack of trying. Twice I spilled grounds while pretending to make coffee.

Other campaign staffers entered the office wearing the uniform of the day: Obama t-shirts and fleece coats. Canvassers got into their teams—walking, bussing, or carpooling away. Phone-bankers sank into headsets and donated cordless phones that ran out of juice every couple hours. Anza switched footwear from heels to sneakers, laces stained brown. Casually as I could muster, I asked if she was ready.

"Yes," she said, precisely, unaffected. "Ready to go."

I followed her into the haze of maritime fog. We ascended a steep incline from downtown, across the highway bridge, up along Capitol Hill's concrete drainage. My body felt enfeebled from hours spent sitting—in my car, in desk chairs, at meetings. Anza moved quick along the sidewalk as though gravity somehow missed her.

"We'll take a left at Twelfth Avenue," I said, out-of-breath and pointing to our route. "Walk that to the end, then back on Thirteenth."

"I understand," she said. "I know how to read."

"So you made it back from Yakima?"

"This one is Twelfth," she said, pointing to a street sign whose green cut through fog like an airplane hitting the runway.

"Listen," I said, "sorry for interrupting you at the factory. I thought you'd want your ticket."

"No te preocupes," she said. "You know that phrase?"

"Doesn't it mean, don't worry about it?"

"Yes. So don't worry about it. You can get us Mariners tickets sometime."

"They don't have many games in Honduras."

"Who knows?" she said, and gave me a punch in the shoulder. "I'm just sick of being called white-washed in Yakima, and the Honduran girl at the campaign office."

"I've never thought of you as the Honduran girl. Aren't you from South Seattle?"

Anza peeked down at the map and said, "You should never play poker."

We had work to do. We each took a side of the street—knocking on the doors of family homes, apartment buildings, brand-new lofts. We asked residents whether they'd voted. A few needed directions to the poll site, held in my old elementary school.

Anza and I passed Volunteer Park, its water tower and wet pine smells, and I caught sight of my house. My family owned one side of a converted mansion. Two floors and a basement, a stone entryway and two carved lions flecked with pigeon-shit. I stood by my mailbox and shouted to Anza: "Maybe we can do this one together."

"I'll get this house," Anza called from across the street, bending to retie her shoes. A tear in her legging showed off some nice kneecap—afloat in its fluid casement, connected by ligaments to the femur and tibula-fibula bones.

"Come on," I said. "La casa de mi familia."

She demurred. The front door was ajar. I called to my mother. No response. I hadn't been there in a while, opting for the sterile effects of my father's new condo.

Anza laughed and asked: "So is this neighborhood considered a ghetto?"

"Listen, cars are broken into every so often. And the lions came with the place."

Sand and rocks filled dozens of Mason jars in the living room. Piles of maps made unstable stacks. A hand-drawn one from the 1920s rested against an easel. It was a

map of Puget Sound which the window overlooked. Strips from a cartoonish tourist map of Seattle were pasted across this older one.

"Someone ruined that map," Anza said.

"That's my mother's artwork," I said.

My canvassing partner looked confused. How was that considered art? What were we doing in this musty living room on election day? Two good questions. No longer sequestered to her garage studio, my mother had converted the entire house into her creative space. I listened for sounds of movement upstairs and heard none. I peeked out at the front yard's unkempt whiskers of grass. Dead tomatoes hung from trellises.

"Tea or coffee?" I asked. "Sandy Rose collects them from dozens of countries."

"Any from Honduras?"

One bag was labeled Comayagua Café. I boiled water, dropped grounds, plunged the French press down into burbling brown and sat across from Anza.

"Is your country known for its beans?" I asked.

"You tell me," she said, arms held behind her like they weren't there. "Isn't Seattle the city of coffee?"

"To be honest," I said, "I don't know a thing about it."

"Why be honest?" Anza dropped a spoonful of milk into her mug. Explosion of white, a flattening star pattern. Osmosis, equilibrium, me with black nerves.

I said, "Once I wrote a play about Honduras."

"De verdad?" she said with a sarcastic pinch of Spanish.

"Well, about a Honduran girl anyway. She moves to America. She's beautiful and secretive—everyone thinks she works only in an office, but on weekends she reads newspapers to factory workers."

Anza tongued a drop from her cupid's bow. It trailed brown across pink lips. "Aren't you going to have some?"

I shook my head and drank plain warm water.

"So what's the name of your protagonista?" Anza asked.

"It's been years" I said. "Now I've forgotten everything besides Obama and how to make slings for broken arms."

"So does she go back to Honduras?"

"I'm not sure I ever finished it," I said, self-consciousness setting in.

"There's nothing in Honduras," she said. "For me, just a dead mother. She worked in a coffee factory. My father read there—I learned to be a lectora from him. Today he's just a voice on the radio."

The water eddied through my intestines and warmed my throat. "I remember how the play ends. Because she loves baseball, she stays in Seattle, and the Mariners win the World Series."

"The Mariners have never been to the World Series," Anza said. "And American visas are rare for Hondurans. So the protagonista would need a very good job."

"The president makes her an ambassador—half the year in America, half in Honduras."

"And would she be cut in half too?" she asked. "A saw through her spine?"

"Maybe you've seen my play," I said. "That's the final scene."

"We should go." Anza stood and wiped her lips; coffee disappeared. "Save the celebrations until there's something to celebrate."

I spun around the room making eye contact with a portrait on the mantle—young Daniel Rose, smiling and well-coifed. He holds high an unblemished chin, alabaster skin. Alas. I slung a voting leaflet over the doorknob.

That night I struggled with a champagne cork. Outside the campaign office, I was illuminated by the Space Needle's teacolored glow. My dog had won the fight. My good for the world was done. Goodbye Bush, hello Obama. Goodbye campaign, hello unemployment. Now I just had to drink up and wait for the medicine to take. For the world to change. My wrists ached, impish pain radiating. Holding the bottle between my knees I bent over and yarded on the cork, hand mittened in a peacoat pocket. I felt tempted to break the bottle open by shattering navy champagne glass against brick. They'd slated the building for demolition anyway. To the victors go the condos.

"I didn't know you drank," said Anza. The abrupt arrival of her voice kicked the champagne from my hands and it rolled along the ground. She bent to retrieve the bottle, balanced on her floating kneecap.

"It's shaken up, carbonated," I said, adopting my best casual posture.

"Probably," she said, "but isn't that the point of champagne?" With Sword-and-the-Stone ease, she pulled the cork. The discharge filamented onto the ground, brown

decomposing leaf pulp textured by hiking boot treads. I offered two plastic cups from a back pocket and told her have one or two.

"Most men warm up with one or two," Anza said.

"I'm different from most men," I said, meaning my stomach couldn't synthesize. A thimble of booze and the real cocktail was served—bile and pancreatic juice in the small intestine.

Coworkers emptied onto the sidewalk. They gathered suit coats and fleeces, threw back drinks. The night's destination: the Hilton on Sixth Avenue, the official victory party. They'd even booked a room in my name—a *nice-job-and-tomorrow-you're-fired* bonus. The mob took off jogging in a loose pack. Perfume and cologne wafted. Arms and legs flailed, cell phones held out. Denim. Khaki. Gore-Tex. Pinstripes. Instead of joining them, I stayed put. By filling my pockets with stiff-cold hands and not participating, I tried to seem more individual. That way Anza could wonder about me.

Instead, Anza trotted toward the others in spiked heels. This left me alone with the Space Needle, whose lights shifted to red, white, and blue. I saw Anza leading the pack with effortless strides—scything scapula powering a long curved body. So I followed her, or tried my best to stay close. My stomach somersaulted. My vision narrowed: Anza was a baseball player on the basepaths. A runner caught in a pickle. Ninety feet ahead on the diamond. Crossing intersections without slowing, she expanded her lead and turned up the juice—outdistancing any further baseball analogies. Blocks separated us. Catching her was as likely as John McCain raising both arms overhead.

The warmth of the lobby greeted me, as did the conveyor motion of escalators, the floating trays of champagne. Plastic flutes of carbonated wine cost only a smile and a commiserative we're-all-Democrats-tonight nod to the waiters. Though I'd succumbed to the mob's antics, and partly because of this, I was glad to slide anonymously into the hotel, rather than as part of my coworkers' clattery entrance. The main room had a stage and a garish podium, folding chairs, balloons, televisions playing CNN, boulder-sized speakers, American flags, and the smug smell of victory. When your party loses you make excuses; when you win it's a divine mandate.

Anza sat in the back, rubbing her feet. The bottoms of her leggings had shredded. The run exhausted me, but her Achilles heels bled the color of a Red Delicious.

"Is this the first time you've seen sangre?" she said.

"It's my first time seeing your sangre. If you'd like I could grab a paper towel."

Anza folded her arms and looked back at me like, well-then-stop-talking-and-go-get-it. So I did. Which wasn't particularly easy, given the confluence of other folks I knew there—besides campaign workers, a sundry of high school and college acquaintances. I skipped my fair share of hellos and canyoubelieveits to be back at Anza's side in a couple minutes flat.

Her toes curled and uncurled on the carpet. Working my way north I assessed her skirted and sweatered body as an unlikely compliment of sinew and soft woman-parts. By the time we'd stopped the bleeding and cleaned up her feet, our field hospital was flanked by mountains of coats thrown across the chairs.

"So that's how you examine your patients?" she said. "What if I had another injury I hadn't told you about?"

"I'd ask you to squeeze my fingers to compare bilateral strength. Then I'd check your radial pulse." Anza squeezed my fingers and let me touch her wrist. "After counting fifteen seconds on my watch I'd multiply your pulse and get a heart rate of 74 beats per minute, strong and regular. Then I'd start with your head. I would push right here and here and ask if you feel any pain. No? I press on the ribs and ask you to take deep breaths. Point to your bellybutton please. Then I palpate the quadrants where your organs swim and press your hipbone to make sure nothing's broken. Is there a reason to examine your genitals—any suspicion of an injury? I'm supposed to ask that."

Anza hesitated a moment and shook her head no.

"Something like that," I said, a bit embarrassed as coworkers observed our pairing-off. "Minus the abrasions, you're in perfect health."

"I was hoping I would have SARS," she said.

"Why would you want SARS?"

"Because then they wouldn't let me fly home." Using a thumb, she chased a mascara clump from her eyelashes.

"Couldn't you just stay in Seattle?"

Anza shook her head and looked toward the rafters, bags of balloons waiting to be released. She didn't think I understood the complexities of visas—correct.

My cell phone vibrated. A text message: *Hey Daniel, congrats on getting that pacifist liberal elected. Hope you're ready to fight off the commies.* My high school friend, discharged from Kandahar. I'd agreed to fly to Texas and drive back with him.

"Is that your girlfriend?" Anza said.

"There's no girlfriend," I laughed. "Paul was in the army in Afghanistan."

I held a pantomimed rifle toward her while she cocked her almond head in acknowledgement. I meant to make eye contact to read her response about the girlfriend thing; instead, I pivoted toward the front of the room.

Washington's re-elected governor took the stage—a mid-forties blonde woman with a frosted Hillary Clinton hairdo. She made a brief and spirited acceptance speech before yielding to a projection television screen. The President-elect and his wife, Michelle, at their own garish podium in Chicago's Grant Park. They raised interlocked hands while flags stood soldierly behind them. His speech began and the crowd in Seattle hoisted drinks, hugged, kissed, and high-fived; the room's collective voice rose as loud as liberals have mustered since Civil Rights marches. I remembered Barack's visit to our office after a speech at the basketball arena. His head swiveled at an incredible pace, the hands always moving while he spoke. Celluloid made flesh. Our work embodied. I'd tried to make eye contact with the man but in a haze of camera flashes and book signatures he was gone. Flesh made celluloid. His speech began.

"If there is anyone out there who still doubts that America is a place where all things are possible, who still wonders if the dream of our founders is alive in our time, who still questions the power of our democracy, tonight is your answer. It's the answer spoken by young and old, rich and poor, Democrat and Republican, black, white, Hispanic, Asian, Native American, Americans who sent a message to the world. We are, and always will be, the United States of America.

"Tonight because of what we did in this election, change has come to America. To the best campaign team ever assembled, this is your victory. And I know you didn't do this just to win an election. And I know you didn't do it for me. The challenges that tomorrow will bring are the greatest of our lifetime - two wars, a planet in peril, the worst financial crisis in a century. Brave Americans in the deserts of Iraq and the mountains of Afghanistan risk their lives for us.

"This victory alone is not the change we seek. It is only the chance to make change. We rise or fall as one nation, as one people. To those watching tonight from beyond our shores, from parliaments and palaces, to those huddled around radios in the forgotten corners of the world, our stories are singular, but our destiny is shared, and a new dawn of American leadership is at hand.

"America, we have come so far. We have seen so much. But there is so much more to do. This is our chance to answer that call. This is our moment. Out of many, we are one. While we breathe, we hope. Thank you. God bless you. And may God bless the United States of America."

On the television screen, the first couple danced across a spotlit wooden floor. Everyone around us watched, their own hips starting to sway and tears starting to flow. He was us. We were him. A tipsy body politic.

Anza sat with sudden textbook posture and spoke through a narrow parting of lips. "Do you think anything is going to change?"

The question slowed my celebration. "Wait until January," I said. "He'll start to end the drug war, knock down border fences."

"I'm glad we won, but I also enjoyed running here. What good did that do?" Anza pointed at her feet with the emphasis of a high heel spike. "And I can't run from my visa. They'll take more than blood. You're looking at a ghost."

Anza remained still. Maybe someone had switched her for a wax figurine. Her straight, dark hair pulled defiantly from a hair-tie. More than ever she seemed a visitor from a place unlike Seattle, where politics weren't an idle pursuit. Where coffee was made not drank. I didn't know. I knew only the sharp bones of her face, how they

pressed against skin wanting to escape. Her cheekbones were the tops of question marks unwinding toward pinched mouth corners.

"I'm sorry," I said.

"I don't mean to stop the music for you."

"Maybe we should have a dance," I said, presenting an open palm which shook in a please-take-it kind of way.

"Take off your shoes," she said. "It isn't real dancing if you wear shoes."

I kicked my leather footwear to the floor, socks stuffed inside like tissue paper. Anza took my fingers into her fingers. The Obamas waltzed on the screen while we revolved around the hall like carnival teacups. My free hand cupped the curvature of her lumbar spine, her free hand on my shoulder. A lively seriousness imbued the twenty-feet-tall waltzing Obamas, a gap between filial and eros love bridged, between Harvard educations and slavery, between party politics and moral sensibility; the room danced so intently we must've been convinced that if you mimicked the Obamas' steps you'd glean a little of this through osmosis. At the same time, the President-elect also seemed childlike, as though he were asking us: "you made me, now what will you do with me?"

I timed my breath to Anza's, matched our respiratory rates, life in each breath.

"Your country is still at war," Anza said, squeezing my shoulder as if ensuring my attention. "Your friend fought in Afghanistan."

I pulled her toward me. "Paul didn't fight. He was a medic, like I used to be."

"The United States will always be at war. It's in your blood."

"Things will change under Obama. He'll end the wars, fix immigration."

Anza started to laugh. "Where did you read that, Daniel? Maybe in a fairy tale."

"He can't ignore his supporters. Not after all the books we've bought."

"I've known the United States since I was a girl," she said. "American soldiers at the base in Tegucigalpa—they think Honduran girls are fruit to be picked."

Sheepishly I straightened my Banana Republic jeans. "It's hard turning a steamship around. We're starting tonight." I was reading some memorized script, rhetorical aftershocks from the campaign.

"You have my vote," Anza said. "Not that I'm allowed to vote. But maybe you could make me your ambassador."

The song ended. Couples separated and looked for drinks. A newscaster began to recap the magic of the evening, latest results in Washington races. We had won most, although I saw that Peter Bennett captured Yakima's county commissioner seat.

"Anza," I said, sitting next to her. "We're different. But we both ended up working on this campaign. That means something."

"To me, this job meant a visa extension. Now I go back to the U.S.S. Honduras."

I touched her arm above the elbow. "If you're leaving for Tegucigalpa, spend tonight with me."

Anza looked at the people, the posters, the balloons, the televisions, her eyes wide as if a blink would erase it all. She said, "Daniel, you're drunk on the election."

"Come and see the skyline from my room."

Again Anza laughed, and ran her hand over mine in a steady groove. "My mother warned about men like you. Men who come to the factory and expect you to go home with them. My father was one. He had a foot broken in the Army, not a scar like yours."

"I'm not like your father," I said, my lips so close I smelled earwax.

I refused to separate our bodies. Why she said yes I'll never know. Our hands interlocked like the Obamas as we strode into the foyer. Partygoers spoke all at once. Some swayed drunkenly, others yawned from long days of phone-banking, canvassing, pastry eating, coffee drinking, cheering, and emoting beyond reason. A table with a blue-and-white tablecloth held a tray of gift bags. I grabbed one by the twisted rope handle.

The elevator dinged open and we stepped inside. A woman's digital voice announced the floors from one to ten. In contrast to the noise of the lobby, the hallway was quiet. Carpet prickled my bare feet like grassblades. The keycard inserted and turned the LED from red to green. Lights behind glass seashells illuminated green walls over the bed. Watercolor ferries headed for the San Juan Islands.

This room was a palace. I placed the gift bag on the sill—a mantle of black marble jutting from the window. The bag had a disposable camera, another bottle of champagne, an Obama button. Anza went to the bathroom and I texted Paul back.

You wouldn't believe what I'm doing, I wrote.

Voting Republican next time? he wrote immediately back.

Falling in love. For the night anyway.

Do it for your country, son. Just don't bail on driving up with me from Austin.

Anza had washed the makeup from her face by the time she reentered. Her skin looked blanched and stripped of ornamentation. Wet hairs lathed into the letter *S* at either of her temples. Her leggings were balled up and held in hand. If nothing else but to slow my desire, I reached for the champagne bottle. This one had a plastic cork. I took a sugary swig and felt a minor stomach eruption—paisleys swimming through my vision.

With the measured effortlessness of a ballerina Anza cut the distance between us. She gripped the bottle and our hands brushed; with caliper fingers I ventured up the bones of her arm, sheaths of muscle over the humerus bone, the spur of her collarbone. For her part, Anza swigged and pressed the rimmed bottle along my spine.

"What do you want for me to do?" she said, using her megaphone voice, too loud for our proximity. "Is there a special way you imagine Hondurans would kiss?"

"Whichever way you kiss, I'd love to find out." I replaced the bottle on the sill and we fell back. Without protest her hips moved toward mine. Her breath was a sauna.

"Make me kiss you," she said with authority. "Pull my lips into yours."

I did so—my fingers threading hairs behind her scalp and finding purchase there. My tongue flicked while hers stayed motionless. The concavity inside her cheek was slick and filmy. She tasted of burnt salt. I pulled her back and forth to simulate actual two-way kissing.

"What's wrong?" I said. "Don't you like kissing me?"

"Does it matter?" she asked. "You are thinking only of what it leads to."

My hand pondered this by exploring her tapered thigh. "I could be talked into it."

"No."

"Or we don't have to. We can go back to the party." I remembered pieces of a script, one that men use at times like these. "We can just talk if you'd prefer."

"No," she said again. "No talking. Just pushing. Empujame. You push me onto the bed and hold my arms and legs. You sit on top of me like bricks. Tell me to forget your face. Tell me you have no name."

Her own face reddened. And then she pushed me square in the chest.

"Come on," I said, stepping back and grabbing the champagne again. "Let's relax, maybe throw the television on."

She said, "You don't want to see me naked? You think I'm fea, ugly."

"I'm the ugly one. I'd love to see you naked."

"Then take my clothes off. I will stand here and close my eyes. If I'm desnuda when I open them it was you who did this."

Anza's eyelids shut tightly, pulling lashes together. My pulse rose. Adrenaline swam inside me, mixing into my stomach's cocktail. I followed orders like a good soldier. I took her leggings and dispatched them over my shoulder. The zipper of her skirt stuttered, inchworming toward the bottom of the hem. The garment gathered at her feet and I slid it away like a painter's tarp. Buttons on her blouse slipped open. Her underwear didn't match—bra tan-colored, panties red polka-dot. I was unwrapping a present. One with a blind girl inside, other senses enhanced by lack of sight. Goosebumps uplifted forearm hairs. I rubbed my hand into thigh flesh and touched the femoral artery.

“Are you finished?” she said. “May I leave now?” She started to walk forward, colliding her abdomen into my chest.

“I said you can go,” I said, but my thumbs slowly hooked the underside of polka dots and her panties fell. Unstrapping her bra felt like inserting a television plug. Anza smelled different from the factory. Cloves. Pears in the sun.

Her hand moved to the bulge in my jeans. “Yes sir,” she said. “It feels nice.”

“I didn’t ask you that,” I said, confused by this game and also excited—my body aware of itself in a way I’d forgotten. A woman’s touch, a glimmer.

She withdrew her hand, opened her eyes, stepped over to the bed.

“I wish you’d let me leave,” she said. “I don’t feel comfortable.”

“I think you want to stay.” I began playing the role she asked of me. I pulled my shirt off like I used to baseball jerseys. Scars below the rib mapped my accident. I undid my belt, my zipper. At least that wasn’t scarred.

Anza spread herself over the autumnal comforter, legs open as though inside stirrups. “I’ll do what you ask,” she said. “Just please don’t hurt me.” Her nipples were bread crust brown.

“Hurt you?” I said, joining her in full nudity. “It’d be fun if you stopped acting.”

“It would be fun if you didn’t rape me,” she said.

My stomach tied some knot I didn’t know. “Don’t mistranslate,” I said. “I want to make *love* to you.”

“This is what American men know of love.”

Anza's pubic hairs were a swath of night. A triangle pointing south. Her hips bucked slightly forward.

"Para mi," I said in my best Spanish, "Amor es un sueño."

"A dream could be a nightmare," Anza said. "Tonight is a celebration for you. For me, it is goodbye."

And she started to rise. From the end of the bed I cat-crawled, placing my hands onto her breasts—firmsoft and spilling from the sides of my palms. Backward she fell against the oversized hotel pillows. I positioned myself over her. Like bricks. My lithe body felt heavy. I brushed a knee along the inside of her legs and paused between them.

"I will tell everyone about this," she said.

"No," I said—now roleplaying with discomfiting ease.

"I will remember your name," she said. "And your face."

With a sigh, I slid inside her. I pushed forward and pulled back, slick friction memorizing itself and repeating. "Forget my face," I said.

Her lips bit into the air when I spoke forcefully. Breathy whimpers. A surge of newfound power. My body's basic function. With each thrust my semen moved toward her like a tug-of-war rope in a game I would soon lose.

"Should I find a condom?" I asked.

"I can't make babies," she said. "Your rifle can't hurt something already dead."

So I took my cue, ragdolling onto Anza's frame, grunting as I filled her with me. Ejaculation hurt, rope through my urethra, and I diminished. A salmon dead after mating.

Anza's face grew wet. Was it sweat or tears? She turned over, twisting into the comforter—a post-coital indolence men were usually scripted for. When I touched her hair, nothing. Her breath slowed toward sleep. Exhaustion had been in her all day.

No more than a foot from her, I felt alone. So I walked to the window. A pile of clothes, Anza's shoes, and the champagne bottle littered the sill. Noise from the streets below. A gathering of sign-wavers, fist-pumpers, beer-sippers. Girls on boyfriends' shoulders clapped to invisible rhythms. Their voices were nearly imperceptible through the window, which didn't open. News cameras skirted the throngs as they marched in the direction of Pike Place Market. One ululating body.

Never before had I seen this energy in Seattle streets. I'd been at school during the WTO riots and watched them on TV like everyone else. Tonight, cop cars arrived as they had then and just parked on side streets letting the procession pass—the new president's first executive order. Photographers perched on lampposts exploded their flashes into the night. Given my panoramic vantage, I figured I'd contribute a picture. Taking the disposable camera from the gift bag, I pulled the sticker from the lens and wound it. The comically small viewfinder reminded me of telescopes at the Space Needle. I composed the shot and the button depressed beneath my finger.

With Anza now asleep, I glimpsed something at the base of her neck. I pulled back the sheet: a diagonal scar spanned the ridgeline of a vertebra. It was whiter than the rest of her, like a graft from my own fair-complected skin. I pulled the sheet further. More scars lined her spinal column, eight total. Afraid of waking her, I lightly fingered them—mottled tissue that I knew well. With each breath cycle the scars traveled in the

way of fish nosing through waves or film advancing in a camera. I twisted the dimmer switch. Seashells extinguished their light. Sounds from downtown receded. Anza murmured in Spanish, disquiet sleep-talk I couldn't translate. A gestating story I didn't yet know.

Chapter Four

Honduras stretches in every direction trying to escape itself—north toward the U.S., south toward South America, west to the Pacific and east to the Caribbean. Only two baseball players have made it to the big leagues from Honduras to the United States. One came from British Honduras, the old name for Belize. So all we have is Gerald Young. He played center field and was known for flashy basket catches. Gerald Young went to high school in California and this still made him Hondureño enough for Houston Astros games to broadcast throughout my country.

Usually Honduras is an afterthought, a blank space, a subcountry in Central America's subcontinent. Our country is lesser known even than our neighbors—Guatemala, El Salvador, Nicaragua. In all my university politics classes, the only mention about Honduras was Sandinista troops launched from inside our borders. Sandinistas are Nicaraguan. And they were trained by the United States.

After independence from Spain, the Federal Republic of Central America formed. In 1838, we raised a Mayan middle finger and founded Honduras. We sewed stars on our flag to represent each country of La República Federal. A flag with other countries and a name that means 'deep sea' was the height of our history.

Honduras might as well mean, deep obedience. We export crops and workers. Twenty percent of our money comes from remittances. We are pobre, corrupto, and former confederates ridicule our accents. Let them ridicule. They don't have our costas

and selvas and cordilleras. They don't have Gerald Young. They don't have Anza Guillardo.

Today I walk down Tegucigalpa's streets behind a radio broadcaster. Although protests now fill the city he seems calm, oblivious. My father has a belly grown large that pushes the fabric of his suit like a grand tumor. First he goes from his apartment to a restaurant. I watch him read three newspapers and drink coffee, dipping toast corners into egg yolks. With a thumbnail he follows each article and I'm sure he doesn't notice me. Perhaps he wouldn't even recognize me. We haven't seen one another for five years and he doesn't know I've returned from Seattle. Though I listened occasionally to his radio shows we haven't spoken or exchanged emails in some time.

The sky is darkening, rain from the mountains soon to reach us. My father carries no umbrella and walks slowly, bent over his right hip as if supported by an imaginary cane. He is a horse-faced man named Ruben whose gray beard meets gray sideburns, hairs which curl back like the waves we once watched from San Lorenzo with my mother. The sign for Voice of America, his radio station, is small with faded lettering. A red blinking tower that crowns the building sends my father's words hundreds of miles. In every direction his voice carries yet he says nothing true. He's told me he must be careful on the air; in Honduras, speakers of truth disappear.

This happened to my mother on a moonless night. I was eleven-years-old and had followed my father to the capital. My mother stayed to protest a new dam, a represa. The government wanted to drown the foothills of her village. As though a few tents would stop them. From her I was born with my hard head. Water rose and my mother

sank. Seven people drowned with her. Hers is a story about a reservoir where they say a village existed. Fish have eaten her body, though little pieces will always float.

No one can make a woman's choices for her, my father said, especially not someone like Isabela. La Madre. I knew she wanted to stay and work in the village where she was born, where on her factory breaks she ran across the baseball field with the speed of a cat. How strange she was and how beautiful. On the air, my father said nothing about the incident. He told me this was for our safety. Besides, at this time he read only advertisements. Rich men seeking más riqueza.

A grumpy little girl, I would not let my father forget. Isabela, I said, as though her name would resurrect her. La Madre. Before school and during dinner I mentioned her. When my father started to see other women I wouldn't speak to them; I carried a picture of my mother over my breast. What a daughter I must've been, more loyal to a dead mother than a living father, a father who demanded I read him newspaper stories in perfect English and Spanish pronunciations. I gave in. Those years before his career improved I went to factories after school and read news for handfuls of lempiras. With this money we paid for tutors and cleats, the extra things. If workers were interested I would read Lucila Gamero—the greatest Honduran writer. Usually they had patience only for newspapers, so I read periódicos from Honduras and Spain, the United States.

And though everyone in Honduras loved telenovelas, the soap operas, I watched them only reluctantly. The stories lasted nine moths or a year and the entire country followed them. A poor girl marries into a rich family. The ugly girl becomes beautiful. A long lost father would reappear. To me they were unrealistic. My mother was never

coming back, and my father was there but he wasn't. Besides, the popular telenovelas weren't even Honduran, they were Mexican.

In 2004, I was admitted to the University of Washington with full scholarship. They loved the story of my mother, my story of wanting to study politics in a country freer than Honduras. Yet none of these stories were my own. They were written before me. They will be repeated after I go. Third-world suffering is delivered in first-world language. It takes not courage to deliver them but submission. Not pride but shame. It's easy as reading a newspaper, each word written by someone else. Or easy as reading a script, watching a telenovela—the outcome easily predicted by Honduran families watching large televisions in small living rooms: eyes open and mind shut.

A woman's story must be her own, mother or no mother. Today I hold a sonogram picture of my father's grandchild. I want to tell Ruben about this, but how would I begin? Would I talk about Honduras, a country he knows better? Or would I tell him about the United States, a country whose government still pays his radio salary?

My father enters the studio and I do not follow. The sonogram picture is too unclear, the cuerpo gray as though from an old television. So I crumple the picture and drop it on the sidewalk. Today I will go see the protests, about which my father will say nothing into his microphone. President Manuel Zelaya. He began his term as just another vaquero businessman with a hat and a mustache, bleached teeth like a skeleton. Rich men seeking más riqueza. Then he asked to reform parts of our constitution. He asked for a higher minimum wage and better social services. His opponents said he sought longer term limits. Not everyone wants change.

President Zelaya was flown from the country in pajamas and his white Stetson hat. A coup d'état. A golpe de estado. But the U.S. government won't call it this. And now Hondureños want their president brought back. They are hopeful our country could be reborn. They don't know rebirth is impossible. Things will always be the same.

Chapter Five

Sun melted liquid streaks on the windows. The morning after the election, I watched Daniel sleep naked, the sheet twisted over his chest. I didn't know how to wake him or whether I should. Would we thank each other? Apologize? The room spun while the ceiling fan stayed still. In Honduras, they call hangovers andando con caña. Walking with a cane. Translated, it doesn't make much sense. Hit your forehead with a sugarcane and you'd understand. I washed my face and dressed, looked once more at Daniel's sweet, ribbed, pale body and walked out into the morning's cane field.

My backpack was still at the office and I'd asked to meet with our campaign manager. A fence now surrounded the office and I watched two short, strong men carry furniture toward their truck. Inside, the campaign manager was posting sticky notes. Pink meant Goodwill. Orange meant resale. Green meant personal items. "Lucky I put a green note on your backpack," he said, glancing down at his clipboard, the same clipboards we'd read phone scripts from. "Wouldn't want your stuff given away."

The man's tired eyes gazed further and further down his clipboard. He was too big for his clothes and too old for his haircut. Silence meant bad news.

He said, "Tell me again what you wanted."

"You said you could get an interview for me."

"My magic wand broke, all right? The position I heard about can't cover your H1-B like I did. And you're not Seattle's only Spanish speaker. It's tough out there, muy difícil. Me? I'm filing for unemployment until I hear about a D.C. job."

"Okay," I said, "thanks for not giving away my backpack."

"I'm sorry," he said. "Take some extra shirts—as many as you'd like."

On the bus, downtown skyscrapers looked like metal teeth in a closing mouth. I thought of the calendar in my apartment where an X marked the day my work visa would expire. They gave me exactly two weeks after election day. Five years gone from Honduras was just a plane ride from ending. Hours separated me rather than miles. Someone had left a newspaper on an empty seat and I unfolded the front page. The headline said, "Yes We Did!" One picture showed Barack Obama holding his wife's hand in victory. Another showed a crowd marching down Pike Avenue—a white guy riding his friend's back and spreading two fingers into a peace sign. I took out a pen and marked an X through both photos. The sports section only had articles about basketball and American football. My university's quarterback would recover from a concussion. Nothing about baseball, nothing about fútbol. Another X through the page.

The bus passed Southcenter Mall where my roommate had worked. Ours was the next stop and when I entered the apartment, she dried dishes and placed them in a box. Plump as a cassava and shaped similar, Guadalupe had large soft fingers she used to pluck the brow that grew between her brows, leaving a permanent patch of pink.

"I'm going to be using those again," I said.

"I'm happy to clean them anyway," said Lupe. "Anything besides that hijo de puta daycare doesn't feel like work."

She had the radio tuned to the Mexican station, her weight held on one hip and then the other, her butt shifted like water in a jar. "Last night you didn't come home."

"Here," I said, "I got you something."

It was a black shirt with a white O. She put it on immediately and it bunched over her sweatshirt, the color a compliment to her hair and eyes. Lupe was a pleasant-looking woman, sixteen years older than me, and had been the perfect compañera. We'd met at a Salvadoran restaurant in Rainier Beach. I recognized her accent right away—not Tegucigalpan but certainly Honduran. That night she took me dancing and within weeks I'd moved from the dorms into our apartment. Having a Spanish-speaking roommate made the city different, a change of lenses. The apartment became Little Honduras, a brown carpeted embassy.

In two days, Lupe would move back to Yakima. I was planning to stay in Seattle for another few days in hopes of finding a job.

"Where did you sleep, Anzana? You wear the same clothes and smell of vino."

"Under a puente like a troll," I said.

"Come to Yakima conmigo," she said, a refrain during recent weeks. "It's better than Honduras, and Little Honduras too."

"I'm going to check the mail," I said. "Maybe my new visa arrived."

My building had a blue sea of broken glass in its parking lot, and I walked down the road with no sidewalks. Sugarcanes slapped my forehead with every step. The post office was selling packets of U.S. president stamps. Richard Nixon with his big nose,

and George Washington standing up on a boat. I opened our PO Box and found my last paycheck, an advertisement for a pizzeria.

My phone rang, a text message from Lupe. Someone from the campaign was there in our apartment to see me, she said. Someone carrying a clipboard.

What does he look like?

Like a gringo with a weird smile.

What do you mean?

Then, in the apartment, I understood. The scars sloped across Daniel's face made his smile extraño if you weren't used to it. Both Lupe and I stared at the naked scars bordered by stubble; he rested his chin in his palm so we had to look at something else. I pictured him on skis in the forest, blue blood on white snow. Today he wore a black jacket with buttons that hung from his shoulders like a cape.

I said, "What are you doing here? And, joder, why that clipboard?"

"Your apartment doesn't list names next to units so I asked thirty people who they voted for. I should sell my exit poll to the campaign."

"The campaign's over," I said. Each of these words dropped at different speeds, with different gravities.

Now Daniel and I looked at Lupe who danced slowly to the radio and rewashed all the cups and plates. When she finished, Lupe took the radio with her, winking to me and crossing the carpet toward her bedroom.

Daniel said, "She seems nice, Guadalajara."

"Guadalupe."

"Right," Daniel said. "You left early this morning."

"It wasn't very early. I had packing to do."

"You didn't even hit me with a pillow and say goodbye."

"You were snoring."

"Hondurans don't snore? Here you hit them with a pillow until they stop and then say what you need to say."

"I had nothing to say. Last night we drank ourselves borracho and I still feel it."

"Yeah, we celebrated a little bit. It's what we worked for."

"I worked myself into unemployment," I said. "And not the kind you can get from the government. All the gobierno will give me is a passport stamp that says, Thanks for electing the president, now vayate and fuck you."

"That's a big passport stamp," Daniel said.

"Others have it worse."

"As long as you're not leaving in handcuffs, you're better off than immigrants I saw deported from SeaTac."

"And now we have a new president to handcuff the illegals."

Daniel noticed the stack of Obama shirts on our couch. He smiled again and his face unzipped from his hand. "I thought you didn't take any free stuff."

"This is my bonus," I said. "Not as good as a hotel room."

"There's a bunch of luggage around. Are you leaving right away?"

"Soon," I said, offering for him to sit. He moved the Obama shirts but I stayed standing, arms crossed over my chest. "And when will you work with the veterans?"

"I'm not sure. Lots of paperwork when it comes to the government. I might stay in my cabin for awhile."

"What cabin?" I said.

"My grandfather's near Snoqualmie, we passed it on the drive."

"Your family has empty houses?"

"It's not a house. Well, it's a large cabin—una cabana grande." He gestured the cabin's size and dimensions, square with a long steep roof.

"Did I tell you that I went skiing once?" I said.

Now Daniel crossed his arms, in mock-surprise. "A sport only for gringos?"

"It was with the campus multicultural center. They did a photo shoot in the lodge. Other skiers looked surprised we were there, although the cooks were from Peru."

It felt odd for us to be clothed, in my apartment but separated by brown carpet.

"So will you come to the cabin?" he asked.

I told him it was a long drive from Tegucigalpa.

"I know things happened fast," Daniel said. "But it doesn't have to end so quick."

"Cállate, Daniel. This isn't a Lucila Gamero story. It ends last night. Go watch baseball games with your father. Go become a doctor. Go skiing, and wear a casco before you hit another tree."

"I know you'll do something amazing," he said, his eyes a little rainy. "With your voice you could work in radio like your father. Or with your English you really could become an ambassador—ambassadors fly free to Seattle."

"No, when I leave the United States I won't be back. But someday you'll visit Honduras with your own family. You'll see the rainforest. You'll scuba dive in the Bay Islands. You'll tell them you met a girl once, whose name you can't remember."

"Now you're reading a story, some Rick Steves travelogue. He went to the University of Washington like we did." Daniel's voice grew serious and he dropped his voice from his lips to his throat. "Anza, I know you said you can't become pregnant, but maybe we should get Plan B anyway. I'll pay for the pill."

I looked at the floor, a continent of matted carpet threads. "I've had pills before," I said. "In Honduras I became pregnant, and the doctor said I couldn't carry. So they gave pills made for elephant throats. They did an operation, tied a knot. They said there would be no more babies. Do you understand?"

"I'm no expert. EMTs are supposed to call 911 if a woman's in labor. I'm sorry for what you went through—I just want to be sure you're healthy now."

Daniel held out his hands and waved his fingers, indicating that I should come to him. He opened space in his arms for me to fill. Part of me wanted to touch him, it's true. But my feet had grown roots.

"We have to go see the priest," I said.

Daniel closed his arms.

I said it again, a little louder.

"What do you mean, a priest?" Daniel asked. "Are there services now?"

Then Guadalupe returned, holding her radio. A ranchero sang a high note that crackled with each of her steps.

"Anzana," she said. "You're right. We have to go see the priest."

I told Daniel I'd forgotten about this engagement, and he seemed to shrink, diminishing into a boy who wore his father's coat.

He said, "I wish you'd stay with me at the cabin. Both of you."

I left a small kiss across Daniel's scar. And then he left, smiling his weird smile.

I thanked Lupe. *We have to go see the priest* was her invention, a codephrase for men to leave us alone. It worked before at the Salvadoran Restaurant, Mi Chaleteca.

"You're welcome," said Lupe. "But he would have taken you on a nice date."

"Like what—driving me to the airport?"

"You know," she said, "my visa expired in 2003 and I didn't leave."

"Yes, but you can never drive. You'll never vote or get tax returns. You're here in blood and not in name."

"And in fat too," Lupe said, shaking a handful of stomach through her new Obama shirt. "In Honduras, who cares if you vote? And the roads are all potholes."

I said, "I can hear my father's voice now: 'Anza, you're home. Now you can rub my old broken foot every night.'"

"Men will always ask of you. That's their nature."

"I wish I had money when I flew back, Lupe. Enough to pay every centavo he gave me for university."

"Maybe you could do that in one apple cosecha. You were a hard worker, a good picker."

"But the harvest's over."

"So what's the rush? Everyone loves it when you read—Anza, La Lectora. When you read, the pain in my tooth disappears."

So I agreed to go with her to Yakima. Maybe it was the caña, or the fading excitement from the election. Either way, I would ignore the X on our calendar and pretend my passport didn't exist. At least in Yakima I would save money, and when I returned my father could ask nothing from me. Ruben Guillardo would have to read news stories until he was 100-years-old, each word recited exactly as written. And Anza Guillardo would learn to write her own.

The taxi left us at the Greyhound Station and we knew exactly where to go, how long we'd wait on the plastic seats before loading our luggage and boarding. Stops in Issaquah and North Bend and Snoqualmie and Ellensburg logged deep grooves within me like the space between songs on your favorite record. Once again my life was a suitcase and a ticket. I brought rolls of newspaper for the ride. I wore sunglasses from Goodwill, the kind soldiers wear. Their lenses rested unevenly against my cheekbones and the nosepieces scraped into bone. Guadalupe kept asking about Daniel. I'd made the mistake of telling her about election night, sex in the Hilton. It sounded romantic, she

said, in that way of women whose children live far away and whose father had never been romantic. Hers wasn't a happy story, but she smiled more than I did.

"Lupe," I said, pulling on her shoulder. The flesh was an overripe melon. "Don't ask about him anymore. I made a mistake. Now my body will forget."

"Anzana," she said. "Your body remembers what it wants."

"I know this," I said, my voice held low to keep passengers from turning their heads at the Spanish. My stomach felt like a fist. "That doesn't mean I want to talk about him. Please don't tell me again about your friends who've married Americans."

"Every time is different, Anzana. And except for the scars this boy was guapo."

I took my hand from Lupe's shoulder and said she was right, hoping she'd fall asleep. That way I could read newspaper articles in quiet, translate phrases to read aloud if anyone would offer to pay me. More stories about the President-elect. Through the sheer window curtain I watched frosted signs lining the road and wondered how the closest things can be the furthest from you.

Lupe and I were met by Jose Luis in his blue pickup truck. He had long fingers and a long nose, a thin figure like in those mirrors that stretch bodies. A round mole next to his nose bounced when he took our luggage and the black thing looked ready to roll down his face. "Bienvenidos," he said, fingers against my waist as he opened the truck door for us. Jose Luis helped run the day worker center, a job once shared with Guadalupe before she'd moved to Seattle. The two had briefly been lovers, a pairing of tall and lean with short and fat that highlighted their imperfections yet told you their child

might be handsome. Jose Luis watched us in the rearview mirror with a proprietary wink that disgusted me. Lupe grew coy and straightened her posture.

Just as the two of us had shared the Seattle apartment we would now share a one room cabana at the migrant camp. You could see occasional holes in the walls. The tin roof looked like a man's hat pulled down to one side. "This cabana should have everything you need," Jose Luis said when he'd traded the propane tank that provided fuel and heat. He gave an inventory and touched each item when he mentioned it—frying pan, cots, blankets, nails to hang jackets.

"Tomorrow morning I will pick you up with coffee and eggs," he said. "On other mornings you will make the breakfast. Each week you'll pay me for gas," he said and gave an amount we should expect. "When the center closes I give a ride back here. But when you work, you find your own ride. The camp is on public lands, so ask to be dropped where the road turns to gravel."

He acted like we hadn't been there before, ignoring my summers and Lupe's full years. And so instead of listening I just watched his mole while he spoke.

Little Honduras had migrated to Yakima and was now even smaller. Lupe and I brought a rose-colored sheet to separate our beds. The sound of her radio filled the single room. At night, she would turn off the radio and sing lullabys when she thought I was asleep. A hose ran through the window and attached to a spigot—this was our faucet. Warm water could fill the wash basin if we were patient. This was the price of no rent.

That first morning, I tried to fill a chipped tea mug with oily water that smelled of rubber and earth. Cold air had snaked through the floorboards and pulled me to my feet. With winter on its way, mañanas stayed dim and sun hugged the horizon all day. Gray clouds lined with pink looked like the sheet hanging in our cabin, or the sheets a girl called Anza once used to hide from the world. Jose Luis gave us warm coffee and cold eggs in the truck. We ate them carefully on the bumpy three miles of road, forks held far from the roofs of our mouths. Except for his mustache, residue from shaving soap chalked his face.

The day worker center was just a fenced-off place with a trailer. Here's how it worked. Shifts often began before seven, so we opened early. Lupe and I unlocked chains from the gate and Jose Luis drove the truck through. We unstacked white plastic chairs and arranged them around white plastic tables. I pushed on the legs to level them in gravel and support them against wind. We unrolled the vestíbulo over the tables and staked it down. Workers began to show up around six o'clock. They took a numbered ticket and we wrote down the order of their arrival. First-come, first-serve for whatever jobs were available. Lupe and I made a little money working at the center but not much, so we took numbers too. Jose Luis worked only in the center.

It was magnitudes quieter than the summers, when employers left desperate messages about wheat needing to be threshed and collected, sweet onions to be picked, then grapes, cherries, peaches, nectarines. Summers brought the need for extra hands on tilling and controlled burns. Truck after truck would drive to the edge of the fence with

bus station bustle and workers hopped in with thermoses and full lunchboxes. Even compared to the last time I'd visited, the center had reached a state of hibernation. The apple harvest was gone and most of the remaining jobs too. Each day rusted cars or bicycles brought only a few workers. A couple more arrived on foot, who looked like they'd walked from Mexico without rest.

Trabajadores sat around waiting for their numbers to be called. Many days their numbers were never called. With barely enough people to fill three tables, they played cribbage with rocks over their cards. Cribbage was the trabajadores' favorite game and they were very good, jumping pegs without even counting. Sometimes Lupe and I played, betting for lunch money. I hated losing but often did. Then I would read the newspaper in exchange for my money back. With these small crowds, no megaphone was necessary.

Every day around noon, a family arrived in their good-smelling van. They would unroll an extension cord to heat rice, beans, tortillas and sometimes tamales, selling them cheap and slathered in sauce.

I remember one particular morning when Jose Luis spun in his office chair like a little chico. I asked if there were any jobs for the guys.

"Not really," he said. "One tipo called looking for work. A jefe needs demolition for Thursday, roofing on Friday. Nothing yet for today."

"What about for me?"

"For Anzana? Everything. A wealthy family who needs their child read to and will pay a hundred dollars an hour. When would you like to start?"

I pulled back the window shade and in the foothills saw rainclouds, darkest to the west where they curved against montañas. I dropped beans into the coffee grinder and shook powdery grounds into the urn using yesterday's filter. Each worker had a slot for mail and a phone number where they could get voicemails. Occasionally they used the computer to check email or apply for jobs, although Jose Luis guarded it—a worker had once spilled coffee on his keyboard.

"Hardly anybody needs trabajadores until springtime," Jose Luis said, his computer mouse rubbed in circles like kneading dough.

"Then how about letting me use the computer?" I said.

"Okay, but you pay a peso for every minute. Pesos only, no lempiras."

He stood up and pushed the chair back with a boot heel, arms raised in a fake caballero offering. Remaining close while I waited for my email to load, his breath wafted tobacco and near the keyboard I noticed his coffee cup used for a spittoon. Someone called Jose Luis' name and he swept up the cup, an Hasta Luego with syllables drawn out like an English speaker learning Spanish. The door didn't shut and late morning cooled my fingertips.

My father had written again. "Anzana, Papi misses you. Have you listened to my programs? I talk about my daughter working for President Obama. Yes We Can! Si Se Puede! He is more popular than our President Zelaya, that socialista. Maybe you can walk with me to the studio, though my feet hurt so much. When will you return?"

I wrote back: “Papi—No estoy seguro. When will you swim and visit me?”

The rest of the emails were job rejections. There had been a time when I was optimistic about finding more work in politics. Then I applied for anything I could find. No one was interested—these were my last applications, and now I felt nothing good.

My weekends and summers in Yakima seemed wasted. I shouldn’t have spent those days reading at factories, picking apples, playing cards. I pretended to be just like the other trabajadores, and now I was them. Why hadn’t I made job contacts in Seattle? For me, there would be no more campus of brick and ivy, no more coworkers who spoke about travel or law school. I resented the privileged gringos I worked or studied with, and felt too educated and whitewashed for other Latinos. I was too good for everyone, not good enough for myself.

So, with nothing else to wait for, I closed my email. I deleted my whole account. Sorry, Papi. Que será será. Anzana was going off the air. In Spanish, you don’t say you are between a rock and a hard place, you say you’re between the sword and the wall.

I poured coffee and stepped outside, trying not to think of the men in my life. Drops of lluvia drummed. I helped pull the tables together. Collars pulled against ears, caps and hoods over heads. A flask twisted opened and we passed it around. The whiskey stung my lips and curled inside. Someone coughed, either from alcohol or the dampness. When the flask was gone, Jose Luis and Lupe migrated back to the trailer. I sat watching rain fall beyond the vestibule. Although the tops of these montañas were white as confectioners sugar, the Cascades still reminded me of Honduran cordilleras. I

wondered how Washington State would look with jungles? Or Honduras under snow? Maybe Daniel's mother had such maps in her dusty piles.

Lupe came home one night with a bag of potatoes and three chili peppers, a sweet onion, and a head of garlic. She'd cleaned a church for their party, ten dollars an hour.

"You must be cooking for Jose Luis."

"No, mi amor. I cook for my compañera. God gave food to his flock and they gave it to me. Now our cena will be good enough for queens."

I pulled back the sheet dividing our room and tied it with a shoelace. All day my stomach hurt and I convinced myself the light diet was responsible, the missed meals, pancakes I burned to make Jose Luis frown.

First we quartered the potatoes and dropped them in a cast iron pan, an inch of water nearly boiling. Onion was next. After the dirty water burned off, we sprinkled garlic and jalapeño. We only had one plate so I ate from a tin mug.

"Maybe I should start going to church," I said.

"They serve wine there too," said Lupe. She washed her mouthful down with a large cup of imaginary wine and then crossed herself. In the last couple years local wineries had popped up like pimples and I heard they donated bottles to churches.

Food tumbled into my stomach, a mash of white gray and green. Rather than mixing, each bite jockeyed for space. I rocked forward and back slowly.

"Are you okay?" Lupe asked. "Estás enferma?"

"Estoy bien. Maybe it was the peppers. Not spicy enough. It will pass."

It didn't pass. It got worse. Acid climbed up my throat. I excused myself to the outhouse and barely made it there before vomiting up the cena and part of a pancake. My mouth steamed and the outhouse smell sickened me further.

Lupe offered the last of her meal. I told her I was full, even though the opposite was true.

"A glass of water?"

"Water is the problem," I said. "Not the peppers."

"But we use bottled water."

"You can't trust the label. In Tegucigulpa, they sell tap water in bottles. Then they follow tourists and sell medicine after the tourists are sick."

My compañera began the dishes. While she cleaned them, she pointed to the X on our calendar. She said, "Yesterday was the day. Welcome to no voting or driving."

"I could never vote here anyway," I said.

"We should festejar."

"No parties," I said. "Who knows which hotel I'll wake up in this time. Besides, why would we celebrate me becoming illegal?"

The dishes nested into each other under silver light and Lupe snapped water from her hands, each drop a bullet. "What else can we celebrate? You're late this month," she said, and again pointed to the calendar. "Should we celebrate that?"

I wanted to deny it but I couldn't erase the moons, the tiny lunas drawn on the calendar to represent our cycles. Maybe my compañera and I had grown too familiar.

"Usually your cycle is like a clock," she said.

"I'm still a clock. The hands are just set at a different hour."

"Anza, it's too quiet at the center and verano is far away."

"No parties," I said, "promise me."

Lupe took a newspaper from her bag and threw it to me. "Te prometo."

My compañera didn't read well and English barely at all. The *Yakima Herald-Republic* was a day old.

"Why don't you read something to me?" she said, winking. "Read as you did to Daniel at the fábrica."

"I didn't read to him. He came uninvited."

"So why did he come if not to listen?"

"I forgot something in his car."

"Anza, you never forget anything. You remember each breath you took in your mother's womb, each coffee bean she sorted when you were a girl."

"That's because the ticket wasn't important," I said. "Daniel kept it as a tip. Now do you want me to read?"

"Sí, por favor," she said. "I thought the memory would make you happy, that you'd want the prince to come for you again."

"The principito thinks I'm in Honduras. And maybe I already am."

I asked which section of the newspaper Lupe wanted first. She sat on the bed and held a finger held over her rotten tooth as I translated. I read slower than usual but still I read, and though it reminded me of Ruben Guillardo, it felt good knowing the next line

was below my finger, that some things can be counted on, will always be there, don't have to be invented, and yet can't exist the same without you.

Chapter Six

In Seattle, I had learned to live in a foreign country. I learned to write better in English than Spanish. I learned about college sports. I learned to impress professors with stories of Honduras. I learned how the United States drew its political maps. I learned its constitution and about the men who wrote it. I learned about music and concerts and free museum days. I learned how American students are attracted to foreign ones. I learned how Americans consider university a vacation. I learned to call voters and speak with churches about El Presidente Obama. I learned how it rains all year in Seattle, not just during monsoon season.

In Yakima, I learned to use a hammer. I learned to build fences. I learned to pick fruit when it's ripe. I learned to gather hops and crush grapes. I learned to serve food using a large spoon called a ladle. In Yakima, I learned how Latinos are considered a single group, un pueblo. I learned white people are more interested in Latinos' stories than Latinos are interested in their own. I learned to shovel gravel and dig holes and clear blackberries and weed gardens and sort apples. I learned that everyone loves to be read to, even if their work is loud and they only hear every third word; I learned this is better than one's own thoughts. I learned how to hang plastic over windows. I learned to keep food cold without a refrigerator. I learned about food banks. I learned about red and blue campaign signs still stuck in the ground after elections. I learned to sleep wearing a wool hat. I learned to keep money in an envelope beneath my mattress (which

I read in a Lucila Gamero story called "El Huérfano"). I also learned dogs could be pets as well as pests, as they are in Tegucigulpa—mongrels missing teeth and fur.

Jose Luis found a dog or a dog found him, with a beautiful winter coat of white and black. It was a husky with silver blue eyes. Chito couldn't have been his original name, and some Yakima family probably missed a dog with a different name. They say dogs take after their owners, but Chito seemed nothing like Jose Luis. Chito was handsome, loyal, athletic. Maybe their breath smelled the same.

One night after work, Jose Luis came over with the dog. He asked Lupe if she wanted to go play a game of cribbage. She looked at me like I was supposed to decide, or give her approval.

"We have to go see the priest," I said.

"Maybe you can go tomorrow," Jose Luis said, kicking the dog into our cabana.

"We have to go see the priest." I said it again, to myself.

That was the first evening just Chito and me—though with Lupe spending more evenings away, we had plenty.

In the mornings, my new friend opened the cabana door with his snout. I would run my hand over the velvet of his ears and give him water from our hose. The sound of the dog would wake Lupe also, if she'd returned, and she would say vayate, go away, and that meant both of us. So I would take a tennis ball and go out into the public land where the cabanas sat inside a small U-shaped canyon. Chito and I walked to the top of the hill where old squares of hay looked like forgotten monuments. We could see the cabanas,

the road, and miles of open land that made me think of waves rolling up and down, cresting and breaking, each nearly the same height.

Standing on a hay bale, I would throw the tennis ball. The ball bounced while Chito chased it, his hunting instincts directed at a little green sphere I wished could bounce beyond the horizon. I learned to be sure the dog saw my throw or else he'd just stand there, confused, one leg in the air. Then, I would climb down off the hay and have to retrieve the ball myself. And even though dogs are supposed to have incredible noses, he would never discover the scent until I had the ball again and tossed it back into the canyon. Chito would drop his ball near our door and waited impatiently for the next episode. Then I would start to cook pancakes. Their burnt flavor is what I taste in my mouth when I think about those weeks in Yakima, the morsels we tossed to our husky, not as rich-coated as my university's mascota, but still proud and erect.

Only once did Chito accompany me to work. Lupe and I were spending the day replacing a broken fence outside the meatpacking plant. Our crew leader brought his dog too and said they could play together. We drilled holes and dropped posts and unstrung the metal fencing. Chito snapped his jaws at the other dogs who ran with him after the tennis ball. Snowflakes fell slowly from the sky and he caught them in his wet mouth.

The white guys asked why women were sent on this job. "Because we were next in line," I said. They asked where I was from, and I told them Seattle. "Yeah right, where in Seattle?" I told them Fourteenth Avenue near Volunteer Park. "You're probably from somewhere in Mexico." I told them I'd never been to Mexico. They

laughed and asked, “How’s a girl from Seattle wind up at the Mexican work center?” I told them I was doing it for the money, just as they were. They shrugged their shoulders and kept unstringing fence in the day’s worsening weather.

Machine exhaust and animal smells from the meatpacking plant filled the air. I remembered once working inside there for three smelly days. I’d been put on the line to replace a sick woman. With scissors that hung from an electric cord I sliced the thighs of cow carcasses, a clothespin over my nose and a plastic shield over my face.

Now we hadn’t brought anything for our noses and instead shoved sagebrush into our nostrils. Chito liked the smells. And, before we were finished, someone from the plant brought a bucket of organs for the dogs. Steam rose from the pile and they ate it without pausing even to breathe.

Lupe asked the white guys to drive us to the grocery store. We split a small list and she bought beer for Jose Luis. I found dog food for “active dogs with lustrous coats.” The organs had stained the fur surrounding Chito’s mouth and he slumped in the truck bed, moaning, full and satisfied, while we bounced down the frozen gravel road to the cabanas. “The Red Lion it sure isn’t,” the driver said. “These look like little hunting cabins. How many of you folks live out here anyway?” I whistled for Chito and he lazily dismounted. Lupe said something to the guys and left a beer each for the ride.

We made dinner and Lupe told me she was going to Jose Luis’ cabana. “Do you want one?” she asked, holding the beer box like a suitcase.

“No. If Jose Luis doesn’t have enough to drink he won’t sleep with you.”

Lupe paused at the door. "And if he has too much to drink he won't be able. Are you sure that's why you don't want one?"

I opened a newspaper.

She said, "I got you something," and pointed to a paper bag on the counter. "To be sure."

"Sure of what?" I asked, but she was already outside. And she hadn't been gone a moment when Chito nosed his way inside. The dog's eyes were wide and wet and his breath made gray balloons. I said, "Here, Chito. Let's see what gift Lupe brought me."

Inside the bag was a pregnancy kit. The box was bright pink and it said: *Results Five Days Sooner*. It said: *Easy Read Stick*. It said: *3 Tests Inside. Over 99% Accurate*.

Chito became disappointed, as though expecting more meat. I shook a little food into a dish and he ate it without interest, dientes crunching each brown bite into powder.

I had told Lupe not to bring this up again. Sure, I hadn't had my period, but was that her business? The box glowed pink on the counter. A white silhouette of a pregnant woman stood inside a pink number 1. Why did pink represent pregnancy? Was my body made of bubble gum chewed by baseball players? And why were the sticks shaped like thermometers—did they think pregnancy was the same as a high temperature? I wanted to throw it all in the basura and never think about it again.

But the moons on the calendar glared at me. I couldn't ignore them because I'd drawn them myself. They smiled celestial smiles while Chito panted and drooled. In my astronomy class a professor said the moon once had seas. He said the moon controls

tides. He said nothing about a woman's tides. Now a sailboat navigated a pink sea inside my stomach.

Snow had accumulated outside. I walked to the outhouse between cabanas, darker spaces marking the footprints, mine and the dog's, where the snow compressed. Only four of twelve cabanas were occupied—one by Jose Luis, one by Carlos and his wife Graciela, another by Angel. Jose Luis' chimenea exhaled gray. Through a window I watched him tell stories to Lupe, his beer pointing toward imaginary people.

I peed into a cup and a little of it wetted my hand. Then I dipped the thermometer-like test into the cup. I dumped the rest of the cup's contents in the snow—a brownish yellow patch which Chito licked until I threw the tennis ball.

The night cleared and the moon now spotlighted my cabana. Inside for five minutes, I awaited the results. Using a pocket knife I removed wax from a Braeburn apple. Gray sheets like curled fingernails fell over the counter where I stared down at the pregnancy test and the tiny pool of urine. One pink line would indicate, *Not Pregnant.* A second pink line would indicate, *Pregnant*. I chewed the apple—kept in a warehouse at winter temperature—and watched a single line appear. *Not Pregnant.* I swallowed a sweet cold bite and watched the second line. *Pregnant.* I blinked hard with my whole face and wished it away. The image separated and doubled and reunited with itself.

I repeated the test twice more. Two lines. Four lines. Six lines. *Pregnant. Pregnant. Pregnant.* Nose-first I pressed into the cot mattress. I held a pillow over the back of my head and thought of the money envelope below my abdomen.

A memory: Daniel asking if I might be pregnant, telling me to get pills. His narrow face made him look like a boy pretending to be a man. I knew this behavior from American soldiers in Tegucigalpa—young guys barely filling their uniforms, polish rubbed into boots and guns like genie lamps, holding unfulfilled wishes of manhood. And who was I? A girl with high heels and a newspaper, a European body and indigenous face, brown and white absorbed by today's single color: pink.

Lupe came back that morning. From the way I writhed, she guessed how I felt.

"You should sleep more," she said, her breath smelling both of coffee and beer. "We can pick you up in time for almuerzo."

"By lunch I'll be at the back of the line for jobs. I'd rather be alone anyway."

"Are you sure?"

"Go ahead, Lupe. Chito will keep me company."

"Whatever you want, compañera. It's a day of good news. Jose Luis told me volunteer doctors will come soon to the center. I'm going to ask about my tooth. They bring free food too. No matter what there will be a party."

I said, "Lupe, I appreciate your gift. Now please just go."

Through the sheet separating our beds I watched her dress and wave goodbye. After she was gone I remembered one of our first nights in the cabana. Lupe had sung the lullaby Cucurrucucu Paloma. Maybe she thought I was sleeping but I heard every cooing note, the two tones of her voice: one very deep, the other higher than an Andean flute. In this lullaby a dove sings from inside a lonely house whose small doors are wide

open. The sheet had silhouetted my compañera as she sang, breasts pressed forward, with one for each twin son. Certainly Lupe missed them. They made sneaker soles at a Nike factory in Nicaragua. It wasn't long after they left Honduras that she left too—bus rides that brought her all the way to Washington State. In this lullaby a dove represents a man's soul which waits for an unhappy woman to return. Before Lupe had finished, I fell asleep with dreams of my mother singing the same song. Time melted like snow under sun—I was a daughter, a mother, a paloma—and pink covered all.

Though I could have woken up anywhere in any year I woke up alone in the cabana. "Guadalupe," I whispered, and heard nothing. No snoring. No breathing. No shuffling around. I wondered about the time but had no clock or watch, nothing besides caking around my eyelids. Chito came inside looking for food and I fed him breakfast, the little brown pieces turned to dust. My stomach hadn't yet awoken. I dressed in jeans and grabbed my backpack. Outside, I called to the other occupants of the camp. Empty cabanas stood in a line like sunflowers, sentry guards who watched me pass. In an unsteady gesture I saluted each of them. Frost made a crunching noise. When I reached the paved road I patted my backpack to check its contents. There was a newspaper, a scarf I pulled out to wear. What I couldn't find was my passport. Always I kept it there, protected by an aged plastic sleeve. One at a time I unzipped pockets and even turned the backpack upside down to shake it like a rug. Since the day I arrived in Seattle I'd traveled with my passport close in case I might have to leave or show my visa to police. Air scraped my nose and lungs on its way in. My belly burned. As though drunk, I

struggled to follow the road's white line. One line became two and the shoulder swayed. I threw the ball for Chito. In diminishing hops it bounced barely ahead of us. The three mile walk to the center probably took two hours. This is the girl who once outran all the boys. Isabela's girl. The girl who ran through Seattle streets on election night faster than cars. Now I could walk no faster than my father with his lame foot, or a child who hasn't taken her first steps.

Music rattled. At first I thought it was a car passing by, but it turned out to be coming from the centro. My unused megaphone amplified a smaller speaker. I watched Carlos, a small man, tacking a banner which said, Enhorabuenas. Jose Luis roped up a piñata. The blue donkey's sequins fell like dandruff. "There she is," he said. "Surprise." Carlos looked over his shoulder, barely keeping his balance on the chair, which flexed its plastic leg. Lupe came from the office with a basket of sweetbread. "Congratulations," she said and offered me a hot pastry. It burned my hand and hurt to swallow.

"Congratulations for what?" I said. "What did you tell them?"

"Everyone here's a friend," she said, indicating more people than we'd had all the other days. "Everyone has been in your situation."

I flicked some sweetbread down to Chito and he snatched it in his teeth.

"Aren't you supposed to keep your compañera's secrets?" I hissed.

"Please enjoy this. Jose Luis says it's a special day when the doctors visit. And with you here we have something more to celebrate."

"Jose Luis knows nothing, less than nothing."

"He knows how to be quiet. Here he comes now, be respectful Anzana."

While he walked, Jose Luis leaned against a baseball bat as though it were a cane. His mole bounced atop his nose like black gelatin. From Lupe's basket he grabbed a sweetbread and stuffed it into his mouth. "Muy dulce," he said, and then pretended to take a baseball swing at my side. My reflexes were too slow for me to flinch. With a buttery grin Jose Luis then flipped around the bat and offered me the handle which was wrapped in wrinkles of duct tape. Carlos, who had finished tacking the banner, came behind me with a bandana. This red bandana covered my eyes and stretched tight over the hairs at my temples. Again the day was dark. Three sets of hands spun me, first one way and then the other. Someone started to whistle, Graciela, Angel, maybe the others who played cards. When the spinning stopped it didn't stop in my perception. Rays of light came in from the top of the bandana, but I couldn't see the piñata.

They yelled: "Move to your left."

"A little further."

"Now move to the right."

"Take a swing."

My boots dragged on the gravel. What could I do? I made a high errant swing. Whistles grew louder. There were more directions, some contradicting each other. I twisted my palms into the duct tape and swung lower, like Gerald Young chasing a curveball. This time my bat connected with the piñata. Items emptied from its belly.

I pulled the bandana up onto my forehead and saw that airplane bottles of alcohol decorated the ground. "What is this, Lupe?" I said, dropping the bandana over a little bottle. I took the bat and swung it flat across the donkey's head. Another swing ripped

open the side of its stomach. Everything dropped: more bottles, sour candies, candles, prayer cards. Something else. It stood on edge, a sea blue I knew well.

"Congratulations," Lupe said to me again. She bent down, picked up my passport, handed it to me. "You're like the rest of us now—another indocumentado."

"Congratulations," Jose Luis also said. "Smile, Anzana. Life doesn't end when your work visa expires."

I threw the passport down into my backpack.

"I'm sorry," Lupe said. "I didn't think you would be so angry. Your other secrets are still safe with your compañera. The visa is no big problem."

Everyone drank the liquor like baby bottles. I bent down and chose a rum bottle, with palm trees and a sailboat on its label. The cap opened easily. Lupe protested but I held my free hand to her face. "Remember, safe secrets," I said, taking the liquid into my mouth. White rum swished like bathwater and I closed my throat, a drain plug. Acid climbed up my stomach into my throat. Still holding my breath, I walked past the piñata and the stereo and the megaphone to the edge of the vestibule. Out of Lupe's sight I spit the alcohol, as Jose Luis did with tobacco juice. The liquid stained my jeans and boots. From the periphery I overheard Angel complain about an injury, his shoulder. "When the doctors get here, I'll say I need Vicodin. I can sell the pills I don't use."

In turn, I heard Lupe complain of her toothache, the dead brown tooth in the middle of her smile. Some nights when she couldn't sleep I wondered if the lullabies weren't for her sons but for herself. I stood alone and listened to one person after another complaining about illnesses and injuries. Their candor rose along with their drunkenness.

Fever. Headaches. Infected blisters. I couldn't say what I needed from the doctors, so once again I shouldered my backpack. Lupe said nothing as I left the center and even Chito stayed behind, attracted to the smell of sweetbread and liquor.

Wind from the mountains penetrated my coat, bumps rising over my skin. I recalled damp Seattle winters when I brought umbrellas everywhere. Locals told me it wasn't cool to have umbrellas. I told them it wasn't cool to tell me what was cool. I thought of meals professors served to international students on holidays. Many huge platefuls had twisted my stomach and I kept eating as the Americans did. One professor told me how families ate together on Día de Acción de Gracias and named what they were thankful for. I had been thankful then even for stomach pains, for rain, for umbrellas, for losing seasons from the Mariners—thankful for everything which kept me from Honduras, the blue ocean miles which brought exports north and remittances south. Now that I had no home in Seattle, no home in Honduras, what was there to be thankful for? I was thankful that the lines in the road were clearer. I pulled the coat tight around me. I lowered my head and walked back to the cabana, trying to be proud of my swings, even the ones that had missed.

Chapter Seven

After leaving Anza's apartment, I drove the Seattle streets without destination. Wind teakettled through a cracked window. Daylight burned bright veins in dashboard vinyl. The city I'd lived in all my life and suddenly I was unsure where to go. Whether to my mother's or my father's. Whether north or south. Since the campaign started I'd moved back in with them, separately. Two sets of clothes. Two toothbrushes. Two sets of everything. Half of me in each place. I thought I'd hold them together. Instead, they floated further apart like icebergs—one of my legs on each and the pelvis splitting.

I passed Pike Place Market. Highway 99. The viaduct. Belltown. In the distance, Bainbridge Island sloped like a forehead. I followed cars in front of me for blocks at a time. Along the waterfront I started to notice pieces of my wardrobe on other people. It started with someone walking past in my same Obama shirt. Then some jerk had my messenger bag. A man bent to tie his shoelaces wearing my New Balances. A pair of identical jeans kicked down the sidewalk. Someone passed with my same car. It got worse. A man exiting a café and blowing on an uncapped drink had my same face. Our nosebones were both long and straight, the cartilage then downhooking at the end like wilted grassblades. Our mouths drooped toward canted chins. I could only guess at his eye color, and decided on an identical dull blue. Clearly this guy was an actor cast to play Daniel Rose. Then he snapped like he'd forgotten something and slipped back inside the café, out of sight from my rearview.

While I caromed across the city I considered whether the waterfront specter had something to tell me. Should I have pulled over? Was there etiquette for such

encounters? Or do you stand there dumbly mirroring each other—he moves a little, and then you move a little, in an uncomfortable dance where neither knows who's leading?

I was just another body amongst similar ones. What are these bodies for anyway? Bodies breathe. Bodies bleed. They regulate temperature and glucose, sate brain and organs. Homeostasis. Keep themselves alive. Self-absorbed creatures. Me first. Always the starring roles in their own production. Maybe I was miscast. I wished I could unscar the scars, sew up my thin-walled duodenum. Bodies tried to start over, set their odometers back to zero. A car horn honked. Once, twice, thrice—a driver's middle finger saluting through an open window.

Millions of tiny Daniel Roses swam inside Anza. A Honduran woman who wanted nothing more to do with me and my body. She would fly home and never think of me again. I was a myth, a mumble, a mistake. Maybe someone walking Tegucigalpan streets would remind her of me. Or she'd remember Seattle. City of Something.

A round structure with green metal ribs flashed into view. Safeco Field. My father's office. Gassing the Subaru through a yellow, I steered toward his condo. He could bring me to the airport for my flight to Texas, whereas my mother didn't drive. Nor did she like baseball, and she never watched the games my father filmed.

My father's building was new. They hadn't even painted lines for the parking spots. The elevator smelled of rental cars. Overhead lights in the condo were dimmed, jazz station thrumming. IKEA furnishings made the place an upscale dorm, walls half

brick, half navy paint. Hardwood floors. Granite countertops. Stainless steel fixtures. Classy in a box. Flatscreen television with plastic still covering.

Through a screen door to the porch I saw my father. A woman stood next to him in hip-hugging jeans and a pink fleece draped over her shoulders. Pushing herself back and forth against the railing with a wrist-push, the routine gave her a childish affect.

"Hey Daniel," my father said, peeking in to the living room. "Come out here. You remember Joanne."

Joanne had dimples and blonde hair falling to her soft jawline. She had a solid pear frame and didn't seem much older than thirty-five. We met once before, briefly, and now she'd graduated to woman-on-the-porch status. Perhaps this was the reason my father called to see which nights I'd be sleeping there.

"It's nice to see you, Daniel," she said, pausing with uncertainty between the two syllables of my name—Dan-Yull. "What an amazing view from this place, right?"

To the north: an empty lot and the stadiums.

To the west: industrial cranes and gray-blue water stretching toward West Seattle.

"Right," I said.

"Just amazing." She clutched a glass of red wine close to her chest as if to warm it with body heat. Afternoon light hit the porch with the muted hue of winter's approach.

"We watched the election," my father said. He spanned his arms over Joanne and me, pulling us together like we had fresh glue on our ribs he wanted to stick.

"Ray says you work in politics. That's amazing too," she said. "Did you learn a lot during the campaign?" Joanne's pink glossed lips were held half-open, ready to ask another question if I didn't respond quick.

I shirked from the Elmers embrace. "Politics aren't so different from medicine," I said. "Either way you're just keeping things from getting worse."

"Well your man Barack knocked it into the nosebleeds," my father said. He sipped a beer. "A couple good swings got you the win."

I noticed plates of shrimp tails and cream-sauced linguini strands and my innards threw a tantrum.

"You want some?" my father asked. "I also bought non-alcoholic beer."

I skipped the O'Douls and dropped leftovers into my empty circle of stomach.

They stayed on the porch. She had worked a couple years in PR for my father's sports station; since she wasn't getting any younger she wanted to break into broadcasting. My father didn't care about broadcasting, he cared about baseball. It started as a foster kid in Spokane. Years later, while playing catcher for the University of Washington, he blew out his knee. He kept his scholarship by running video, then had cameraman gigs in high school sports and assignments with the Mariners' farm system: Single A in Bellingham, Double A in Everett, Triple A in Tacoma, and eventually got called to the big show—behind the camera rather than on the field. He tried keeping his dream of playing alive through me, though I wasn't any good. Sometimes he told me how well he would've played if he were the catcher for the Mariners, or for my high school team. His imaginary statistics were quite impressive.

Joanne smiled with wine-stained teeth and touched my father's upper arm. I overheard her saying: "You and your son look so alike." My father had a middle-aged boyish quality with close-cropped hair, forearm muscles like piano wires, a steep jawline. Her comparison was generous—my frame atrophied, the scar on my face a Nike swoosh from ear to chin.

Then they fell into a poorly blocked kiss. His head inclined; she kept hers back, lips puckered as though tasting citrus. I'd never seen him kiss a woman other than my mother. This might as well have been the first kiss of his life. They saw me-seeing-them and unhooked their bodies. The door slid open and closed. Dishes stacked in the copper sink. Water ran. Something they said at the same time while linguini slithered from my fork to mouth to stomach and settled in oily curls. Acid crept into my small intestine and on the radio a sax soloed. Boy did I hate the saxophone.

"Hey slugger," my father said. "Maybe you should go to your room."

"Go to my room?" I was twenty-seven-years-old.

"I mean, Marjorie left something for you. On your bed."

Marjorie was the older sister of my friend Paul. I'd occasionally worked as an EMT for her catering events. "Does it look like a paycheck?" I said.

"Not unless your paycheck says Number 26."

In the bedroom I found Paul's Garfield High baseball duffel. It was canvas with a zipper I ran back and forth, the teeth interlocking, unlocking, interlocking. A note leaning against the duffel said, "Congratulations. I'll see you when you get back. –M."

Her handwriting was loopy red cursive. Was the note for me or her brother? Either way, hers wasn't the note I wanted.

At the airport, I worried about being recognized. I glimpsed the new medic reclining in his golf cart, waiting for something or nothing, thumbing through a magazine with Obama on the cover. No one noticed me. TSA let me be. I scanned the arrivals and departures board to see how many planes headed to Tegucigalpa. None, zero, count them on no hands. They must've had layovers in Mexico or Texas, where my plane would fly nonstop. I thought of inquiring at the ticket counter about Anza.

"One of your passengers has SARS," I would say. "Tell me when she's flying and I can take care of it."

"Do you have proof?" the ticket agent would say, tired but well made-up.

"I had sex with her. So now I have SARS too."

SARS doesn't transmit that way, although ticket agents wouldn't know that. Then they'd call in their new EMT, and raise the terror alert to orange.

On the airplane, a circle of light illuminated me. I remembered my mother describing her miscarriage. She said it looked like a little circle. A brown slice of lemon. My mother never said whether it would have been brother or sister. Then again, if the child survived I probably wouldn't have been born. An empty circle followed me around. It would be filled for moments at a time—by patients' eyes, the letter O, a

sphincter, my urethra, airplane light—and then it would be empty again. An only child's only child.

I waited outside the Austin airport, duffel in hand. Paul pulled up. Back from Afghanistan for good, he'd bought a black truck with oversize tires that stood out from the parade of 4x4s. The dashboard shone blue and the engine went from idle to active with none of the wheezing I'd grown accustomed to with my Subaru. On the dark highway Paul changed lanes like a kid flicking at a loose tooth. With his big round hands and shoulders and head, he looked like an artist's sketch using basic geometric shapes.

"You still driving that gray tin can?" Paul asked, new knotted muscles flexing above the elbow while he repositioned his grip.

"Until it dies," I said. "They'll have to bury me with it."

Beyond the bleak hills I'd watched during the plane's descent, Austin's cityscape was sharp and cosmopolitan. The meandering Guadalupe river ran through town and Paul pronounced the last syllable 'loop.'

"Capital of Texas," he said. "And, therefore, capital of the world."

We drove for an hour and arrived at his small house. It was a rambler with chainlink fenceposts driven down into caked soil and dirt for a front yard—somewhere you'd expect rattlesnakes nestled inside your boots. Packing boxes were scattered under the carport.

"This is the place you rented?"

"The place I bought. Home sweet home, and good riddance. Probably rented it a dozen times and barely lived in it. Kept waiting for a job on the base that never came through. Now it's sold to some private from Virginia who paid twenty thousand less than I did. Good to see you, Daniel."

"You too," I said to Paul's round presence. Five years had expanded him. I felt smaller and closer to the bone.

Lights from the nearby military base illuminated the night sky, filling spaces where stars would've been. I contemplated these lights first from Paul's house and then from an Army bar he dragged me to, saying I'd love it and the pool tables were always open. For Paul this may have been a good thing—he'd mastered the game. He held the cue like an arm-extension and cracked balls precisely into each other across the stained green table. After the first couple games and no impressive shots, I opted out. Then my friend really went to work, the same precision he once displayed on the pitcher's mound.

Growing up, I often pictured Paul as the brother I never had—my mother's miscarriage. Though we were the same age, I imagined him as the older sibling. With only his mother and sister at home, Paul was man-of-the-house decades before manhood, independent from the start, city bus for grocery shopping and own-packed lunches, plus own-packed baseball gear. We played in extremely-little little leagues where they plomp the ball atop a rubber tube and let kids swing as many times as they need. Paul's father died under tractor tires in Kent so mine gave us rides to the ballpark. By the time I got my license and was gifted a Subaru, I took over driving duties. My friend grew himself

into the ballplayer my father had wanted. An able-armed pitcher, Paul's signatures were a stinging slider and a two-seam fastball. I played left field—the deeper the better, satisfied to track the ball down and throw it crazily to the cutoff man like it might burn my hand. On the infrequent days my mother came, she'd just sketch the field, trees, cloud patterns, the bored left fielder whose head was solidly in those clouds.

Now Paul focused on his pool game, on his last military party. He smirked with his face sideways, at the same angle as my scar. "You see her?"

"Yeah." I nodded over classic rock and watched a woman move between patrons.

Paul aimed his pool stick at her halter-top. "She works here Thursday through Sunday, and likes to drink Schnapps when she gets off."

"So what?" I said, more interested in red pulses from planes through the window.

"You'll see so what," and he chalked my ribs with his cue, a blue streak down my shirt. The bartender noticed Paul. On a cork tray she brought a lager and double whiskey for him, soda water with a splash for me.

"You okay?" Paul asked. "You're quiet. Why don't you pick someone up? It'll be like old times, only we'll both get laid."

"Aren't we trying to get an early start?"

"We'll leave early, don't worry about that," he said. "In the desert you have to get up at 4:30 to beat the heat of the day. It's hard-wired for me to get up stupid early."

"I'm fine," I said. "You enjoy. I've got things on my mind is all."

"You like women still, right?"

"Nothing's changed," I said—ignorant to my sperm meeting Anza's egg, a wriggly advance through castle walls. The implantation stage had begun in Washington, while in Texas I drank brown liquid.

A jukebox looped through RollingStonesLynyrdSkynardLedZeppelinCreedence. The bar filled, growing louder and louder like a caricature of itself—an expatriate bar smack-dab in the United States. I had to keep reminding myself we were still in Texas in 2008, not Vietnam in the Seventies. Paul finished playing pool and led the bar in a hoisting of beverages; he said he was done with Afghanistan and was leaving this shithole for home. He pulled me to a karaoke microphone and started an off-key rendition of "You Can't Always Get What You Want." I made it partway through the first verse and then I choked on it. The absence of my voice was absorbed by other Army men crooning along. They harmonized Paul with arms-around-shoulders boisterousness while women got contact highs from the display. Perhaps moments like these should crystallize time, distill it down to a single point. A song sung aloud. An orange ball on a television bouncing over lyrics, syllable to syllable. Instead, time bootstomped my neck where Paul held me, his hips swaying. I wanted to be in Seattle. My compass pulled me north. The lyrics spoke directly to me: You can't always get what you want. Mick Jagger—the pouty-lipped nostalgia artist.

By the time I convinced Paul to head back, he scoffed at my offer of driving. "People around here respect Army Veteran plates," he said. "No one's gonna pull me

over." Palming his keys as though weighing them, he told me to sit in the back so the bartender could join him up front.

That night I decided to sleep in the truckbed and came inside only to brush my teeth. I regretted this immediately. My friend was on his back upright, thrusting noisily into the bartender, his undulant thighs a particularly blanched shade of white. I noticed how red hair was seemingly transplanted from his shaved head onto his pimpled chest. A tablecloth was unrolled onto the floor as a sheet with his baseball duffle as a pillow. A Schnapps bottle rested on its side testing the floor's levelness. As teenagers Paul and I rubbed our crotches to cable porn for five staticky seconds before the stations cut out. Now I watched five seconds of my friend's display before hightailing it outside with a dry toothbrush. He didn't experience the same pain I felt during intercourse.

Doing my best to ignore their sex-sounds and fall asleep in the truck, I gazed out toward the sky. Beyond the light pollution I guessed at the position of the stars. Were there better stars in Seattle? How about in Honduras? And I remembered how the stars are fixed and it's the earth that spins on its drunken axis.

The next day we headed out late, sun already crested ten degrees above the hills. Paul said his hangover was turning to stone and so he took down aspirin without water, white pills foaming his gums like rabies. Our conversation never returned to the bartender, to the bar, to what had occupied Paul during the dusty weeks since his Army discharge. The highway covered flat geographies. I didn't usually get car sick but the

speed and heat made a blender out of me. We passed the town of Lubbock and I watched sweat droplets form on my friend's shoulder, where he'd tattooed a medical cross.

"How was it being a medic anyway?" I asked. "Any good stories?

"It's a job," he said, rubbing the sweat. "Someone gets hurt, you fix them up."

"It was a job for me," I said. "Clocking in and hanging out in the airport. But you were at war. That's something."

Paul blinked hard as if reading something cribbed on his eyelids. "Something I'm done with."

"Did you lose anyone under your watch?" I asked.

"Never ask a woman her age," he said.

I folded hands beneath biceps, seeking to fold into myself. As an EMT, I wanted to learn something about the body. Instead, I learned protocols. Nothing beneath the surface. Nothing explaining what it truly means to be human.

Paul and I shot through Texas. We exhausted his CD collection and turned to sermons and talk radio on the dial's right side. Then, somewhere in the vicinity of the state border, Paul asked about Anza.

I played dumb.

Paul laughed and slid through old text messages.

"Why don't you keep your eyes on the road?" I said, not entirely comfortable with him driving instead of me.

"Because the road doesn't turn for another hundred miles," Paul said. Then he found the text message and recited it aloud. "*Falling in love. For the night anyway*. And I told you to do it for your country but not to skip out on driving with me."

It was hard listening to him read my message, mainly because I couldn't deny writing it. "You've got some memory, Paul. At least you didn't lose that in the war."

"I figured you'd either shack up with her and ditch me, or else you'd go whack off to Obama ads. Erection night is a big night."

"Glad you thought through all the options."

"So did you do it?"

Paul turned toward me with a gaze so unflinching I had to turn and monitor the highway in his absence.

"She was a coworker," I said. "From Honduras."

"Honduras," Paul said. He said it again, as though repetition might give the situation clarity, time for the surrounding chaparral to weigh in. "Where's that again?"

"Central America."

"By Panama?"

"Not far."

"Now that you mention it, I think there's a base there. A guy in the mess hall was always talking about it—Tejuicygalps."

"She didn't want to go back. But American visas are hard to find."

I pictured the hotel room, Anza assuring me she couldn't become pregnant, the scars on her back, the forceful sex.

"Women," Paul said, as though a universal truth were contained in this word. He cracked his knuckles and neck.

Jostling the radio dial, I craved a distraction. News headlines came in and out and I followed them like a fisherman dragging his fly along an eddy line. At a Texaco station I bought *USA Today*, which I hadn't read since my last EMT shift. One article discussed the accomplishments and failures of the Bush presidency. Another mentioned the outgoing president's pardons. His final gestures foreshadowed eventual memoirs, early steps in a campaign to revise history into a kinder frame. Even in Bush-country, it seemed he'd already been forgotten, bumper stickers sun-bleached and dustified.

Paul glared. "I'm sick of you just sitting there reading."

"What do you want me to do? It's a pretty long drive."

"Yeah and you're making it longer. If you're gonna keep reading that shit," he said, "read it to me. You're the goddamn thespian."

So I agreed. As a bastardized version of Anza I read aloud, tracking my finger across newsprint, ink smearing. When I wound back to politics, Paul waved it away.

"Nothing about the president," he said. "Or the Middle East. I don't want to hear from some reporter who wasn't there. And if he was there, fuck him. Reporters stick to hotels, drinking knock-off whiskey poured into Johnnie Walker bottles."

So I read everything else: headlines, sports, arts & entertainment, business. I wished I had a megaphone. When I finished, we reopened the windows. Newspaper pages fluttered around the cab and we hucked them onto the highway. Clouds held heat-lightning and the scar on my face started to ache. I remembered Paul finding me in that

snowy treewell. He'd been back from basic training and I'd just finished my first college semester. We skied together outside my cabin, the two of us alone in a silent forest. There was a granite cliff band, maybe twenty feet high. We paused there briefly. I agreed to jump out over it. The slope below led to a hemlock. As soon as I landed there, I lost a ski. Hoar frost was grown in a lattice. My speed increased, body frozen up like whenever I batted. The hemlock punched my skull. Blood emptied from my face. My teeth were strewn amongst bark shavings, my jaw dented aluminum. "Are you okay?" Paul asked, after skiing around the cliff. "Don't speak. Don't nod. Just blink if you hear me." My vision shattered. Or maybe my goggles. Snowflakes melted into droplets and the world became dark disks.

We pulled into a diminutive New Mexico town. Hills shaded the moon and our motel sign said "Vacanc." Paul opened two beers, setting them atop the hood like gurgling volcanoes. He sipped foam and asked why I didn't do the same. He knew about my digestion and asked anyway, grinning. We decided to eat before checking in and walked down main street, a downgraded highway whose blinking traffic signals swung like screen doors. Lampposts stamped the sidewalk, maybe every third one working. Day's heat lingered and mixed with the onset of desert night.

The few open establishments gleamed. In the manner of insects driven toward light we walked into a Mexican restaurant. A tinny bell announced our entrance and we stood alone by the Please Wait To Be Seated sign. There was a party in the large main room. Streamers cobwebbed across the rafters and glass-tube candles adorned the tables.

On a stage at the far end of the room, a young girl wore a dress with all types of lace—at the elbow, vining up her collar, embroidering slight concavities the dress emphasized. Camera flashes captured her fluttering eyelids and she changed the angle upon the photographers' instructions, a doting extended family. Her skin shone and her makeup painted apple cheekbones pink. Tarry eye shadow diminished the girl's own eyes.

"Well I'll be," Paul said, imitating a Southern accent. "A real debutante ball."

The party grew aware of our presence, the two white guys leering zoo-style, only we looked like the animals—unshaven, sweat drying, slack-mouthed from hunger, chewing complimentary toothpicks. A banner said *Feliz Quinceañera*.

"It's her birthday," I said to Paul.

"Like a sweet sixteen," he said, "only Mexicans ripen a year early."

A waiter approached, straightening a white button-up into black slacks and a silver belt, sleeves puffed out like a magician's. "Hey Señores," he said, leading us to a table shoved against the window, out of view of the party.

"Don't worry, we won't bother your little shindig," Paul said.

"The kitchen is mostly closed but we can accommodate a small order for the caballeros."

"A small order?" Paul said. "We've been in my truck for twelve hours. We want to rest our sore backsides and eat a proper meal. Abierto means open."

"Give us a couple minutes to decide," I said.

Then the waiter was gone a long time, dealing with the party. Paul picked at his incisors with a toothpick. He stood up and walked toward the Quinceañera. I followed.

Still onstage, the birthday girl let a woman, presumably her mother, re-pin curls flopping down her shoulders. Another woman—was it her aunt?—struggled to place a corsage above the girl's left breast. The girl's dress hourglassed her body, designed to catch men in a game of caught-you-looking. She was a girl; her body was a woman.

The waiter approached, dancing from one foot to the other like he had blisters. Other men stroked mustaches. They did so not contemplatively. This forced me to fold my arms and knuckle my unimpressive biceps forward.

"Please return to your seats," said the waiter, picking at oversized cuffs. "I can take your orders now."

"The buffet looks better," Paul said. Long tables flexed under fajitas platters and tortillas, chicken, beans, fruit, sweating water carafes.

"If you won't order from the menu," the waiter said, "then please leave."

"Two burritos with carne," I said. "Mine with no spice."

The waiter didn't move. I considered how you can't stand between two men in a triangle, even if it seems like the right analogy. The next round of photos began with the birthday girl. The men, I suppose they were uncles, continued ruffling mustaches against the grain and stroking them smooth, speaking about *los gringos*.

Finally the waiter walked toward the kitchen. Paul grinned. "I wonder if they do these parties in Honduras. Did your girlfriend come of age like this?"

"I doubt it," I said, picturing Anza reading to the apple factory. I stared directly into the party lights and in the blank white afterimage I tried to rid my mind of her. At the same time, I tried not focusing on the party's clenched jaws and Spanish expletives.

The birthday girl led her family to the buffet table. A three-man band lugged their instruments onstage and started up—guitar, trumpet, accordion.

Pushing Paul in the direction of our table had little effect. "I've had about enough of this treatment," he said, his voice rising in volume like a note from the trumpet bell. "Racism, plain and simple. We're in *New Mexico*, not old Mexico."

"Why don't you sit down?" I said, meeting Paul at the back of the buffet line. "The camarero said he'd take care of us. Our orders will be out in no time."

"If you want to sit and wait, then sit and wait."

Paul loaded his plate with corn tortillas, meat, and rice, while I doled out very sorrys and lo sientos to whoever would listen. The waiter brought our burritos in white to-go bags. I said we would pay extra for Paul's food, which he ate standing up.

Lights dimmed and the music softened from ranchero to a ballad. I hoped this would lend us a clean exit. But neither of us moved. Silver lace on the birthday girl's dress turned orange as she moved timidly to the dance floor in front of the stage. She raised her left arm up and lowered the right one down, wearing long Madonna-style gloves. Then she switched her arms, right up and left down, as though they opposed one other. Her abdomen shone flat and pink as she began to undulate her body, adding in high heel strikes against the wood floor. She kept time with the musicians in a clear beat. Everyone stayed silent during this dance number while occasional camera flashes held the birthday girl in even deeper focus—muscle and bone under all that pink and lace. To great applause, she finished her dance and curtsied.

"Bonita," Paul belched. Somewhere he'd found a glass of tequila. "Just bonita."

"Sure," I said. "A bonita performance."

"I mean the birthday girl. You think one of them is her boyfriend?" he asked, indicating younger men with barely shadow for mustaches.

"Maybe they just got roped into wearing those tuxedoes," I said.

"One way to know for sure—see who tries cutting in."

"That's not a good idea," I said. "She's too old for you anyway."

"Well the tequila thinks it's an excellent idea," Paul said. And he walked to the dance floor. The band played an energetic tune that five or six couples danced to. Paul approached the birthday girl who drank from a glass of water. It felt like watching another version of me and Anza. Not-Anza set down her water and Not-Me spoke to her, extending his hand. She shook it shyly and lowered her gaze. Not-Me pointed up at the streamers, the band, with the same exactitude of his pool cue. Not-Anza laughed. Other couples slowed their dances until they weren't dancing, just holding each other and staring. No one took pictures. The band played final notes—guitar strum, accordion push, trumpet bleat—and sound diminished. Not-Me touched Not-Anza's low back.

The waiter tried to separate the two from behind. His reception was an open palm to the chest, collapsed him backward into a woman, who fell against a table. The birthday girl pulled away and ran into the arms of a man I assumed was her father. At this point, Paul and I reunited at the center of the dance floor. We were being encircled as I'd only seen in movies, silent determinations of who moves first.

"He's drunk," I said to the room, a pantomimed drink at my lips. "Borracho."

Paul then lifted his shirt. The handle of a pistol curved like a banana.

I pushed his shirt back down.

The waiter met us at the center of the circle. He no longer looked like a magician. "Guys, just get the fuck out of here. Your food is on the house."

"No, we'll pay," Paul said. "It's a gift to the lovely girl in pink."

Paul pulled a twenty from his wallet and dropped it onto the dance floor. I took another twenty and handed it carefully, my jaw aching from just the threat of violence. We stepped onto the sidewalk, our departure announced by the same tinny bell.

The engine came alive and kicked exhaust toward me. Again I offered to drive and Paul refused me. So we drifted at twelve miles per hour, he gassed it to thirty, slamming the brakes at a stop sign which sent our bodies toward the dash. The tires collided with curbs and ruts and potholes. We passed the restaurant and Paul side-fisted the horn with sharp notes reminiscent of the mariachi trumpet. Shadows cast by the moon made long spectral shapes Paul swerved from. I took a cold burrito bite and tasted perhaps the world's hottest peppers. My stomach did jumping-jacks up toward my glottis and esophagus. I spat carne out the window, which landed mostly against glass. Paul asked what the hell I did that for. I said I could ask him the same thing.

The alcohol and adrenaline reached equilibrium in Paul's system on the open highway. Our speed settled to a solid twenty over. Straightaways were sprints. Curves chattered my molars when we crossed into the opposite lane. Paul's words about police respecting veterans' plates reverberated in my mind, the mile markers coming closer and closer together until they might've marked some shorter distance. Road signs announced

rural highway information about wind gusts and local burger joints, numeric rivalries between elevations and town populations. 700. 500. Paul asked for a beer. I said I couldn't reach them. Night cinched around us. A deer crossing light pulsed like a yellow Cyclops eye.

"Any snow yet in Washington?"

"A little," I said. "Why?"

"Snow equals skiing. Skiing equals your cabin. You're mad still. I piss off a few spics and you're mad?"

"Why do you have to talk like that?"

"Daniel, you're the one who fucked the Honduran girl. And since you live with your folks, and I'm dropping my stuff with Marjorie and my mom, we should head to the cabin. We both know your family's not gonna use it."

I just sat there shaking my head no, and then pressed my face against the beef-stained glass. Winter whispered from the Sangre de Cristo Mountains. The edge of our headlights unnaturally obscured everything beyond it. Within this odd whitish darkness, the landscape made vague shapes. Something moved. I told Paul to slow down; he dropped his foot deeper onto the gas. Transmission whined into overdrive. An animal shape traipsed alongside the highway shoulder. "Paul," I said, as though his name would summon an ancient authority. By the time the animal made its unwise right-angle zag, Paul was staring down the tarry road like it challenged him to a fight.

The sideways body of the deer met the front bumper mid-stride. A split second paused and expanded, muscles and sinew and fur lit up like the museum exhibit it was to

become. The seatbelt held my lower body while the rest of me shot elastically forward. My chin and jaw punched the dashboard. The truck fishtailed and the animal somersaulted across the hood, antlers cracking the windshield into dark circles we hunched to see through. Paul careened to a stop straddling the rumble strip, half in the lane and half in the shoulder. He palmed the hazard lights and we spilled onto pavement. All of this is to say we hit a deer, had been hit by a deer. That was the simple part. More complicated was the animal still jittering, eyes wet opals with human lids. Muscles misfired in the broken back legs and around the ribs, which themselves looked like bent antlers. Tallowy liquid emptied onto the pavement from organs—its insides on the outside, film exposed. Blood fell from my chin and I held pressure there. Paul took a good moment with the deer and pulled up his shirt. He held the pistol to the animal's temple. I asked if there wasn't someone we could call, maybe they could save the thing.

"There's no one to call," Paul said. "And this is saving the thing."

In some grimace-smile combination, he pulled the trigger. Through its skull he fired once, twice, five times. The carcass writhed and then simply jolted at the final bullet's entry, like a punching bag slammed by heavyweight fists. Synovial fluid splattered the two of us as it had the windshield. Deer blood mingled with my own. Paul dragged the animal along the pavement. He propped the deer's head against a mile marker in artificial alertness. I didn't want to move, my body heavy. Was this how he dragged me from that snowy forest? Had he considered saving me the same way?

"Come on," Paul said. He spoke deep and clear and removed. For silent miles afterward, we painted the highway with a single headlight. I thought of a poem my grandfather often read in the cabin.

> Traveling through the dark I found a deer
> dead on the edge of the Wilson River road.
> It is usually best to roll them into the canyon:
> that road is narrow; to swerve might make more dead.

We arrived at another motel. Steam escaped from the hood of Paul's truck, bent upward like a flexed elbow. Radiator fluid dripped onto the pavement. Hair and fat clumped in the grill. Paul shambled across the motel parking lot. He mumbled something about getting the fuck to bed, then bumped into the lobby's automatic door.

The one man concierge stood plank-straight. Recently emerged from a backroom cot, the wrinkles on his blazer had the same quality as the sheets. He informed me of our shared room number and slid me the keys. "What happened to your face?" he asked.

"Which time?" I wasn't about to get into it.

A computer perched on a corner table. I asked the man, who wetted his palms with spit and attempted to smooth his jacket, if they had guest internet. He nodded and slid a card with the login code, paper tacky from saliva. Sheepishly he tiptoed to the backroom and left me alone in the lobby, elevator jazz playing so low it's questionable whether it was there. The computer took a month to boot up and I'm certain I could've slept in that chair. There was only one email to write. Not to my father. Not to my mother to receive on her paint-splattered laptop. Not to anyone but Anza.

I typed slow with only one hand available, the other still against my chin. I said I wondered about her. About whether Honduras was different from how she remembered. And though I didn't know the extent of it, I said I'd left part of me with her. I could only send the email, roll it into the canyon. A new message instantly appeared. It said that Anza's email account no longer existed. Each letter separated on the screen. Blood browned my palm.

Chapter Eight

My father came along to the old house. He stood by the doorframe and looked extraordinarily hurried, the way he passed a fedora between hands and checked his watch every third pass. "Even now I'm waiting on her," he said. They told me dinner was both of their ideas; that might've been news to my father.

It hurt to think about the last time I'd been in the house so I called after my mother. I heard something upstairs and creaked toward the source of the noise. My mother was in her bedroom, hunched at a lamp-lit table, a yellowed map of the Americas stretched before her. I watched the slow vibrating placement of glue on a green piece of seaglass and then she affixed it to the map's coastline along the skinny tip of Chile.

From downstairs, my father called: "Daniel, Sandy—are you two coming?"

"Is that your father down there?" my mother said.

"Who else would it be?" I wasn't sure I wanted an answer. "Get dressed for dinner. The map will wait."

The three of us walked down Fifteenth Avenue. A bus had parked there, driver reading a paperback and waiting for her route to begin. We passed the cemetery, Capitol Hill's highest point. The gate was open and my mother wanted to visit her parents' graves. The saddest part of the whole deal between my parents had to be the two plots in front us which were supposed to be theirs. Bought and paid for by my grandfather, grass kept trim and green year-round. I wondered if this had been intended as some kind of pressure: stay together so you can die together.

My mother bent to one knee that night, placing trilliums on her parents' graves. She looked like a child and an old woman in a single moment. Her light brown hair fell in a braid onto her shoulder. Her skin was turning to tissue paper and the only makeup she wore was rouge over flat cheeks, a little brushed against her balance-beam nose.

"Our reservations are for six, Sandy." My father offered her his hand. Instead, she used her own father's grave as support.

"Ray," she said, "watches hurt my wrist so I don't wear them anymore."

"That's why I'm telling you, it's time to get going."

They looked so mismatched it was kind of ridiculous—my father in collared shirt and black sweater, navy slacks, and that fedora he held but didn't wear, my mother in linen pants that would've worked for Tae Kwon Do and a sweater sewn in a Native American diamond pattern. Wherever I fit into this picture, it was a reluctant cameo.

At the Thai restaurant, I ordered decaf coffee and asked about the art piece.

"I'm donating it to Marjorie for her fundraiser tomorrow. She told me you and Paul will work there as medics."

My bandaged chin ached. I plunged the coffee before it steeped—weak and watery but at least hot. That was news to me. Calling the waitress over, I announced our meals. We'd been coming here for years and tonight had no need to divert: spring rolls, coconut soup, curry, noodles. All zero stars.

My mother said, "I'm finding seaglass which swims the ocean trying to return home, like spawning salmon. I'm bringing them home onto the map."

Head-checking to see if anyone else was listening, my father said: "So how do you know where the seaglass comes from? Do they speak to you?"

"Who are you looking for, Ray?" said my mother, sliding a pair of chopsticks from their paper sheath and working them apart. "Is your girlfriend here?"

My father walked his fedora to the bathroom.

"Daniel," my mother asked. "Have you ever made love?"

"Mom."

"Well, have you?"

I poured more from the French press. "Of course."

"Then you know it's not just an act but an emotion, right? The way another person feels under or above you."

"Yes."

"Well that's good, because your father doesn't. Ray thinks sex is something to spread around like those seeds baseball players chew."

"Sunflower seeds."

"Beautiful flowers that look like skeletons when the seeds are picked."

"What's your point, Mom?"

"The players weren't the only ones who had women in different cities. There's no other man in this world who takes as many showers or does as many loads of laundry as your father."

"You two are divorced now," I said, rain starting to ding onto the roof and flood the gutters. "That means you don't have to worry about what did or didn't happen."

"I haven't seen any girlfriends around lately. So are you single right now?" She said this like she'd start dishing to her friends, who would spread the news to any spinsters from their bloodlines.

I told her I'd had a date on election night but it hadn't worked out.

"Maybe you should date Marjorie," my mother said. "She has excellent taste in art. Which is more than I could say for your father. "

He returned in tandem with the arrival of the food. With knife and fork, my father stabbed meat and vegetables and bathed them in sauce; the faster he was done, the faster he'd be gone. My mother went at her plate with chopsticks that ticked against porcelain. Her mouth screwed up when she bent her wrist, aching tendonitis. Twice she dropped food from her spoon onto the tablecloth and both times slid her napkin over the stain. I avoided chili flakes and the cementing facts of my family. Thai pop songs played, speakers hidden behind potted jungle plants. The same bus drove by, stabbing spears of light into rain. Its austere momentum brought it toward a corner park with benches built around a maple tree. The tree had lover-carved bark. M & L, Ellen & Rich, Ray & Sandy.

Sideways rain sped up the walk home. My mother and I changed into dry clothes. After she tied the sash of an eggplant-colored bathrobe, she made a pot of tea. I set it on the table for her, clearing away South American maps with old country names. My father, still wet, dug through shelves. He showed off a VHS from a Mariners game. The 1995 playoff win against the Yankees. The one where Ray Rose manned the first-base camera and Paul and I watched from left field. My mother dismissed the idea of

watching it and I agreed. After this consensus was expressed, my father's jaw tightened, as though trying to trap tea leaves in his molars. "Let's go then," he said to me.

"I guess I need to find my EMT uniform for tomorrow," I said. "Plus I'll pack up my ski gear. If it's all right, I'll spend a few weeks at the cabin."

"Fine with me," said my mother, who'd been willed the place.

What could my father say to that? He said to enjoy the mountains and drove back alone. I remembered the Kingdome demolition on March 26th, 2000. I was there. So was my mom. The three of us together had watched the implosion. My dad filmed it.

"Wake up." My mother opened the blinds and late morning tumbled into my old room. "I need your help with something."

I said, "I told you I'm leaving today."

"You're leaving tonight. Alki has the most incredible seaglass and you need to drive me out to West Seattle to pick some."

"It's not apples or bull kelp. You don't pick seaglass. You just find it."

"Come on, Oscar the Grouch. If you need breakfast we can stop at the bagel shop. Anything you want. I'm supposed to finish this piece by tonight."

"Can't you give them another piece? You've got a million of your map thingies."

"My Cartographics Series aren't map thingies. They happen to sell well with a gentleman in Vienna, and a collector in Japan has expressed interest."

"So why not have them make a donation in your name?"

"We're going, so you can either dress or come in your pajamas."

My mother took seriously her own costume suggestion. Along Alki Avenue, I sat parked in her unused Volvo and watched wind swish her eggplant bathrobe, zipped beneath a fleece. She wore wool socks and some kind of square-heeled boot. Sandy Rose—lady of colors, lady of art, lady of arthritis—carried a pail down to the beach like someone playing a girl in a community theatre. She stumbled over rocks on her way to the sand and then removed her socks and boots. I met her there and carried the pail. She had birthed me, made blood, given me her genes, and only with her permission could I occupy the cabin.

"Look closely at each one." My mother inspected a rimmed piece of amber glass. "Where do you think this came from?"

"Bottom of a Coke bottle."

"Wrong," she said. "From sand. All these pieces came from sand. Sand, ash, and lime heated to thirty-six hundred degrees. The bottle shatters at high seas and drifts home like Coho."

I inspected the piece again and felt safe with my Coke bottle guess.

My mother pointed to a few others in the sand and I gathered them. She gave each one a thumbs up or a thumbs down before I plunked them in the pail.

This was my mother's artistic method. She started with an extensive collection of antique maps of the Americas. The closer you got to Seattle, the better her selection. My grandfather's hand-drawn logging maps were stalwarts—Elliott Bay in Washington

Territory and the surrounding mountains. With one of these rare maps as her starting point, Sandy Rose used mixed media to modernize or reinterpret it. She overlaid strips from tourist maps. She interspersed Duwamish Indian cartography. She'd taken Snoqualmie National Forest maps and drawn ski resort trail maps using pine needles and spray paint. In the words of Anza, "Someone ruined that map."

Today, my mother completed her piece which began as a hand-drawing by an Australian sailor, roughly demonstrating the Americas. My mother shaped the bits of seaglass with a rock drill and cement-glued them over the shorelines. Seaglass followed Washington to Oregon, Oregon to California, then on to Mexico, doglegging into Central American shores. Honduras was a green space arced between the Pacific and Atlantic with mountains sketched across it and the seaglass like a storm wall. When finished placing the final pieces from our field trip, my mother signed it with gold acrylic paint.

The rest of the day went to packing. My station wagon held skis, boots, poles, hats, socks, gloves, pants, jackets, fleeces, sweaters, and goggles. The backseat was dedicated to reading materials—medical textbooks, Washington geology, my grandfather's dog-eared William Stafford collection. The passenger's seat held my computer, CDs, my mother's seaglass art. About the piece, she said with surprising self-awareness to hang it in the cabin if it didn't sell.

At the convention center, a security guard greeted me. He spoke the silent language of uniformed employees paid too little. My EMT shirt scratched at my chin,

which was bandaged and still sensitive. The short sleeves made my unexercised arms feel cold white and weak, and I opted for a long underwear top.

Marjorie greeted me with a kiss on the cheek. She wore black pants and a red blouse shades brighter than her hair, burlesque mascara brushed across lashes and brows. On her wrists jangled bracelets with jade. As I followed her, I noticed the length of her neck and the strength in her posture, knees flexed and torso straight, how her upper body was thinner than her legs which made her seem a composite. She said, "I hope your jaw was cheaper to fix than Paul's truck."

"What was the damage?"

"You tell me," she said, and pointed out the first aid table at the back of the ballroom. Marjorie went to check on things in the kitchen and I inspected the first aid kit, which was missing a little of everything. The handbook had rudimentary instructions. If someone had a seizure, you could learn all you needed from page 81. If a woman complained of abdominal pain, page 64 said to check for ectopic pregnancy.

A string quartet warmed up on the large carpeted stage. They whined their bows and struggled with billowy indigenous garb. I couldn't tell you which country their threads came from; the ballroom was outfitted with decorations from all over the world. Marjorie showed me to the auction staging area where I left my mother's artwork.

"What's the deal?" I asked. "Some kind of jungle-themed party?"

"The stuff is mostly theirs. MCI is based in Seattle but they work all over. Listen, Paul was supposed to help with setting up."

“It’s okay,” I said, and I helped arranged chairs and tables. Each table had a placard representing a country where Medical Care International operated: Somalia. Burma. Eritrea. Haiti. Bolivia. Big names in the world of non-profit medicine, I supposed. Beneath the country name, placards described diseases the organization fought, health risks in local communities. Well-to-do attendees began striding in and were seated by ethnically dressed staff members.

With the program about to begin, I sat alone at the first aid table. A man came by and introduced himself. “I’m Doctor Jeffrey Wyman,” he said, “Director of MCI.” Doctor Wyman had long articulate fingers with pronounced whorls at each knuckle and I figured him for some kind of surgeon. Bifocals swung at his neck from a fabric chain which belied an aged athletic musculature.

“Daniel Rose,” I said. “EMT basic.”

“They leave you back here all alone? You’re supposed to have a chess partner. That’s how it was when I worked ambulance shifts a million years back.”

“My partner hit a deer—he should be here soon.”

“Well, shouldn’t be any problems for you unless they added shellfish to the menu. Other than that just relax and enjoy. It gets maudlin, my ask especially, but you gotta tug heartstrings to open purse strings. Nothing worse than a ten-hour jeep ride to a village with enough medicine for every tenth patient—Madagascar, 1994.”

“Sounds worse than anything I’ve dealt with.”

“I was gonna say you could work with us. Whatever they pay, we’ll halve it.”

I said, “Doctors don’t need an EMT getting in their way.”

"At least you understand blood barriers and CPR. The rest of medicine is just extra training. Finding your niche, whatever speaks to you." Doctor Wyman said his was obstetrics, women's health.

I thought about the woman in the airport, the woman in the hotel room. "Nothing's spoken to me yet," I said. "So you go to all these countries?"

"Used to. I'm mostly behind a desk now. All roads lead to desks. I get out a few times a year with our mobile clinic. Unemployed mill towns, immigrant laborers."

I asked if they ever did work in Honduras.

Wyman scrolled down a mental list with swollen eyes. "Nicaragua we've got a clinic. Some relief work in San Salvador. Nothing for the U.S.S. Honduras. You speak Spanish?"

"Marginally," I admitted. "I know someone from there. Thought maybe you'd seen the country."

By this time lights had lowered and the band started up in earnest, instruments tuned and costumes sorted. Guests found their tables and were finishing first drinks; waiters brought appetizers. Photographs projecting over the stage showed medical teams at work, children and mothers from five continents.

"Like I said," Wyman stage-whispered, "maudlin. That's what sells for these stuffed shirts. Excuse me."

Around the same time the doctor stepped onstage, Paul wandered in. He smelled like whiskey and wasn't apologizing for it. Marjorie drifted by with a tray of wine glasses that were not offered to us, for different reasons.

"What's her problem?" Paul asked. "And who's this chucklehead?"

I shushed him with my finger and stared off into the half-dark at guests' hundred dollar hair cuts silhouetted by stage lights. Wyman told an anecdote about a mother who'd lost three children and, when he met her, the fourth had river blindness. "We saved that child's eyesight," he said. "Equatorial Guinea, 1998." He mentioned free clinics, community health lectures on clean water and condoms, immunizations. Wyman was good at this. And next to me sat a guy I assumed had been a good medic, but now Paul dropped a flask cap on the floor and I wouldn't have trusted him with aspirin.

The presentation finished and the auction began. Marjorie brought salads on paper plates.

"Come on, Sis," Paul said.

"Meat is for people here on time," she said, though none for me either. We tilted the plates toward our mouths, an avalanche of Caesar dressing and spinach leaves.

"When are you taking off?" Paul asked.

"What do you mean?"

"I saw the skis and shit in your car. They're calling for snow." Paul didn't offer any whiskey, though I'd looked forward to declining.

I said, "You can't trust meteorologists in Seattle."

"So I'm banned from the cabin because I talked to some girl and shot a deer. Or is it something else?"

The auctioneer announced my mother's seaglass art, a minimum bid set low. Paddles remained on the tables. Over their wineglass, someone chuckled. The spotlit piece did look a bit amateurish. My jaw still throbbed and registered deep cello notes.

"We'll talk about it later," I told Paul. "I need to be alone for a bit."

"You've changed, you know that right?"

"We both have."

"This isn't the homecoming I expected. Marjorie's in my face about going out at night and now you need alone time."

"I'm sorry," I said. "I'm sure it's not easy getting back to civilian life."

"Fuck *civilian life*. It's not easy getting back to my life."

"At least you're getting back from something," I said. "Austin was the farthest I've been away."

"And a cabin fifty miles away solves that? Your travel agent is horseshit."

Doctor Wyman shook hands with the Somalia table, a group of bankers, and came by again. "Is this the guy with the dented-up truck?" he asked.

"This is Paul," I said. "He just got back from Afghanistan. An army medic."

"Are you the guy we're supposed to salute around here?" Paul said.

"I guess you could say that, but the only person shooting anything is the photographer. For what she gets paid, I'd like to think she's a sharpshooter."

Marjorie walked a tray of desserts past us, apple pie with vanilla ice cream. Wyman grabbed two and slid them toward us; he took a third for himself and thanked Marjorie. She nodded deferentially and shot arrows at Paul. The ice cream tasted decent

with only a slight apple residue. Paul took a shameless whiskey pull and Wyman asked if he could have some. Rather than sipping it, he decanted the contents into a water glass, which he handed to a waitress. "I'll do you a favor and pretend I didn't see that," he said, sliding the flask across the table like the plates.

"I'll do you a favor and pretend the same," Paul said.

"Any thoughts on which country you'd like to donate your wages to?"

"None of them. I've done enough public service for ten lifetimes. Besides, my sister's company is paying us, not you guys."

Wyman said, "The guests pay for dinner, we pay the company, and they pay you. Blood from the same heart."

"Then a bunch of suits pay my wage. I'm fine with that."

Marjorie noticed the simmering exchange and laid her hand on the doctor's shoulder. She asked a question about auction items and started leading him away. "Sign up to volunteer with us," Wyman said, bifocals slung up from his nose. "And don't tell your friend."

When she was done with Wyman, Marjorie brought over my mother's piece. "Sorry it didn't sell," she said. "It's their loss."

"It's bound for the cabin now," I said. "Though I might not tell her for a while."

"Are we done here?" Paul asked his sister.

"Yeah," she said. "You should go."

"Fine by me," Paul said. "I'm late for drinking with strangers." He threw a barely-fitting sweatshirt over his medic shirt. "Thanksgiving's coming up, and I'm thankful for friends and family. Good luck pulling yourself from a treewell."

"Paul." I spoke my friend's name, now certain my voice had no lingering power. I helped clean, which didn't take long. Marjorie's team just packed up their stuff and were gone. The rest was ethnic decorations for Medical Care International's storage unit.

As we said goodbye in the parking lot, Marjorie again kissed me on the cheek. I gave her one back in a brotherly way, yet my hand somehow rested against her hipbone. We looked at each other in elongated inarticulate goodbyes. Marjorie had watched me onstage, on the baseball diamond, and hired me those last few months during the campaign. I wondered if she smelled the sadness rafting my small intestine.

"Maybe we can do the holidays up at the cabin," I said. "All of us, I mean."

"Just so long as I don't do the catering. And I haven't skied in years."

"Me either." Then I took my hand from Marjorie and drove toward the snoring mountains where my life had split like a log. Now it was to split again.

Chapter Nine

Through deepening snow I marched, Pulaski over my shoulder and boot soles shattering crystals. About two miles from my cabin, I slid down a gentle slope. White settled into islands on the cliff band above. The tree before me was a mountain hemlock: *Tsuga mertensiana*. They were known for pulp and paper, central to my grandfather's business. I had learned that *Tsuga* was from the Japanese, meaning tree and mother. Know thy enemy, but not yourself.

I unfastened a leather cover from the Pulaski blade and filed its rust into young and steep and sharp, reflective metal whose gaze I avoided. Blunt head trauma and a puncture wound had been my diagnosis—how would they diagnose the tree now? Boughs fell from my sideways strokes. I shaved it from brush to stubble, closer and closer to skin. Cones and needles huddled on either side, the tree's patient ejaculate.

1000 cones per tree, 100 seeds per cone. Meiosis begins with pollen from hemlock mother cells. Winged pollen matures by mid-June. During fertilization, neck cells develop. Pollen tubes penetrate the neck cells and two male gametes are formed. The ventral canal cell breaks down and fusion occurs. Four nuclei form and migrate. Cell walls form, and a proembryo develops. The embryo and seed mature in October and the cones are dry and open by November. Cones turn from brown to purple.

I kicked aside forest floor until I met dry loam. Brighter wood showed where bark flaked. Using the Pulaski's pick, I scratched into unblemished. Would I leave my signature before I felled the tree? Would I carve lover's initials in the hemlock heart? Before I could decide, my crotch began to vibrate—cell phone reception even here, alone with a silver gymnosperm. It was a Seattle number and I didn't answer.

Doctor Wyman left a message. In it, he asked if I'd come along to Yakima. Their mobile clinic would provide free medical care and Thanksgiving dinner. Most interesting was the location: the day worker center. El Centro de Jornaleros. A smile stretched my lips flat. I twisted my boots in earth for better purchase and took one good Pulaski swing, about head level. Wood ate my blade and in my wrists baseball memories reverberated.

I left the tree and walked to the road where coolant streaks like alien blood were being covered by fresh snow. Snoqualmie Pass was the backbone separating Washington's rural east and urban west—between Kittitas and King Counties, between two ideologies. City folks like my grandfather wanted a retreat from the diminishment of Seattle's open spaces. Eastside ranchers craved the closest thing to Chamonix, a word they creatively mispronounced. Both sides liked virgin lumber. Snoqualmie Pass was named for the Snoqualmie Indians. Their tribe fished for salmon and steelhead, black and salmonberries collected from riverbanks. Before backcountry and resort skiers traversed hillsides, Snoqualmies wore cedar bough snowshoes. The tribe numbered only seven hundred now and they ran a casino.

Alsatian eggshell facades and A-frame roofs were standard-issue. Steep driveways dipped to meet the unplowed lane. At its 1970s zenith, the development of Snoqualmie Pass slowed, hamstrung by a failed push for a township. Properties became vacation rentals for families, or university students sardined into bunkbeds.

When I was first brought to the cabin, we coasted down Snoqualmie Mountain View Road without any mountain views. My grandfather had pointed into the gray and named peaks I thought he'd made up. Alta Peak. Kendall Peak. Denny Mountain. Snoqualmie Mountain. Later I would climb each one with Paul, not particularly high or difficult routes, just long treks that rarely left treeline. None of these mountains was visible today, as much for low-lying clouds as for stands of conifers.

"I wonder what changed your mind," said Doctor Wyman. He gave me a hand up the RV staircase. A young woman at the wheel had crushed curls under a beanie and the man next to her had spiked blonde hair and wore a tattered silk scarf. Wyman introduced me to Graham and Gretchen. They were a young married couple and UW medical students. "See, I told you not everyone in our organization was a nurse or a doctor," Wyman said.

"They're in their residencies. That's a doctor minus a diploma."

"Another year and we can start to pay off loans," said Graham, cleaning smudges from his sunglasses. "That's a pretty deep avalanche to dig ourselves out of."

Wyman said he'd met the couple at Hyak resort, now called Summit East.

"We were ski patrollers for a few winters," said Gretchen. "Or at least I was. Graham just did it for the free pass." She removed the beanie and her ramen noodle curls bounced free. When she rolled her shoulders, the scapula pushed against taut down fabric like wings. Gretchen was beautiful, and her beauty quieted all three of us men for a moment, Graham included, as though he'd temporarily forgotten.

He punched her playfully on the arm to break her spell. “I remember you taking a few out-of-bounds runs on the clock yourself.”

“These two had that overeducated look,” Wyman said. “And they knew their medical stuff, transporting some vomiting skier in a toboggan when I skied by and offered help. They said no thanks and I respected them for that.”

“On a day that good, you keep skiing until your legs quit,” Gretchen added. “We were the ones paid to haul around injured kids and do paperwork, not Doctor Wyman.”

From the cramped RV kitchen, Wyman asked me for help. In crock pots, he stirred gravy, mashed potatoes, yams roasted with green beans and cranberries.

“That’s a lot of food.”

“We never know how many folks show up. We could use help serving if nothing else. My wife’s happy to cook but damned if she’d leave our kids with my folks.”

“You’re from Seattle?”

“Garfield High School, same class as Jimi Hendrix.”

“Me too,” I said. “Not the Jimi Hendrix stuff but Garfield anyway.”

“Be sure and stir down to the bottom where it gets gummy.”

“I know someone who worked at the day worker center,” I said.

“And here I thought you might’ve had a philanthropic bone,” Wyman said. With a tap on a spice shaker, he dropped cayenne into the food.

I bit into my tongue and tasted pink.

“Something wrong?”

"Spice is like nuclear waste," I said. "After the accident."

"What was your accident anyway?" Graham asked from the front.

I still had the bandage over my chin from Paul's dashboard. I told them about the car ride, and the hemlock.

Gretchen glanced toward her husband. "Skier versus tree. Hyak sees those every so often. Wasn't there a fatality in '06?"

"Some woman skiing the trees with no helmet," Graham said. "A patroller told me blood was pouring out of her ears."

"Sorry about the spice," said Wyman. "Fatima practically adds cayenne to milk."

"That's all right." I stirred way down into the gravy pot and uplifted a gummy film that floated to the surface like a burnt lily pad.

"Listen Daniel, I'm diagnosing you with a clear case of no schtick."

"No *schtick*?"

"Sure," Wyman continued, "A schtick is your specialty. You gotta close your eyes and see what fascinates you about the body, what scares you. Besides, EMTs top out at twelve bucks an hour—good luck raising a family on that."

Graham held his wife's upper arm, wedding band kneading her flesh as a massage stone would. Since they already looked like Scandinavian siblings it was no leap to imagine their children.

At the day worker center, Wyman handed me a digital SLR and asked how I was with a camera. "Not bad," I said. "Dad being a cameraman and all."

“Graham and Gretchen volunteered to serve so you can take pictures. Try to be discreet—we only use unposed photos on the website.”

“Photos of what?”

“Whatever looks good for the organization. You’ve seen our stuff.”

“So if African mothers come by for doxycycline I should snap it up?”

“Just take pictures. Since you’re only a medic, we’ll keep it simple.”

We set the food on picnic tables under the canopy, crock pots powered with extension cords from the RV. I took photos of the workers in their single-file dinner line. Before they ate, a woman recited some Spanish prayer, her syllables slurring into one another. Through the camera viewfinder I recognized her as Anza’s roommate. I took a picture of her eating turkey and potatoes, and seated myself at her table. To seem casual, I framed a shot of Wyman meeting with the first patient. The white knights had begun their work.

“Hola Guadalupe,” I said. “Soy Daniel.”

She seemed to recognize the scars on my face. “Daniel, hola,” she said. Alcohol spiked her breath. “You are a doctor?”

“No,” I said, “Técnico de Emergencias Médicas. So you’re sick?”

Lupe chewed a yam cube and winced, wrinkles bunched around her filmy eyes. “A tooth,” she said.

“Does it hurt bad?”

The delicate way she chewed answered for her.

Somewhere between one and two dozen filled the tables, our food and medical lines. All were Latinos besides a Thai couple who spoke to Doctor Wyman, their English choppy. I photographed the woman pulling her husband's sleeve, Wyman removing a bandage from the forearm wound, purple infection lining the veins. The man bucked in pain when Wyman flushed the wound, applied an antibiotic ointment, butterfly band aids and gauze, overlaid by a fresh bandage he tore at the end and tied into a bow. In my final photograph, Wyman shot Novocain into the Thai man's thumb.

"You sure you don't need a hand?" I shouted over at him.

"Just keep shooting," he said. "That'll go a good deal further."

Guadalupe ate next to me. She had seconds and brought me firsts. I had only dinner rolls and licorice root pills. Then she broached the woman on my mind.

"This was all for her," Lupe said. "For Anza."

"The food?" I looked down at my potatoes: coagulating, cayenne-tinged. I fed them to a husky who chewed on a tennis ball. His muzzle was stained carmine.

Lupe shook her head and winked toward a beheaded piñata.

"Have you spoken to her?" I asked.

"Yes, and I have a big mouth. Maybe that's the problem with my diente." Lupe smiled, her incisor the color of old bacon and pitched to one side. "You know teeth?"

"Very little," I said, knocking knuckles against my bicuspids. "Three of mine are fake. The doctor knows a dentist nearby who is cheap and won't check your papers. So is Anza glad to be home?"

"She thinks she isn't home. Anza is the one who needs a doctor," Lupe said, autumnal fare steaming on her tongue. "And that is your fault."

"My fault?"

"Daniel," Wyman called. "Your assistance, please."

I excused myself and took a picture of Lupe, as though to pause our conversation. Slinging the camera against my spine I took Wyman's instruction and wrapped a woman's injured wrist with a bandage. He told me it was probably a hairline fracture, so we cradled the lower arm into an air cast and did a sling-and-swath with cravats and safety pins. "Not a lot to do for that wrist," Wyman said. "It's repetitive work that's the problem, mixed with deficient calcium. Fruit picking with clay for arms. We see picoteros every time. I call it picker's wrist."

There were others I assisted with, pickers like he said. Then one bad cough. A feverish infant. A sore-shouldered man ceased wincing upon receiving a shaker of painkillers. I saw Graham and Gretchen serving food in unison. They spoke succinct Spanish to the attendees—Más papas? Más gaviota? Tienes suficiente? The meals were well-received and I envied everyone else's digestive tracts.

Afterward, Lupe asked if we would give her a ride to her cabana.

I lobbied the others. "The tooth lady?" said Graham, who'd noticed me speaking with her. "With the amount they all drank, I hope she remembers the directions."

"Let's just do it quickly," Wyman said. "Or Fatima will put chilies in my leche."

The road brought us past Seneca's giant Red Delicious sign, its parking lot almost empty during factory hibernation. Sickly apple orchards filled the valley. We drove

upstream against a narrow river. The road cut through hills bristled by wheat stalks. Gravel shot behind the tires. Twelve cabins were pressed into a valley, roofs no taller than their abutting hills. They might have been mobile homes, but I saw no wheels. Guadalupe thanked us for the ride. Outside the vehicle, I was about to say goodbye when she mentioned another patient inside.

"I'll get the doctor," I said.

She asked for me instead, and I followed her to the cabin. The RV engine ran.

Her cabin was barely that, dimensions of an outhouse built out a few times. The walls were porous, nailed-together sheet metal and plywood. I turned my collar high. A sheet separated two cots and a blanketed body rested on one, curved like a kidney bean.

"Is that her?" I asked, watching breath cycles against the blanket.

Lupe nodded and said, "Anzana."

"What do you mean?" I asked.

"Te traigo alguien," Lupe said. "Te traigo Daniel Rose."

With a handful of blanket I revealed her. From still-worn shoes to hair's part—tightly drawn and off to one side, white scalp against sweaty dark curls. Anza crossed her arms and held herself in slight shivers.

"Que haces?" she asked Lupe. And to me: "What are you doing here?"

"Anza." Her name made fireworks in my stomach, adrenaline and bile. "You said you were going back."

"My flight was delayed," she said.

"She is embarazada," Lupe said.

Then I asked, “What’s to be embarrassed about?”

“No, Daniel,” said Lupe. “Not embarrassed—”

“Pregnant,” Anza said, rising corpselike to her side. “Embarasada is pregnant. It is something to be ashamed of.”

Like two cymbals, *embarazada* and *pregnant* crashed against each other. A blurry montage played—election night and the painful release of sperm.

“Anzana,” said Lupe. “You need someone to help you.”

“I came with the doctors,” I said, crouching next to Anza, her sicksweet apple smell. “I’m volunteering like we talked about, remember? Your email didn’t work.”

“So this is some fucking house call? Maybe you saw a play where this happened and had a happy ending.”

“You tell me.” I touched her shoulder, little circles growing larger. “Anza, if you’re pregnant then the child is both of ours.”

“It’s no one’s child. It can’t grow, my body cannot carry.”

“We don’t know that for sure. Can I bring in the doctor?”

“I drank enough alcohol so the baby would be born with two heads. You can read this story in the newspaper.”

I ventured my hand into the blanket and toward a tiny lump of uterus. “You should see a doctor.”

“Daniel,” she said. “In Honduras there’s a modismo: When you dig you find only your grave. By the springtime, I will be gone. Please go and stay afuera—watch a Mariners game and forget about me.”

“Again with this,” I said. “Come to my cabin. This one is too cold, no place for someone pregnant. And there can’t be much work. My cabin is private, in the cordillera like where you grew up.”

The RV’s shadow fell through spaces between the floor and walls, a diesel purr timing our conversation.

“Your friends are waiting,” Anza said.

I remembered the Greyhound voucher still in my wallet, crumpled now worse than my speech notes. I smoothed it against my knee. On the back, I scribbled my address and phone number. “If you change your mind. It’s a short walk from the bus stop, shorter than you made today.”

Anza rearranged the blanket over herself. I kissed a quilted square. It tasted like closet. Lupe and I exchanged silent goodbyes in two languages. Although the camera was in the RV, the only image worthy of capture was this: how I found her pregnant with my angelito.

On the slow drive back, we passed the VFW hall and my whole body itched. My insides wanted to be outside and I bit licorice into pulp. There was no solitude, just an empty cabin larger than I needed, and my pollen fertilizing Anza’s hemlock cone.

Wyman apologized on the phone to his wife. When he finished, he asked if I was okay. I said surewhydoyouask, using the dregs of acting skill.

“Your face looks moist,” he said. “You eat something you shouldn’t have?”

"It's just the election and everything, it got me thinking. Why is this clinic even needed here? And what happens to workers between visits?"

"It's a niche I wish didn't exist," said Wyman. "These folks avoid hospitals, requests for their social security numbers. In other countries it's far worse. Some of our American money goes straight to strong men who pet AK-47s like cats. Better that than a village dying of malaria."

"It doesn't sit right. We can't produce our produce without immigrant labor—and they get sick and injured in the process. Say someone were embarazada, pregnant."

"I know what embarazada means," said Wyman. "I'm an obstetrician after all. But change is on the way, right? Si se puede. The new president will fill all the holes."

I checked to see if Graham and Gretchen were listening. Instead, they sat in front like mannequins, changing radio stations when an unspoken consensus was reached. They touched in small electric ways. Up at Snoqualmie, they pointed out drainages with skiers' eyes. Flakes fell against our windshield like bird shits. Plenty of snow had accumulated which transformed my cabin into some Christmas carol cottage.

"Happy Thanksgiving," Wyman said, and the couple said the same.

Although tired, I knew the woodpile wouldn't last long. So I hauled my Pulaski out to the porch. I used overhead strokes, baseball swings down the y-axis. Wood splintered onto an oiled canvas. When enough was chopped for the night I couldn't stop. This was my conveyor belt. I set another log onto the block and started in with the maul. My body worked into a sweat and I felt hot-cold in that exerted winter way and couldn't

stop chopping until blisters empurpled my hands and the logs were gone and I would've chopped down the railings too if I didn't need them to measure the snowfall. Sixteen inches, according to the yardstick. Winter's clock. A white crystalline elbow threatened to slip off the railing, like a stadium roof imploding. In the cabin where my parents made me, I was now alone—unemployment checks soon to arrive, and the echo of a pregnant woman who'd told me to fuck off.

Over the mantle I hammered a nail and set my mother's seaglass art. Then, I sat cross-legged in front of the fire, which catalyzed sweat droplets down my forehead. Let it be a sauna. I removed my clothes and pulled a blanket over me, sewn by my grandmother, air slithering through its crochet pattern. Maybe the scars would dissolve.

That night I dreamt lucidly. During an EMT shift I'm reclined on the golf cart, having some decaf, CNN abuzz and everyone late for flights. Through one set of windows, it's sunny and the mountains are white daggers; through the other, Seattle's maritime rain pummels the tarmac. The voice of the dispatcher crackles through my radio. She's telling me something urgent and I can't hear it. I ask her to repeat. 10-9. Say that again. 10-9. Taking my cart down the shined-up hallway, I see the face of Obama on every television, that pearly smile. His speech emits the same crackly voice of the dispatcher and I switch my radio off. Then I'm flagged down by a man with a pinstripe suit and an earpiece. "This one's pregnant," he tells me. "Says the water broke." I ask where she is and he points a veined hand toward an empty gate.

And who do I see there? Daniel Rose. My doppelganger wears an orange Guantanamo jumpsuit and a dark circle at the crotch. His face is clear and plump, belly distended. "Can you help me?" he says. "They're trying to put me on that plane. My baby wants to be an American." I freeze; I sweat. His pudgy wrists hide his pulse. When I find it, I count out loud as though afraid I've forgotten numbers. "I don't know about male pregnancy," I say. "That's new to me."

He looks up and says, "Switch me. Come on, take my place." His breath stinks of applesauce. I ask for him to repeat that. 10-9. It's too late. The man with earpiece and pinstripes has an armpit hold on pregnant-me and drags him offstage, a faint trail of wet over airport tiles.

I woke up and no longer felt tired. The sun wasn't far from the horizon, whatever relative height it would reach that day. I boiled water and stoked the fire. This dream was a variation on previous ones. Something would happen at the airport, something I didn't know how to deal with, like performing onstage and not having your lines. That was just nerves. This was a vision through a snowglobe. I opened a medical textbook. What did I know about pregnancy and childbirth? A blank space. Topsoil. And in this soil, I planted myself. The cone grown into a sapling. The book's pregnancy chapter was skinny and I read it aloud with staticky syllables.

Chapter Ten

There's a story my father read when the fábrica de café still stood tall. It was a Honduran myth about a wicked man who dies and whose soul won't go to heaven. This wandering soul smells piña sweet and follows smoke from young men's cigarettes, smoke like he used to make. In the darkness El Alma paces behind the glowing cigarillos. His breathing is asthmatic and he turns himself to smoke when he decides who will be his carrier. "El Alma flies into the lungs of the smoker," said my father with a cigarette in his own mouth, "then he reaches a man's stomach and testicles and esperma. If the man tries to masturbate he feels gravel in his penis. The man must have sex to remove El Alma from inside." In Central America there are many versions of El Alma Humeante, the Smoky Soul. And yet my father's version is the one I recall. I hid inside mother's falda while she worked and my father said, "El Alma passes from man to woman, inside her growing big like a coconut. Many times he grows large and bursts through, born again into his wicked ways."

On my walks between the day worker center and the cabana I missed weather where coconuts or piña could grow. I refused to ride with Jose Luis and Lupe and had to leave an hour early. At night the sun would be gone, its bits of heat forgotten. Work was mostly gone too. We would call Yakima's employment agencies and request work orders. They would say they didn't have nothing for Mex-y-can'ts. But every so often they called us back, when employers requested hispanohablantes to communicate with other Spanish-speaking workers. We found work this way for Carlos and Angel,

demolishing a gymnasium two days before Christmas. "Why not come with us?" Carlos had asked. "Because I don't do demolition," I said. "And because they need two more workers, not three." Angel said I should come anyway; they enjoyed my newspaper readings during las mañanas frías. "We'll pay you from our wages," Angel said. The job was for a week with only Christmas Day off—I agreed to come on the first day. I saved a copy of the paper and brought it with me, the megaphone cord a scarf around my neck. A third worker, a Salvadoran man, picked up Carlos, Angel and me from the cabanas. "Eres la lectora." He had an apricot nose and burnt hands. "I've heard about you."

The gymnasium was on the same road to the centro but in the opposite direction. A sign with faded brown paint said, *Yakima Community Gym*. The edificio leaned to one side as though wind might knock it over. Dead corn stalks filled two fields and two others were fallow, tilled recently. There was no one in charge, no farmers with yellow mouths and awful Spanish. In the distance I saw the owner's farmhouse, maybe watching us with binoculars. There was a pile of saws, crowbars, and sledge hammers, each with painted orange numbers to prevent theft. Today, the Salvadoran told me, would be spent inside. They'd tear up the floor and take down the basketball courts. Tomorrow they'd start removing the walls and roof. "So you're going to read to us? You'll have to read loud because hammers are not quiet."

I sat along the basketball sideline on a bench just like my mother's at her factory. My newspaper was the *Yakima Herald-Republic* and I moved through one article at a time. I was careful with flipped pages, speaking transition sentences slowly. Many

stories were about La Navidad. One story awarded Best Holiday Lights to the Callahan family. From a list of church services, I read which ones were available in Spanish. A tree lighting ceremony was taking place today at the White House; the Obamas' tree stood higher than the gymnasium. Carlos, Angel, and the Salvadoran tried their best to listen while removing the walls. Hammer strokes rang and echoed, too erratic for baseball swings. Crowbars wrenched nails free. I should have picked up a tool since they couldn't hear me well, even with my megaphone. We ate our lunches from paper bags and I told them my father's version of El Alma Humeante. The Hondurans knew the story already and were happy to hear it again, holding their jeans when I mentioned ripio in the penis.

The Salvadoran told us his own version from San Salvador. El Alma Humeante is the only doctor in a village. For years he handles all the illnesses, delivered all the babies, gives medicine to whoever needs it. In this pueblo, many enfermos come to see him, and many die prematurely. They think maybe it is because the doctor smokes cigarillos, even when patients have tuberculosis. One day, someone writes to the university in the capital and discovers that the doctor never graduated, never even registered. And so the pueblo locks the doctor in his office and won't open the door until he stops making noise. But his spirit haunts the pueblo. New child can be born infected with diseases from El Alma Humeante—and men never smoke when it's time to make a woman pregnant.

When the Salvadoran finished his story, he lit a cigarette. His eyebrows turned red and he blew a grinning smoke ring. I started to cough and the men returned to work.

By the end of the day, they were covered in sweat and wiped themselves with handkerchiefs. I asked for them to pay me. They refused. "You have to come every day before you get paid—we get paid when the job is over," Carlos said.

"I want to buy food for La Navidad," I said to him and Angel. "You told me you'd pay today, and just for today."

"Lo siento," said the Salvadoran when we got back to the truck. "But your voice is so beautiful and we cannot read so good like you. I've told my only story."

Vayanse al carajo, I said to them as I started to walk down the road—a pregnant woman and her backpack the day before Christmas. They slowed the truck and told me to get in. We are sorry, they said. We'll pay you when we have money. They continued saying this until I grabbed a handful of gravel and threw it at the truck. One of the rocks nicked the passenger window. They drove away, tailpipe smoking. The megaphone was with them in the truck but I didn't care. What else would I need it for? Besides, this would end up being my last day in Yakima.

Mine was a story of walking, trusting only in myself, in these legs which supported and moved me. Vehicles passed by with their complicated engines—quiet, loud, quiet. From a hilltop the whole thing looked miniature, our cabanas little houses from an airplane window. Two vans banged against the road. They were darker than shadows, darker than the space between your eyes. The vans stopped near the first

cabana. Big trunks rolled open like garage doors, ten men climbed out. The black of their jackets matched the vans and had yellow printed letters: *ICE*. I watched as they ran forward in a practiced formation, shotguns held before their bodies. Immigration raids were like boogeymen or getting struck by relámpagos—fear couldn't change them. But my legs didn't know that. They weakened and I crawled inside a crevasse of bales. Hay pricked my face. It was safe enough. During a raid you must take care of yourself, and running away brings attention. How many people did these cabrones expect to find? They grabbed Carlos and Angel, along with Angel's wife. Agents walked them into the van. Others inspected the cabanas. They brought furniture outside like a sale, expecting someone to run from a hiding place and say "Dios mio, not my bed."

La migra stayed for twenty or thirty minutes as pindrop rain began to fall. Chito was the only one left. The dog remained close to my cabana, unsure whether to be aggressive or to cower. As soon as ICE finished their business and were returning to their vans, Chito barked fiercely. He trailed behind one of the ICE agents and made an incredible leap at the man's culo, biting straight into flesh and tearing a window through the black pants. The man sprayed a canister of pepper spray into Chito's eyes. Chito pawed at himself, and then the man brought an electric shock to the dog's skinny ribs. I stuffed a fist into my mouth. This incident seemed starkly violent compared to the arrests on the others. Nevertheless, the agent carried Chito quite gently into the van—as though the sleeping animal might become their new drug-sniffer, their new immigrant-sniffer. Que te vayas bien, Chito.

I stood between the bales until the road was quiet. I remembered what others had said about these raids, how sometimes they were random, sometimes because of informants, or because agents need to fill quotas. Our cabanas merged into the night. They no longer existed. I had no reason to go back inside, no reason to believe the vans wouldn't return. My passport lived inside my backpack with old newspapers, their pages wrinkled and irrelevant. And tucked inside the passport was the Greyhound voucher from Daniel. Part of me wanted to rip and throw it from the windy hilltop. I wanted not to need it and yet I needed it. This was my fault.

Stubborn and wet, I walked seven miles to the bus station. Guadalupe and Jose Luis would soon learn about the raid. They would lie to themselves and say it was like relámpagos, that ICE would never strike the same place again. If you believe your own lies are they still lies? I would not stay and find out.

I crossed an imaginary nighttime border. At least I was on my feet again. There were worse places to be. Holding cells. Buses with windows painted black. Immigrants from many countries were dropped in Mexico. I heard this from workers, had read about it in politics classes. Or they were handcuffed in American prisons. Fluorescent lights kept them from sleep. Immigrants became caulk between continental cracks, squashed under heels after they've picked all the apples. The United States did not invent this behavior but it stood atop the northward ladder. Americans hate Mexicans, who hate Guatemalans, who hate Hondurans and Salvadorans—and everyone hates Ticos from Costa Rica with tourist dollars flowing down the Río Pacquare. What was seven miles? The fingernail of a fingernail in the body of the Americas. Gravel and concrete and

sagebrush and cold viento and headlights whose eye contact I avoided. Christmas eve and houses were many-colored lamps, their warmth an insult, shadows of families sent across the road. The house near the gymnasium was one of these—red and green figures moving about. Of the two buildings, the lurching gymnasium felt more real, with the marrow and bones of its foundation. There can be more life in death than in life's carnival. Or so thought a walking woman with homes behind her and the beginnings of a child inside. A hat pulled over mis ojos. My spine rested against the wall of a closed bus station, morning's approach still many miles away. I was twenty-two years old.

On Christmas morning, I was still waiting for the bus. I tapped my skull against bricks, invented rhythms. As soon as the bus arrived, and not before, the station opened. I exchanged my voucher for a ticket. They asked for my name. I wrote down Lucila Gamero de Medina. "Merry Christmas, Luckala," said a man in overalls who seemed to be covering for someone else. I had only enough money for a newspaper and a coffee, which a vending machine spat into my cup. I drank thinking about my mother and read the newspaper thinking about my father.

American sports pages grew dull and frozen every winter. The only baseball articles speculated about trades. In fútbol, an article mentioned Senegal losing to Cameroon. I looked at a picture of white guys in roller skates—hockey. From the outdoors section, a man in camouflage with a rifle and animal antlers. The caption read: *Christmas Dinner*. I brought the paper aboard with me, took a seat in the back. The

bathroom hadn't been cleaned for at least one trip; the urine smelled worse than our outhouse where we shoveled dirt, lime, wood chips.

With two summers in Yakima and many weekend trips, I'd memorized the ride. Always I went from there to Seattle, or Seattle to Yakima, and never stopped in between. Soon snow filled the road. Pine trees leaned like apple pickers carrying full bags over their necks. The driver pulled to the shoulder. He said, "Jingle bells everyone," and then put on tire chains. This took a few minutes and everyone looked at each other. Half full seats held families with grocery bags of presents, bows sticking through plastic. Two men with army haircuts and camouflage spoke across the aisle. A woman I'd met in a peach orchard carried her daughter on her lap, who looked too big for that. I pretended not to see the woman, though I whispered Feliz Navidad at Snoqualmie Pass.

The bus pulled away with a long slow hiss and for a moment I became a Lucila Gamero character, lost in a story larger than her own, until snow stuffed between my socks and boots and I could think of nothing besides. Cars skidded with radios loud enough to hear from the outside. They spit snow in the way tractors spit soil. Skis and snowboards were strapped to roofs. People carried unsteady loads of gear dressed in baggy pants and jackets with hoods. Their plastic boots slipped beneath them. They were teenagers and gray-haired men with leather faces. A wall of snow kept the lifts from my view, although I heard high-pitched grinding. One skier slid onto the road before removing her skis. One man was dressed as Santa Claus. A little boy with a reindeer hat cried. The gasoline smells remained thick on the road even as I got further

from the ski area. I came to a grocery store called IGA, the lights working only on the IG. Holiday music played and they were mopping the floors, ready to close. I found the cabin address and asked one of the moppers for directions. "Shoot," he said, a young guy with pimples and a skinny neck. "It's not far but I couldn't tell you exactly how far. Hey, you go skiing in those jeans or what?"

"Yes," I said. "Don't you ski in your apron?"

He shrugged his shoulders, almost touching them behind his back. He said which way he thought to go on the road. The boy was right that it wasn't far. And though my feet were wet I needed extra time to decide what I'd tell Daniel. Skis stacked on the porch looked like spears. There were three cars in the driveway, one Daniel's Subaru and two I didn't recognize—a black truck and a white sedan. All the lights were on. The roof held snow like cake frosting. Smoke exhaled from the chimenea and showed the wind's shape. Pale blues shined onto the road.

I walked to the side of the house. A closed window pinched the curtain, a corner exposed to the wind. Its fabric felt as soft against my cheek as the handkerchief in my back pocket. The curtain was sheer, traslúcido. The people inside were seated in a circle of chairs and couches. Daniel stood within the circle. He held two imaginary sticks in his hands; by the way he pushed backward they must've been ski poles. He stepped toward the chimney edge. Against a wreath he held his face and pretended to strike it, his hands liquid pouring under his chin. Everyone began to shout. "Daniel hits a tree while skiing," a deep voice declared through the curtain, the windowpane. Daniel pointed his finger in the direction of the voice. "That's it," he said and rubbed his chin along the

scars. He took a bow and everyone clapped. I noticed lit candles, plates of food on a table, glasses of colorful beverages. At this point Daniel turned toward the window. His body paused. For a moment I couldn't move either.

I retreated. The room diminished and I stepped backward from a painting. The voices were no longer clear, the light no longer bright. Sheaths of snow held my calves with each step. I wanted to turn and run and instead moved slowly. "Anza," I heard Daniel say from the porch. The front door clacked closed and he stood amongst skis. "You're here."

"Yes," I said, "late for the Christmas party."

"I'm sorry they're here. My family decided to come for the holiday and I couldn't tell them no. At least not well enough to keep them away." He glanced back through a window cut into the door. "Are you here to stay for a while?"

"There's nowhere to stay. Should I sleep on the porch?"

"Of course not," Daniel said. "Meet me at my car, I'll be back in two minutes."

My watch ticked five minutes before he hopped down the driveway. The car door was already unlocked and we didn't speak again until we'd turned the corner. Down the hill stood the grocery store, a bright IG and a dark A. He jerked the emergency brake. "You're here."

"You said that already."

"What made you change your mind?"

"As you said at the cabana, not much work until primavera. But you told me your

cabin was empty. So drive me to the bus stop. I'll ride the next bus to Seattle or Yakima, whichever comes first."

"That's ridiculous. I'm glad you're here. We just need to think of something while my family and Paul's family are here."

"You don't want to tell them about me? The woman you made pregnant."

"I'd rather not introduce you to everyone now. By New Year's, they'll be gone."

I bit my lip, hungry for options and could think of none. "So what is your idea?"

Daniel scratched at his chin and opened his mouth wide. "There are hotels for skiers. Maybe we could find you a room."

"I don't have enough money."

Daniel said that was okay. His unemployment checks were coming in and he had only electricity and gas to pay at the cabin.

"As soon as I have money—"

Daniel dropped the brake. "No," he said. "The important thing is that you need somewhere warm to go for Christmas."

His car rolled toward the main road where the bus had left me. The first place—*Climber's Cabin*—had two ski poles crossed over its door. Daniel got out and walked just as I remembered from our day spent canvassing. He came back and said they were full. "There are other places."

Heat melted snow into my boots. For some reason I said, "Jingle bells."

He smiled and said, "you're telling me."

We followed the road slowly, both staring through the windshield. Cars honked and Daniel let them pass. Each store had holiday decorations for Navidad. Lights and candy canes, Santa Claus and fake nieve. A little further on, we came to *Summit Inn.* Snow from the parking lot was pushed into little dirty mountains. Daniel said, "This one's the biggest. I'll see about a room."

While Daniel was gone, a family pulled their green truck so close to the lobby that the doors opened. Father stepped down and helped his wife from the passenger seat. They each carried a child and the trunk opened with the press of a button. A man with a round hat and long jacket brought a cart and loaded their luggage. Skis fell from the cart and the man hurriedly picked them up. The father stood above him and said something. The family disappeared inside and a sound against the window startled me, Daniel tapping his key. "We got the last room," he said, brimming with pride. "I put my name down and gave them a credit card."

Daniel held my arm through the lobby. It smelled of coffee and apple cider. Inside the elevator, espejos repeated our images. There were a hundred Daniels and a hundred Anzas. Daniel wore a hundred wool hats with red balls hanging from them. He stood straight, a little taller than me, adam's apple above a new blue jacket. And I was una fantasma. Color from my skin had stayed in Yakima. Dandruff decorated a hundred stretched sweatshirts. The mochila held my possessions, its seams frayed. One hundred images of Anza—pobre, fea, flaca. If not for my head, I could have seen myself forever.

"No soccer team would pick me now," I said.

"I'd pick you for my team," Daniel said. "You would be la capitán."

"Please," I said. "Your poesía is very bad."

The room was only a floor up and the elevator took longer than walking. I noticed the same luggage cart down the hall. Daniel used a card to open the door, its light red and then green. Skiers were visible through the room's only window. They turned in Z's downhill, legs held wide. Their motions mesmerized me.

Daniel pointed and said, "See that rope-tow over there? It pulls you uphill."

I told him how, during my only ski day, I went down the main runs.

"And I'll take you again, if it's okay in your condition."

"Daniel," I said, "how expensive is this room?"

He stood next to me watching the skiers. "Don't worry, this is your Christmas present. Feliz Navidad."

"I won't need to stay long."

"Only until my guests leave. Then we'll move you to the cabin." I still wore my mochila and Daniel took it from my shoulders, placed it on the bed. He brought a hundred hands to my hundred stomachs.

"I can pay you back."

He shushed me and asked, "How are you feeling? It's been seven weeks since election night."

"I don't feel anything different. Nothing has changed in my body."

"Signs usually emerge by this time." He rubbed circles over the ombligo and lower down, hands encallado with rough skin. "You have ten percent more blood than

usual. The baby should be half an inch long, with little hands and feet. There might be a tail that will disappear soon. Eyelids grow over the embryo's eyes."

"How do you know all this?" I asked. "Or maybe you're acting."

"No, I'm learning everything about pregnancy. Have you felt nausea, any sickness when you try to eat?"

"I haven't eaten much," I said. "But maybe I've been less hungry."

"Order food," he said. "They'll charge it to me. Just no champagne, okay?"

I agreed and asked if his family expected him soon.

"They might wonder why I come back with no groceries, but let them wonder. Would it feel nice to lie on the bed?"

With his hand over my abdomen, I went to the bed. First we sat and then we laid together, our feet still on the floor. The mattress was soft and thick. Daniel moved his head close, warm respiraciones. His hand moved lower.

"Anza," he said, and then said it again. Daniel brought his labios to my ear and kissed me. It was a beso like Chito's, wet and warm. His other hand went under my back. He turned my body toward him. Dark lines of hair had grown down his jaw except for the diagonal scars. Daniel touched them and said, "They're ugly, I know. On the inside I'm handsomer."

"On the inside I'm uglier," I told him.

"That's not true. There's a baby there with blood vessels forming. On the inside you're making it alive."

Our lips touched. Daniel was on top of me. My vientre started to ache—my abdomen, my womb. In Spanish they're the same word. "Please," I said.

He sat up. "What's wrong?"

"I'm embarazada. That's what's wrong. I smell bad and should shower myself."

"Fine." He held his hands together. The knuckles became whiter. He said, "You get settled, and I'll find a way to see you tomorrow. I have the phone number for the room so I'll call you here." And once more he said, Feliz Navidad.

"Yes," I said, glad he was leaving. "Merry Christmas."

The door closed and I sat for a long time alone. Beginner skiers descended the mountain under pink light. Little ruts showed where they went, each time a little deeper. There was a heater by the window and I moved its arm to red. Frost melted from the window. The mountain blurred. I closed the drapes. I locked the lock. I turned on the television which I found hidden inside a cabinet. Removing my boots was the best thing. There was a place for them between the heater and the window. With their plantillas removed, the boots steamed and I laid the socks next to them. On a chair near the bed I set my sweatshirt, and a shirt with red checkers, the Obama t-shirt. Next were my jeans. With all my clothes removed it looked as though I'd melted from them. Maybe I was liquid, as the child inside me swam in liquid. The last time I swam was in Honduras.

In the espejo across from the bed, I looked at my sideways body. My arms were skinny ramas. Hips were wide but walking gave me narrow, strong legs. Had my stomach grown, I wondered. It didn't look larger. Though the rest of me was smaller. I pushed the estomago out, I pulled the estomago in. Perhaps it curved slightly, a little fish

tank. I removed my underwear and my small breasts, a little more full, touched the rib in a place I didn't remember. Nipples pressed forward to be closer to the heater, black hairs stiff as a toothbrush. Hair grew thicker than I remembered from the vagina. For a moment I thought Daniel would come back, an excuse of something more to say. I couldn't decide if I wanted this or not. Alone was better, I decided. He was probably enojado at needing to pay for me. But he didn't know how to introduce me to his family. How could I be introduced anyway? Did I even want to be?

Tonight I would stay in a lujoso hotel room—that was the important thing. Others had been arrested. Stiff alfombra tickled my feet. In the bathroom steam rose from the water of la ducha like steam from my boots. I turned off the lights and the fan. The water was warm lluvia on my skin. Today Jesucristo was born. I could eat cacachuetes and watch sports on television. I could sleep many hours on a mattress large enough for a family. And I could awaken as anyone else, or myself at another time. I could be a little girl in the campo, or a joven in our Tegucigalpa apartment. Maybe I would be an old woman looking through her window. Or I would wake in a hotel. In a place where people ski. And it would soon be 2009, when Senator Obama would become President Obama. A year when anything could happen. The dark bathroom slowed my thoughts. Water made little ríos down my face. I didn't know whether life grew inside me, or something else.

For a week I experienced a vacation alone. I lay on the bed at whatever time and watched news stories and holiday movies about criminals in little towns. I floated in the

bathtub and imagined it was the sky. I didn't exist. Only Daniel knew I was there. He came by for short visits and brought food and spare clothes, whatever he smuggled out. He ordered meals delivered to the room and watched me eat, not taking a single sip of coffee or bite of sausage. "It's Paul who's the toughest to get away from," Daniel said. "He always wonders where I'm going. And he's the last person I should tell about you."

"Tell him what?" I asked.

"Just that you're here, my unemployment checks covering your room."

Did he mean for me to feel bad? No estaba seguro, though I knew well enough about others paying for my life. The university, my father, and now Daniel, who the gobierno paid to hacer nada. I was his job. Baths went from hot to cold. Movies repeated. Clear nights became snowy days became clear nights.

The morning of New Year's, Daniel didn't show up. I had only an apple browning on the counter and I couldn't order any more food because the Peruvian waiter kept mentioning Lucila Gamero's novels after learning of my false name. I put on my old clothes, now cleaned, and a sweater from Daniel's mom. Its neck was large and its sleeves short.

The hallway smelled of bleach and when I passed an open door someone said, "Hey, hola." It was the man whose family arrived when I did. "Would you mind changing the towels? Never got done this morning." He rocked his daughter like his knee were a horse, his face folded where he smiled and where his eyebrows touched the forehead. I started to tell him I didn't work there but he interrupted with laughter. "We're just kidding, aren't we Hudson?" She nodded, blonde hair falling over her

pajamas. “Haven’t seen you around. I wrenched my knee yesterday,” he said, indicating the one with no daughter on it. “The other two are skiing without us. Is that where you’re headed?”

“Yes,” I said. “I think it’s a short walk from here.”

“Well with kids no walk is short. I’d offer you a ride but the wife took our car. So you’re marooned here with Hudson and me on New Year’s?”

“Anyway, better to use my legs.”

“If you say it is. What’s your name anyway?”

“Lucila,” I said.

“Well Lucila, since you’re all alone why not have a glass of champagne with us?”

“I’m pregnant,” I said, both hands placed over the sweater and his look changed. From down the hallway, I heard his daughter ask what pregnant meant, and he started to tell her “Hudson, when a man loves a woman…”

Skiers navigated past me in every direction going to their cars. I found a short slope from the parking lot to the lodge, difficult to ascend since la nieve was compact and resbaloso. Twice I fell forward, only to catch myself with hands grown soft. White children were everywhere. Instructors called to groups with matching hats and animal nicknames. Even older ones looked like they wore diapers in their big noisy pants.

The lodge windows were smeared and empañado like bathroom mirrors during my baths, the inside air thick and moist with nieve melting into alfombra, sheets of water across tables. Coats and gloves and goggles made piles and families ate from bags and trays. I sat on a stool attached to a low table, careful not to slip again. With a sweater

sleeve I wiped the glass. French fries had been abandoned on the table, the half-moon of a hamburger too. I pulled them toward me and started to eat. There was no flavor so I understood why ketchup encrusted the plate, mostaza the brightest yellow. La comida, colder than the room, slid down my throat. Entire tree trunks supported the ceiling. Photographs showed women skiing with skirts and men with bristled bigotes pointing to summits of confectioners sugar. Today the resort was packed—more so than any airport in the world, any concert or protest.

I ate the cardboard food and let a water fountain cleanse my mouth. There I found cellophane wrapped over a muffin, walnuts that cracked under my teeth. And I began to again notice Latinos working in the lodge: two cooked hamburgers and hot dogs; one had a vacuum for a backpack; another, dressed in green tights and bells on her shoes, poured hot chocolate—each with H1-B visas.

Where had they gone, I wondered, those arrested at the raid? Had they gone to Tegucigalpa, or Guadalajara, or were they still in cells? And would they be interrogated, asked about others they knew? My eyes unfocused into a kaleidoscope of ski clothes.

A girl slid an overflowing tray of beers onto my table and sat down. "Anya," she said. "Hey you're Anya, right?"

"Anza," I said, slowly, like my name were now the fake name.

"How've you been? What're you doing here?" The girl, Annabelle, had worked for the campaign.

"Visiting during the holidays."

Her friends met her at the table and she introduced them, perfect white smiles: Caitlin and Amanda.

"We ran into Daniel," Annabelle said. "You remember him?"

I shook my head and said, "No, who is he?"

"Come on, you remember Daniel Rose. Brown hair, that shit on his face."

"How is he?"

"He's good. He was with a tall red-haired girl, his friend's sister or something. I told them about a party we're having tonight at our rental. You're totally invited, and whoever you're here with."

"Only one other person," I said, and then took a drink from her beer. "Give me your number and I will call about the party."

Annabelle clicked open a pen and scratched digits over my palm. "So where are you living now? We're gonna have an inauguration party back in Seattle."

"I live at the hotel," I said with a finger pointed there.

"Living the dream." She drank down her beer until only foam pooled at the bottom of her glass. "Well we're gonna take some runs before night skiing starts. That's when real drunks take over the slopes. Good to see you." They waved goodbye.

I slid back down the hill, paddling my hands to slow myself. Ink dissolved into blue snow. A puddle stood at my door, snow floating on water. Daniel was on the bed in snowpants and fleece. His legs dangled, his feet in socks that looked like stockings. The television was on, an advertisement about Oregon ski resorts. He muted the sound and

dropped the remote. "So you didn't take off again," he said. "I figured you were halfway to Yakima by now, or Honduras."

"Is that what you want?"

"No, but I wanted to eat with you."

"I already ate at the lodge."

"I can pay you back," he said. His cell phone vibrated and he checked a text message. "My mother. She wants to know when we'll be back."

"Who?"

"Me and Paul. He went to Alpental for the steeper runs." Daniel tilted his arm to show the slope angle.

"And what about your friend's sister, the tall one with red hair?"

"You saw us?"

"Annabelle told me."

"Right, she ran into us. Marjorie asked for pointers, not that I'm any good."

"That sounds nice."

"Listen," Daniel said. "Everyone should be gone tomorrow." He turned off the television and asked how I felt.

"I'm fortunate to be here but I miss Guadalupe."

Daniel looked out the window and sat straight, ready to ski again. "You can visit with Lupe soon."

"No, Daniel. I can't go back there."

The phone vibrated and he silenced it again. "Or Lupe could visit you here. Spend a weekend in the cabin."

His mother's sweater climbed up my stomach and I pulled it down. "Okay," I said, and we shared a slow, uncomfortable abrazo.

"I have to go," Daniel said. "I'll see you in 2009."

And he left a bottle of folic acid pills. Instead of food for dinner, I had only folic acid. I had a nosy Peruvian waiter and a father's invitation for champagne. The pills tasted like weeds. I wanted to keep the door shut until the new year, open it to 1986 and start life again. There were no more sports on television, not even hockey. I picked up the phone. I should have called Lupe.

The evening was cold with pockets of loud, gran fiestas that filled porches and scattered crows. I wondered what a crow would think of holidays. Did they know why they happened, did they expect them on their calendars and sing different songs? My own father would buy me one present for every holiday: a dress, a new ball, a subscription to various periódicos. There were never cards. You already know I feel about Mi Preciosa, he said. Open it, Anzana.

Annabelle and her friends were still dressing when I arrived. "Should I have brought something?" I asked.

"Better you didn't. The fridge is full of booze and too many snacks. Did you say you were up here with someone?"

"He had another place to go."

"Make yourself at home," she said. "Grab a drink."

Blow dryers dimmed the living room and I noticed antlers poked out over the fireplace, a table with playing cards, ski boots upside-down over vents. A stereo connected to one of their iPods played Madonna. I sat, I waited, not sure for what. A few others showed up. Desconocidos, no other campaign workers. Friends of Annabelle from high school. A couple she knew from college in California. When the girls finished dressing they wore enough perfume for the entire condo to smell of them. A game began where you have different numbers of drinks depending on which playing card is chosen.

I filled my cup with water, my plate with carrots, pretzels, cheese, olives, grapes, pineapple. First I ate only as much as was polite, then twice that much. Time passed and I was thankful, momentum bringing the year to a close, a page turning over in my fingers.

On the television, a man wearing a rain coat and a bowtie shared an umbrella with a woman in a fur coat. They were below the Space Needle, its lights a silver Christmas tree. He said, "One more hour until 2009. Any New Year's resolutions?" And she said, "Moving to a less rainy climate—isn't there supposed to be snow on New Year's Eve?"

Minutes before midnight, Daniel arrived with his friend—a huge guy with a furry red beard. Our host introduced Caitlin and Amanda. "You already know each other," she said about Daniel and me. Paul went to the kitchen and Daniel sat close. Couch cushions sank. "I remember," he said. "You're from Costa Rica?"

"Si, Señor Rose. Tienes una memoria muy buena."

"Happy almost New Year."

"Is it?"

"I didn't know you wanted to come," he said. "I would have invited you."

"Someone else invited me."

Then Daniel said, "You're not drinking, are you?"

Ice cubes in my glass stood up to their ankles in melted water. "Why shouldn't I? You want to tell the party something before midnight?"

Everyone at the party went around and shared their resolutions. I said I would take my folic acid every day. Paul smiled with great white planks and said he wanted to join a baseball team. When it came to Daniel his pink lips jittered as if rehearsing what he would say.

"Birth," he finally said. "It's the glue that holds us all together."

"I think someone's been sniffing glue," Paul said, and the girls laughed.

"Anyway," Daniel's face was redder than Paul's beard. "I do have a resolution. I've decided to become a midwife."

"You're borracho," Paul said.

Daniel offered up his bubbly water, a tint of juice. "Sober as a priest."

"So you're gonna be a doula," someone said.

"No, it's a *doulo*," said someone else. "Here's to the doulo! The male midwife!"

They raised their glasses and I did the same. What else could I do? I swallowed an ice cube that swam in my stomach.

"I should go," I said to Daniel. "Tomorrow I have to leave my room anyway."

"Nothing's changed," he whispered. "Stay and check out the Space Needle."

"You're playing a strange practical joke," I said.

The television numbers clocked backwards from two minutes. White lights pulsed up and down the needle, an electric seizure. Purple burst sideways from its shaft. Then red. Then orange. Then yellow. Then green. Then blue. The clock went to zero and smoky light missiled in every direction. Seattle's crowd cheered. Our party screamed Happy New Year. "Bésame," Daniel said. Paul was kissing Annabelle. "Give me a kiss." "Why?" "Because my child is inside you. Because it's the size of a raspberry." He leaned very close, train tracks across his jaw and eyes the blue of Honduran skies.

The food had mixed strangely in my stomach and suddenly exploded. I stood up, numb legs. My bowels were heavy and running. I moved toward the bathroom. I barely pulled jeans to ankles before mierda splattered against the toilet and the wires of my legs. When Daniel knocked against the door and said "Todo bien?" I locked a bellybutton-shaped lock, flipped on the fan. "It was the pills," I said. My fingers touched liquid from my thighs and I held them over the sink. No blood. Just remnants of scattered meals, discarded waste. Sweet and pungent like a baby's pañal. It was the new year and Daniel whispered through the door, a voice from inside a dream. Daniel didn't know sueños and nightmares share the same ingredient, rose petal decay.

Chapter Eleven

Anza and I were alone in the cabin. It took a sedentary spell of days to believe my mother had actually left, Marjorie and her mother, Paul with his cynical nudge about me running into my beautiful Honduran coworker at the party. Anza set up her things on the loft futon, a semblance of distance from my inquisition. I asked if she felt anything in her uterus? Was she hungry? Had she taken her folic acid? To prepare for my applications to midwifery school, I read about female reproductive anatomy, making compulsive notes about birth defects: placental abruption, pre-eclampsia, spina bifida.

"Relax," Anza said. "Tranquilate."

I touched her tiny stomach protuberance and she slapped away my hand with astonishing reflexes. Her pointer finger then followed my scars from ear to jaw to chin. "Just like a Nike swoosh," she said, face reddened by the embryo's amniotic backstroke.

"The worst type of branding," I said, our fingers interlocking but not getting far.

She said, "Why don't you show me where you were hurt?"

"I haven't thought about going back there," I said. "Why dwell on the past?"

Anza insisted. And since a cycle of storms had buried the trail, we could only ski there. With sexless nights mounting, I felt ready for anything. So I brought Anza to the ski resort, outfitted in my mother's skis and boots. Their edges and buckles were rusted but functional. A little unsteady at first, Anza fell against the groomed snow—I helicoptered over and lifted her by the armpits.

I asked if she was okay. She simply brushed white from her parka and fell again. In my mind's diagram, her uterus twisted into a pretzel.

Anza didn't like mistakes and with skiing she proved herself a natural. On the first day she developed a decent wedge turn. By the third, she experimented with Stem Christi—skis held straight like l's in the middle of the word *parallel*. While I waited for her to get good enough for heavier untracked slopes, the muscles in my own legs regrew their former shape. I paid for Anza's lift tickets and when she got sick of my instruction I signed her up for a group lesson.

"So how do you like skiing?" I said one morning, still waiting for a thank you.

"It's okay," she said. "But very crowded. Isn't there somewhere quieter?"

I nodded, seated behind my breakfast.

Gray light entered through curtains behind Anza, a mischievous halo. She said it again: "Show me where you were hurt."

We packed snacks and extra layers. We glided our skis through the snow, using our poles to keep momentum. Anza followed me as I'd followed her on election day and I'd followed Paul those years back, so it felt like I was following myself in a circle. Our hoods caught the wind and we crisscrossed stands of firs and pines. Pinches of blue and green shaded the snow, momentary sunbreaks or the reflection of moss. Some might have commented on winter's beauty, but for me this was overlaid by the route's elusiveness. It took twice as long as it should've. Did I hope she would change her

mind? Sure, we've gone far enough Anza, now let's spread our coats down, spread our legs, and paint the forest with a different type of white.

No such luck. From the top of the small cliff we gazed down at the hemlock. All alone in a clearing, snow ramped softly against it and scaly bark interwoven up the trunk. New cones had fallen. New needles divoted the snow. I told her how I'd jumped over the rock and then kept going full speed, striking fist against palm to pantomime the impact. I scratched at my jaw, stitches and soft angles on a mandbile once sharp and proud. And I told her how Paul came over afterward. How he'd cut straps from an extra coat and stopped my facial bleeding, the bones seeking to separate from each other.

Anza followed me around the cliff and down to the tree. "Why don't you cut it down?" she asked. "If you hate it, shouldn't it become firewood?"

"What's the point of that?" I asked, and ran my gloves along the trunk where I'd swung my Pulaski. Then I felt Anza's hand on my face. A touch of inspection.

Goggles rested on Anza's forehead and with pinhole pupils she surveyed my face, ingrown hairs from a beard that receded before naked scars. Anza's second-hand ski parka flagged the wind. She looked at the notch in the bark and said, "You both made an impact."

"Please," I said. "Your poesía is very bad."

Her other hand reached my shoulder. Our lips touched and breath melted flakes from her lashes. Through the coat I found her spine and followed it up, rocks stacked into a cairn. We pulled away and I saw dark slivers below her eyes.

I asked how she'd been sleeping.

"Not very well," she said, tongue wiping her lower lip, the taste of me.

"Maybe you're cold so far from the fire. My book said that blood goes to the baby first and the mother's circulation—"

"It's not cold." Anza replaced her goggles, the lenses square and cranberry.

I turned my head sideways to kiss her. The sunscreen taste of chapstick receded to saliva, sour liquid between mouths. I wanted to say: "It's because we're sleeping apart. Because the child wants to be near its father." Instead, I kissed her again in that slow way—you lead, I'll follow—of someone lucky to be in it. For all I cared, we could have kissed for decades, Rip-Van-Winkling us to 2040. My beard would be gray moss and her hair a black rug, the hemlock tree old and arthritic.

We skied another short slope and made our way back. The chimney was still smoking. Had I left the fire going? How long could it have lasted unattended? Lights were on in the cabin and a truck double-parked my station wagon. Anza drew behind a veil of fir branches at the property edge.

"It's just Paul," I said. "You met him at the party."

"Does he know I'm here with you?"

"If he does, it's not because I told him. I said not to come here. For a military guy he doesn't follow orders well."

"Can you make him leave? Or can I go back to the hotel?"

"I can try and get rid of him, it just might take a while. What if we told him we reconnected at the party?"

"Does he know about election night?"

"Just that Obama won. I can introduce you however you like."

If Anza had carried her things with her, I believe she would've left, ski tracks all the way to the highway. Her lips suctioned inside her mouth and the cabin's smoking chimney reflected in her goggles.

"Make yourselves at home," Paul said. "There's plenty of firewood and some chili on the stove—zero stars, just how Daniel likes it."

Paul wore washed-out jeans, hiking boots, a Garfield Baseball shirt. Anza said she was going to change clothes and Paul watched her climb the stairs. "You expecting a baby or something?" he said to me.

The question hit me harder than the hemlock. "What do you mean?"

"Looks like you're getting into some heavy reading," Paul said, a midwifery text sitting open.

"For my applications."

"Who's gonna listen to someone without ovaries tell them about having a baby?"

"The doctor from Marjorie's event is an obstetrician, and he's done all right."

"That guy seemed cheesy as fuck."

Paul folded textbook pages like counting bills from a money roll and Anza descended the stairs, lady of the house dressed in my mother's sweater. She filled a bowl with chili and thanked Paul. Her wicker chair groaned and flexed wooden joints.

Cheddar dissolved in her bowl and she asked me if she'd be eating alone. I scooped a little, just a sample, not enough to condone Paul's presence.

"Tomorrow's the 20th," Paul said. "Obama's big day."

"Maybe we can watch on TV," Anza suggested between bites.

"There's no way we'll get it here," I said, pointing to the tin-foil antenna.

Paul said, "Field trip it is." He stared off into the fire, the mantle, and the seaglass art, looking for something and not finding it.

"Today was tiring," I said. "The application's due soon and I need a clearer picture of what I'll bring to the midwife table."

"Besides a dick?"

Anza snorted, a splatter of chili mustaching her upper lip.

Paul said, "That's what I'm talking about. Anza, you've got the sense of humor Daniel left back in the forest."

"Where can we go to watch?" she said to him. "A bar?"

Paul pulled the elbows back, hands behind his head. "I'm sober three weeks, and now someone wants to go to a bar with me. Sober holidays were bad enough."

Anza slept that night in the loft and Paul on the couch like a sentry. I kept the bedroom door open. Paul snored in waves and I tried fruitlessly to eavesdrop on Anza. The wind was insistent, treefingers tapping windows, and sleep eluded me.

In a place called *The Axe*, we ordered three coffees. Mine was half-decaf, half-caffeinated, enough to do jumping jacks around my gut. The waitress came by for refills and asked for IDs. "We're not drinking," I said.

"Yeah but you're in a bar with cameras," said the waitress. "Bunch of pricks at the liquor board too."

"Bureaucracy," Paul said, and he showed his Army ID.

Anza pinched her nose, hard, two fingers against the lacrimal bones—I thought she might pull it off and give that to the waitress. When she dug out her passport, Anza kept hold of it and flipped right to the birth date.

Upon our request, the waitress then changed a television from bowling to Washington D.C.—dirty city snow and boatloads of people shivering in unison. Obama had been my calendar, from quitting at the airport, to electioneering, to the first night with Anza, and now this odd breakfast with snowbanks growing outside and Paul growing impatient. "I need to be at an AA meeting by noon," he said. "So who's up for pool in the meantime—the only vice my mom and sis will allow me."

I shook my head and handed Anza her folic acid pills. Paul gave a distinct look: What-are-those-and-who-the-hell-prefers-inaugurations-to-pool?

"So I can take a shit," Anza said. Slow to her feet, she grabbed a cue.

"Now we're cooking," Paul said.

"I'll have to win quickly," Anza said. "So I can watch the swearing-in."

Paul cracked a red ball into a corner pocket and looked at Anza in a way I didn't like. What could I do? I pulled out my laptop and found a wireless network, scrolled

through old emails. One was from Doctor Wyman, asking about his recommendation letter to the midwife school.

The inauguration started up and I swung the computer closed. George and Laura Bush climbed into a helicopter from the Rose Garden. I waved a middle finger at the television on behalf of myself, and all those airport deportees. The White House looked big and empty in anticipation of the Obamas. Hopefully they kept Bush's cleaning deposit—and yet I wanted everything scrubbed clean, started anew, reborn. I wasn't alone. Sure, at the table I sat alone, Paul and Anza clacking through their game, but the D.C. crowd practically tumored through the screen.

A couple snowboarders shouted at the waitress to put bowling back on. She poured them a pitcher of beer and said to go watch it on the other floor. I don't think she cared much, but sometimes you feel a feeling whether or not you know why. Or so I'd been told. Personally, my mind burst like an ammunition factory on fire when Obama came up to that podium. Anza sat down next to me, eyes trained on the screen as Paul finished the game alone.

"Do you think he looks older?" Anza said.

"It's only been two months."

She said, "He looks gray. And his campaign staff watches from a ski resort."

Obama raised one hand and brought the other to the bible, speaking before the crowd, the television cameras, the eyes of god.

"We did what we could," I said. "It's up to him now."

Anza said, “Unless visas start falling from the cielo, he’s just another American politician to me.”

“Is that any way to talk about your boss?”

“He’s not my boss anymore.”

I asked, “What happened to *Si Se Puede*?”

“It’s been two months,” she said, and then asked to use my laptop.

“I thought your email was shut down.”

Anza turned the screen from me until I could only stare back at Obama, and Yo-Yo Ma pulling bow across cello. The crowd wept and cheered and moved their bodies in skitters that reminded me of waves at Mariners games. “You should watch this,” I said to her, “the consummation of our campaign.”

She folded my irony into a tight smile. “Would you mind if I downloaded my father’s program? Better to hear his voice like this than on the phone.”

The inauguration dissolved into newscaster recaps and Paul finished playing pool. He dropped us at the cabin and headed off for his AA meeting. Was there some way to move the cabin before he returned? Could Anza and I go elsewhere?

We lay on our backs and listened to Ruben Guillardo’s radio program. Tinny laptop speakers made her father’s voice robotic and nasal, digital histamines. The fire warmed my left side only. Anza translated her father’s Spanish into an English more accented than usual, a hurried cross of the linguistic bridge.

"Greetings Hondurans in the city and the country, from Tegucigalpa to San Pedro Sula," Anza said. "This is Ruben Guillardo with Voice of America. Banana prices are up and tourism is down, the national soccer team falls again to Costa Rica. The United States has a new President, and President Zelaya has some advice for him."

I pictured Anza in a doorway between two rooms, relaying what was inside the other.

"President Manuel Zelaya," Ruben said and then Anza, "formally announced the desire to reform the national constitution. The president seeks land redistribution to end what he calls a corporate oligarchy. He's called for a fourth ballot box in the upcoming election—beyond the normal three of presidential, congressional, and local elections. Always quick to speak and slow to think, Zelaya seeks to undo the constitutionality of the nation which in 2006 elected him."

Anza shook her head at this sentiment and closed the laptop. "Hijo de puta."

"Your president? *Son-of-a-bitch*?"

"No, Ruben Guillardo."

"You're calling your father that?"

"Daniel, you don't know him. And you don't know Honduras."

"I don't claim to," I said.

"Everything we make goes to the United States. Our people too. Twenty-five percent of our economy comes from remittances. Corporations have the power—government officials are straw stuffed into suits. Listen to how he speaks about the president. Zelaya's reforms could help the people, but my father negatively reports. He

follows orders from *Voice of America*. Everyone in Honduras follows orders. The brain is the United States, Honduras is just a stupid body, an organ."

"I'm sorry I don't know more about the country. You can teach me, everything."

"Everything takes a long time," she said, and gazed around the room as she had the bar, eyes reaching my mother's seaglass art. "When will Paul be back?"

"Not for a couple hours."

Blood vessels of her cheeks were blue streams. She brought a fingertip to her forehead. "Do you even know where my country is?" she asked. "Here is the United States, top of the escalera."

I touched my own fingertips between her eyebrows, static electricity, little lightning. "And below that?" My hand grazed her cheeks, massaging blood downstream.

"We go to the middle of the country, la nariz is the Rocky Mountains."

I moved slowly down her body and Anza narrated. "The chin is the border of Mexico, Baja Peninsula on one side, Florida on the other. Mexico itself is la garganta."

I sheathed her throat, a custom-made scarf. When she breathed and swallowed the epiglottis tilted open, O_2 exchanged for CO_2—the selfish brain, its disproportionate oxygen and sugar intake. Anza inclined her neck into a slender diagonal. She said, "Americans think Mexico runs from north to south. They ignore the geography, how it curves west and then east like a serrano, connecting North America to Central America."

My hand lowered to the notch between her clavicles, a recession, a valley.

"Guatemala," she said, "starts at the collarbone. A country poorer than Mexico, a country of civil war. They say Guatemala is the greenest country. Can you feel the

mountains, las selvas?" Ridges on her collarbones were ranges, jungle moss the inside of a pilled t-shirt. I switched the angle, arm extending up her shirt rather than down it. The truest mountains were her breasts, spongy beneath bra, alive with lava coursing through fatty tissue. Here I took my time, Edmund Hillary of this summit. I lowered my touch to the apex of her lungs, to the breastplate, to the ribs. A slight curvature at her belly, piedmont folding and faulting into something larger. My fingers spanned her bellybutton as I knew expectant fathers did, in hopes of feeling something from the child. "Here is Honduras," she said. "The center between poles—Canada and Tierra del Fuego."

"I'm happy to be visiting," I said. "You're a wonderful guide." And though I couldn't yet feel the child, I could feel Anza's pulse. It played subcutaneously under the land and marked time with its two-part rhythm—diastolic and systolic, rise and fall, pump and relax. I wondered what her father looked like, how it would be to meet him. I wondered how he and I were similar and different. Both of us had been cut off from communications with Anza. We both knew her fire, a Bunsen flame in her veins. "I'm happy to be alone with you," I said. "The two of us, or the three of us, should share my bed. There's a quilt my grandmother sewed."

"But you haven't heard about my country," Anza said, "the center of everything."

"Well maybe I could visit from the inside." The line makes me cringe to this day.

We stood up and wandered into the bedroom, a dull blue glow from a sheet nailed over the window. The bed was made from pine boughs that sank under our collective weight. "Okay," Anza said. "I give up."

"Give up? What are you talking about?" I kissed her in the places I was supposed to, but she was no warmer than marble.

"You're strong and I am weak," she said.

I said, "Neither of those are true."

"Please," she said, sinking further into the mattress. "I won't fight anymore."

"Don't start with that again."

"Tell me I need to be quiet."

"You do need to be quiet. Here, help me inside. No condom's no problem now."

So I entered her. Anza dropped her head back and bit at something in the air. I held onto her flanks for support and moved forward, then back, a little sideways. My body moved on its own.

"Please," I said, each word a thrust. "Now. Tell. Me. About. Your. Country."

"You already live here," she said. "Why can't you speak for yourself?"

"But I've never been to Honduras," I said, and struggled her over onto her belly, knees pushed into the mattress and thighs ramped toward me. The scars on her spine were rungs on a ladder of bone—four on each side, white asymmetrical ovals.

"Whatever you want," Anza said. "Please don't hit me again."

"I never hit you in the first place," I said, pushing all the way into her and seeking bottom, pulling back almost to her labia, and in doing so realized she wasn't talking to me. I couldn't match whatever Anza saw projected onto the backs of her eyelids. And I didn't need to. Besides, if my penis were underneath Central America, the semen wouldn't be cones or needles, but molten lava.

With each uplifting movement, I grew closer to our child. Anza and I breathed together. The child received its oxygen through the umbilical cord, its lungs filled with amniotic fluid. Water with electrolytes, proteins, carbohydrates, urea, the fetus's own urine. It smelled saccharine and could be a handful of colors: Anza's was green.

Our momentum slowed and I gripped the flesh of her shoulders. Lava rose from my feet, up between the tibia and fibula bones, femur, hips—clogging in my penis—the swelling, the damming—a substance that both creates and destroys, scorches and fertilizes. Finally it dispensed, steam where molten met water. Instinctively I pulled out, an exculpation. Milky ejaculate striped the head. I rolled next to Anza and tried turning her toward me. Her lips were closed again, still. Moist hairs vegetated the cleft of her backside and I ran a finger there, up the sacrum and the lumbar spine, continuing north. Clouds passed and the sheet over the window lightened to a brighter blue.

"Anza," I said.

Groaning, she wiped her damp forehead against the pillowcase. "Don't listen to me, Daniel. Somewhere a nail is loose."

"You mean a screw."

Once more shy, Anza pulled the blanket over herself and reached for her underwear, stained and flimsy cotton balled atop her jeans. Her empty bra cups hung on either side of a chair back. "Anza. Don't you think it's time you saw a doctor? My friend won't ask you for ID."

"He will come here?"

"We'd have to drive to Seattle."

"What news do you want to hear? That a healthy child grows in a coffin?"

"A *coffin*? We need to make sure you're healthy. We listen to what he says. You probably had a miscarriage and now you're reliving the experience. *Mayes' Midwifery* explains the trauma of childbirth. How it stays with a woman."

Anza stretched her jeans over her legs like Saran wrap. She inhaled and clasped the waist. "I'm gaining weight," she said. "From eating so much food."

"So we're not talking about what you said before? We'll just pretend that's how you talk dirty?"

"Please, Daniel. I showed you where Honduras is. It's not an easy map to draw. Can that be enough for tonight?"

I swallowed a mouthful of saliva and my desire for inquisition along with it. "What do you want for dinner?" I asked. And she said, "Hamburguesas."

Chapter Twelve

Though I've been back in Tegucigalpa for a couple of weeks, I still feel like just a tourist. I avoid my reflection in ventanas and espejos. Maybe I'm a vampire and don't have one. Every day my father goes to the radio station; I listen to him but do not follow him again. A bell rings as I walk into a museum. It is owned by the grandchildren of Lucila Gamero—our greatest novelist, who wrote at a time when women weren't supposed to. I pay the sleepy-eyed attendant and stand alone in the pale room. There is a walkway to a white square where visitors are supposed to stand and go no further. Lucila's typewriter rests in a glass box; I step beyond the white square to inspect it. Vowel keys have the deeper imprints. On this typewriter she wrote novelas and cuentos cortos, mostly from Mexico. Then in 1949, she visited her son in Los Angeles and wrote her *Autobiografía*. Books from her library populate the walls, leather volumes with gold lettering.

In another glass box, I see Lucila's medical instruments. She learned medicine from her father. Although she was upper-class, Lucila became known as the "doctor of the poor." Her medical instruments remain brightly polished, perhaps the task of the attendant now napping behind her desk.

I remember the first day my father made me read at the coffee factory. Both of my parents would be listening, not to mention the other trabajadores, so I spent a long time preparing. First I chose the piece: a chapter from *Blanca Olmedo*, Lucila's most

popular novel. But most lectors were men like my father, and I wondered who would listen to a little girl.

I drew strength from a scene in Lucila's *Autobiografía* where she dresses with mustache and hat, pretending to be a man. She even adopts a Yankee accent. When a Honduran businessman agrees to meet with her, she convinces him to sell her a silver mine. Even Lucila's tíos and primos are impressed by this American man, until she removes the hat and speaks in her natural voice. The men are disgusted.

And so, I decided to dress in that same manner. I remember wearing a bowler hat and pinning the legs and sleeves of my father's other suit (he had two). With a black marker that smelled like petróleo, I drew a nice mustache. Maybe I resembled Charlie Chaplin more than Lucila Gamero as I walked up to the lector platform. If I had a brother, he might have looked this way. My father stared at me, my mother too. As soon as I started the chapter, trabajadores began to complain. Even over my microphone I heard them.

Approval for lectors is shown by passing money around in a hat. If the reading is very bad, they pass a hat with a large hole in it. And it was my father who passed this old hat to me, empty. "It's okay, Anzana," he said, and handed me lempiras from the pocket of his other suit. "But you should read newspapers, not novels. No one has the patience. We're competing with the radio now."

Nevertheless, I remember tears waterfalling down my face and into my mouth, ink staining the suitcoat. I thought I could never be a lectora.

Today, I run a hand over the glass box of Lucila Gamero's typewriter. Lucila wrote of Honduras away from Honduras. Lucila was a woman before her time, and for that she is remembered. Not only did she write and practice medicine, she raised two children and was a loyal wife. I return to the street—bell waking the attendant—and wonder if Anza Guillardo will be remembered.

Chapter Thirteen

Never in my life did I have brothers, those strange creatures who are both friends and enemies. Families in my pueblo had these groups of boys and always they threw fruit at each other and wrestled like dogs. Of course, other men act as if they're brothers. I watched them in Tegucigalpa, at the Army base, the university, the centro, the campaign office. Now, living in the cabin with Paul and Daniel, I was pulled into the lives of male siblings. Paul was the loud one; Daniel was quiet. Paul wanted always to drive and go into the mountains. Daniel wanted to leave only reluctantly, preferring to study, his authority in the cabin pulling down on him, heavy steps, but Paul's were heavier, thumps from the loft.

I moved into the bedroom with Daniel. It had the only door that could be closed besides the bathroom. I helped myself to second-hand clothes—chaquetas, sueteres, goras, guantes, y calcetines de lana. Underwear we bought from the grocery store. Daniel's checks arrived to a PO box on Wednesdays. Paul joked about the checks and called Daniel lazy. One night over dinner Daniel reminded Paul that he was living gratis until Paul reminded Daniel that he was too. I wanted to say cállate to each false brothers but I also lived for free. Paul rang his spoon against his bowl and asked me how I felt.

"Fine," I said. "Why are you asking?"

"Because," Paul said, "I didn't know if illegal immigrants felt different from citizens." He smiled and sipped tomato soup, his teeth stained red.

"What are you talking about?" Daniel asked.

"Don't lie to me again, friend. I'm talking about an expired work permit. An illegal alien dropped from the sky. I saw Anza's passport the day I got here."

"Did you?" Daniel said. "I wouldn't have guessed." His teeth were out too, little red-stained cuchillos.

My instinct was to pack my backpack and leave. "It's okay," I said. "You had to learn this at some point."

Paul said to Daniel, "See, why're you so riled? The lady's calm—muy calma."

I sat between them at the table. "That's why I'm here," I said. "They drove to the cabins for an immigration raid. When they came I wasn't there. Christmas eve."

Paul looked up at the ceiling. Daniel looked into the red of his soup. I thought maybe his face would drop into it.

"You're on the run," Paul said. "That's fucking fantastic news. That could keep me sober at least another month."

Daniel said, "Now you know," relieved at his false brother's fading curiosity. So pleased with what he considered a performance, Daniel even played along. In a television announcer's voice he said, "La migra. They got pretty much everyone. Only Anza knew how to run fast enough."

"Well, I'll be," Paul said. "Just when you think you know someone."

In the bedroom Daniel rested on his back and drummed against my belly like drops of lluvia. It was a calm evening after another day of snowfall. A neighbor's

spotlight switched on when something crossed its sensor, blue entering our room. Daniel laughed a little and said quietly, "That was brilliant, Anzana. How you took Paul's invasion of your privacy and made it into a story. The detail of the immigration raid was so believable. You should have been an actress."

Why was it better for his friend to know about an expired visa than the pregnancy? How was a huahua more disgraceful? De todos modos, it was better the child stayed a secret, especially with what I was about to tell Daniel.

"La migra," I said. "It wasn't my invention."

The drumming on my belly dried up. Bright blue light shined onto us. He asked if I could explain.

"It's not complicado. There was a raid at the cabanas, like I said to Paul. I am not an actress."

Three claps Daniel made. He applauded an invisible stage, his fingers interwoven and held together muy duro. "I fucking knew it. It was too good to be true. You didn't come here for me. Or for the health of the child. You came because of an ICE raid, and because you were broke."

"I came for all those reasons."

He said, "You're not an actress? But you act when we make love, pretend we're different people, in another country. All this time you acted like there'd been no raid."

Here, I would discover if Daniel was an angry person. Or a vicious person. Whether he would take this news as an insult. Instead, his face softened, a fold which

cupped his scars grew flat. His hand returned to my estómago and Daniel managed to smile, a long, thin sonrisa that hid his teeth.

I said, "Usually you don't talk about immigration raids."

Fingertips pressed on my skin. A palm smoothed the surface as though it were cake batter. There were footsteps in the loft, Paul creaking toward a window he slid open. We heard the drizzle of urine, snow melting into yellow below. The window stayed open a while and Paul smoked a cigarette. Daniel moved his eyes to the left and to the right, reading an invisible newspaper. "The things immigrants go through I'll never have to experience. The system is wrong, not the people. That's why we worked to elect Obama. That's why I drove two dozen times over the pass, and why you called so many pages of people."

"Okay," I said. "I'm glad you aren't angry. Will you excuse me?"

Daniel unwrapped his body from mine and I walked to the bathroom. With Paul still awake I was quiet. I didn't know how far the cabin's tolerance would go. How much longer would they want me there, hidden like Anne Frank, a Honduran exile who'd exiled herself. A bolt was loose on the toilet seat and I nearly fell onto the floor. I'd begun to feel heavier, the weight more work for my body. My joints ached: the tobillos and rodillas supporting my legs, muñecas and neck. The belly continued to grow. I couldn't tell where I grew because of the child and where I grew because of abundant food. My pecho ached, nipples sucked by invisible mouths. And I didn't know how much longer Paul would stay, how much longer we could keep secret the growing huahua. Maybe he already knew. I inspected the liquids and solids that entered the

toilet. Tonight: urine like hibiscus tea. Gas furled up toward the ombligo, pain like after an incision. I bit into my hand to gag the sound. Was this how the child communicated with me? Or had something gone wrong?

With a hand captured behind his head, Daniel rested against the bedroom wall. He held open a midwife book and quietly read aloud to himself. He asked me about my feet and my forehead, if there was a change in my lungs or circulation. I told him that I had taken the folic acid and not to worry.

"I made an appointment with Doctor Wyman," he said.

"And what will you say to our upstairs neighbor about that?"

"Maybe nothing. The health of the child is what matters, your health."

I pictured driving the highway west, the skyscrapers of polished metal, the lights of the city beyond the water, the Space Needle, my apartment—Little Honduras. "De acuerdo," I said. "Okay."

That night we barely touched each other. Daniel wanted only to read. And for an actor he hated our role playing. I had tried it without. Daniel would enter me frontwards, his arms vibrating since he avoided putting weight on the huahua. The milk white of his culo jounced over me, up and down, down and up like an oil drill, breath growing louder, sometimes a hand pulled from its support onto my breast, pinching a nipple between thumb and first finger. When his arm tired and sweat shone blue on his neck he would ask for us to switch, which meant an almohada under my stomach and he entering me

again the other way, a deeper angle that slid straighter in—he started slow and moved to double-time, one thrust beginning before the other ended. In my mind, I played the tape I always played and pretended to be there with Daniel. Normally clean-mouthed, his orgasms approached with pain and swear words. Fuck. Goddamnit, goddamnit. Jesus Christ. Swearing was the price of admission, the fee he paid to plant more semilla inside me, or at the base of the spine where it stuck to hairs even after I'd showered. Then, he pretended to have a cigarette and his speech switched to Spanish. Fue muy bueno. Me encanta teniendo sexo contigo. Eres una amadora impresionante. It made me regret the Spanish I'd started teaching him. And always this question: "How did you like it?"

"What do you mean?"

"Did you have an orgasm? Did you come?"

"I'm sorry," I would say. "It felt good. That's not your fault."

Daniel would glance down at his penis, el serpiente backing into its hole. "What can we do differently?" He knew the answer, he didn't need a textbook: do exactly as I told him. And every time we discussed this he would ask again, Why? Always *why*.

"There is no why with a female body," I said, trying to believe it myself. Then he would be quiet, kiss my cheek, open a textbook, and I would open a newspaper.

During the car ride down the mountain, we played my father's program from Daniel's iPod. The headlines reported President Zelaya, at a showcase of tractor equipment, asking a question to el pueblo (a word that means both the village and the people). "Does the pueblo agree that we must change the constitution?" said Zelaya.

My father reported that the president had scheduled an initial vote for June; if it passed, the fourth ballot box would appear in November. The coverage was unfavorable. Ruben Guillardo was reading the script. His perspective was the radio station's perspective, the Voice of America. Closer to Seattle, static began to overtake my father's voice. Stations interjected canciones, noticias, comentarios. In Issaquah I switched the station we transmitted from until Ruben disappeared completely. Daniel sang along to Pearl Jam until the vocal range flew beyond his own and the exertion reddened his cheeks. Lines around his eyes showed age, six years my senior.

We drove a winding road through the arboretum. Rain shook naked tree limbs, others who maintained their green leaves. Families buried under big round paraguas walked the trails. Daniel's car smelled sour and I wondered if mold grew in the seats. He took a turn and a large university building came into view with treadmills in the window and a turf field in front. The turf was bright green almost yellow. A purple UW painted the center and soccer goals stood at either side. Two lacrosse players tossed a white ball in an arc. A woman in a raincoat walked the track with her head down, she might've been talking on the phone. Air smelled sweet near Lake Washington and was noticeably warmer. The doctor's office overlooked the water and bamboo straws slapped the side of the building. Daniel spoke to the receptionist while I fingered through a *Sports Illustrated* from the previous year. Barack Obama shot a jumpshot. His wrist snapped down toward his long body. In the gimnasio lights his wedding ring gleamed.

"You must be Anza. I'm Doctor Wyman."

Daniel took the magazine into his lap and waited outside while this man led me to the examination room. New alfombra squeaked beneath our feet. The walls were painted light blue and smelled of glue. Doctor Wyman had framed pictures of himself crouching next to patients from different countries, clouds of hair from when he still had some. His large Judio nose shaded gray stubble and his eyes sought mine. "Please tell me," he said, "why you've come to see me today?" My belly poorly hid beneath my sweatshirt. I had begun to grow. I had begun to show. Of course, this was the second time. I suspected the doctor saw my brain's movements. Wyman was patient, I thought. Patient for a man.

Before he found a better salary in Tegucigalpa, my father sought places for me to read. He told me we needed extra money for my school uniforms and fees, dresses, futbol cleats. I was a teenage lectora with a bad first experience. I walked or took busses to factories after school with newspapers under my arm—my voice deepening and cuerpo madurando with cigar rollers and t-shirt stitchers for audiences. The trabajadores paid from their own wages. They asked me to read certain news stories. Unfortunately, fábricas were distant and I spent more time traveling than reading. "You need more work Anzana," my father said, "unless you want to sell clothes or stop attending colegio." Often I thought of my mother and our pueblo, the mountains that grew green from the earth, a béisbol field with hats for bases, scents of coffee so strong I didn't notice them until we left.

The road I walked between our apartment and colegio passed beyond the metal fences of Soto Cano, a United States Air Force base. Razors on metal wires sliced sunlight. I would stare up at the razors and wonder if birds collided with them—collared trogons and motmots with their short, sharp beaks built for stealing coffee beans. Soldiers performed exercises in a flat field beyond the fence. They ran in close packs and sang horribly. They flipped their guns and disassembled them.

Someone who called himself Airman Alaska approached from the other side. "Where you walking every day?" he asked, cigarette smoke exhaled in an upside-down 'V' through his nostrils.

"I'm going to school and returning to home," I said in developing English.

"Eres muy bonita," Airman Alaska said. "Do you know that you're pretty?"

I shook my head because I didn't. He asked what I did with the newspapers under my arms and I told him how I read them at the factories.

"That's great, real great," said Alaska. "Which papers you read anyway?" I showed him the *Hondudiario*, *El Heraldo*, *El Pais*, from Spain. Alaska offered to bring me other papers: *The New York Times*, *USA Today, Stars and Stripes*. The man ran off to find them, a cigarette still in his mouth. Alaska rolled the papers tight as cigarillos and pushed them through the fence. In exchange I gave him my old newspapers to help improve his Spanish. Our routine lasted for some time. In the mornings we exchanged papers and in the afternoons he'd ask about a new phrase or ask me to translate something. Through a rolled newspaper Airman Alaska funneled coins into my hands.

When my father saw the American periodicos, I explained about the soldier. "Do you think this soldier would have you read to him and his men? Soldiers always have money for cigarettes and booze. Too much money to spend. If they liked you, you wouldn't have to go to the factories anymore."

Airman Alaska told stories about wintertime, about Eskimos and glaciers calving, bays filled with seals, mountains that rose from the ocean. He told me about winter days with no sun and summer days with no darkness. Pimples in his shaven head made a grid of pink volcanoes. "I'm not used to the heat," he said, gotas of sweat on his skin. "In Alaska this kinda heat would melt the whole state." He showed a shoebox of photographs kept under his bed. The soldier's family hunted elk and rode snowmobiles. They fished in Bristol Bay. One picture showed him with a swimming medal over his shoulders. "I used to swim like a fish and now I swim even faster, straight to the bottom," he patted his stomach which sagged over his beltline. "I'll talk with the chain of command about setting up a place for you to read," he said. "Most of these knuckleheads could use a little more Spanish. They get off the base and most can't even order tostones to go with their cervezas. What'd probably be best would be you reading the articles in English first so they get what you're talking about. Then you read in Spanish so they'll get the context. How's that grab you?"

I wanted to say no but couldn't. We needed the money and I knew my father was right. More money for less work and less time traveling sounded appealing. Then I could play fútbol in my free afternoons, or study as much as I needed. Although I read and wrote in two languages my other subjects suffered.

"This won't be forever," my father said. He already read advertisements at the radio station and was very good with making friends. "I'll find a better job and you can go back to just being my daughter." So I said yes to Airman Alaska.

I entered Soto Cano through the main gates rather than the side door Airman Alaska usually opened for me. The guard asked for my identification and handed a badge that said 'Arts and Entertainment'. Many things I saw for the first time. A McDonalds restaurant where soldiers ate. American films projected in green canvas tents. Soldiers who smoked joints on their bunks. I felt afraid and also excited, as though I'd passed into a new country just by crossing la puerta. The land was leased by the United States and wasn't considered a permanent base, although Hondurans know it will be there forever. When monsoons sweep across from the ocean, military buildings aren't damaged. Not even a terremoto could shake Soto Cano's foundation.

I stood on a stage and read to the soldiers, seated in metal chairs that made clanging noises whenever their boot-heels brushed against them. This was the first time I'd used such a loud microfono, my voice amplified into the air. Just as with factory workers, soldados wanted to hear about sports or celebrities and not politics or business. They listened when I read in English and occasionally laughed at my accent. Few besides Airman Alaska paid attention when I read in Spanish.

"I don't think they like it," I said to him later.

He counted American bills inside his shoebox. "No one's holding a rifle to their heads. If they didn't like it, they'd leave."

"Some have left," I said.

"Maybe they have duty or it's their turn to call their families on the sat phone."

Airman Alaska lived in a room with three other bunks. No one slept in two and the third was empty and unmade. A fan rotated above. It sounded like a helicopter, its axis broken as though it might fall onto us.

"How do you say 'very beautiful for her age' en español?" He still looked down into the shoebox.

"Tan bonita por su edad."

"Well that sounds nice," he said. "It sounds nice because it's true that you are. How old are you anyways, cuántos años tienes?"

"Fifteen," I said. "My birthday is in September."

"Mine's around Easter. Course, Mom said I was bigger than an Easter egg, big as an ostrich egg."

"What do you do in the air force?" I asked.

"I was supposed to be a pilot until they told me my eyes weren't good enough. I said 20/25 vision's pretty damn good. They said you've gotta have 20/10 to have a shot. They've got me changing tires on planes, learning to be a mechanic. Now I know how to fix things almost as much as I know how to break things."

Airman Alaska's hands were large and dumb and I couldn't imagine him holding a plane's yoke, flying high above the cordilleras to bomb a target. He held out bills that were folded tightly together and looked like postage stamps. I reached for them and his hand closed over mine.

"What are you doing?"

"Nada, nada. Same as a fish," he swam his arms, pantomiming the Spanish joke.

"Let me have the money."

His hand closed tighter over mine. "You have to earn the money."

"But I already read to you."

"Airman Alaska wants a personal session. It gets lonely on the ground, especially with beautiful ninas walking past the fence and saying hola. A man can't change tires all the time."

"Let me go," I slapped his shoulder.

He took my other hand in his and pulled me onto his lap, facing him. The shoebox contents scattered: polaroids of his family, polished rocks, coins and bills.

"You knocked over my things," he said. "Gonna have to garnish your wages."

Sweat balled on my neck and the fan recirculated stale air. Alaska's eyes crossed and uncrossed as he pulled me closer to him and I tried pulling away. His shirt was unbuttoned at the throat revealing a white undershirt stained with tobacco. He smiled and I noticed his teeth stained the same color. His dogtags were a cadena around this dog's neck as he bit into the space between our faces. A spot of blood crowned a pimple grown onto his nose.

"Please let me go," I insisted. "I don't want the money anymore."

"What happened to good old-fashioned work ethics? You Hondurans are lazy as they come. No wonder you're all so fucking poor. But I don't hold that against you. Not so long as I can hold you against me."

Airman Alaska extended his tongue forward and licked my cheek. Saliva dripped down the neck.

"Do you know my name?" he said. "My real name?"

"Alaska," I said.

"Don't lie to me."

I nodded, having seen the apellido stitched onto his shirts. A piece of tape carried the same name over his bed.

"I want you to forget my name," he said. "I want you to forget my face."

Then Airman Alaska lifted me at the waist and dropped my face onto the mattress. My arms punched backward but he clasped the wrists. I heard the grinning teeth of his zipper, the unfolding of his belt. By twisting my head only the side of his abdomen came into view, growing and shrinking as he breathed. On the floor sat the photograph of him wearing a swimming medal. A boy's hair was spiked, naked chest narrow and revealing ribs. He wore a small blue swimsuit which outlined his penis, pointing down between his legs. Thighbones scraped against my back and I tried to pull away. When he entered me, pain burned upward toward my throat, each stroke deeper and deeper into my flesh. His grunts made it seem he were the one hurt. Again I pulled back and again he held me down. A belt wound around his hand, its buckle the same polished metal as soldiers' lighters. I yelled out and the first whip struck my spine; I yelled louder until he increased their strength. The next strikes swam tears into my mouth, choking my gritos into silence. In this moment my father was at work, reading advertisements, smoke from his lips while he read the script. Alaska's family was

thousands of miles away watching sunsets over mountains, wondering about their son who'd once won a swimming race—his body a thin fish, rippling through the pool with outstretched hands. Now the man weighed heavy atop me.

A long vowel floated from his lips when he finished inside me. He pulled away and I saw his face filled also with tears, terrified of what he'd done. "You can have the money," he said, gathering it from the floor. My underwear had ripped open like paper and I left it on his bed. My skirt was untouched and I replaced it onto my hips. Airman Alaska's purple curled penis dangled from a shrub of hair. A sheen of sperm reflected the room's light. He pulled up his jeans and the thinnest outline of the penis remained. "Can I leave from the side door," I asked, "and not the main gate?" Airman Alaska nodded his pimpled head. With a large, dumb hand, fat as a baby's, he covered his face—perhaps from shame, perhaps because he thought I would forget this way.

"How do you feel?" Doctor Wyman said, hand placed now onto my belly. "Como se sientes?" A slight Castilian lisp accented his Spanish which made him sound older and a little feminine.

"Not so bad," I said. "A little pesada, a bit slow walking. Maybe a few headaches and a few times I've thrown up."

He wrote these answers on a sheet of paper and kept his eyes on mine. "For how long do you believe you've been embarazada?"

I used my fingers to subtract election night from today's date. "Thirteen weeks," I said and made a tilting mas o menos with my hand.

"Have you had a sonogram?"

"No."

The doctor recorded these answers. "Would you like to see a video?" he pointed to a television screen tilted down toward us.

"It doesn't matter," I said. "The baby won't survive."

"Why do you think that?"

"The last time I spoke to a doctor he said my body couldn't carry a child."

"And who was he?"

"In Tegucigalpa."

"Did you trust this doctor?"

"I don't know. He did a procedure to take care of the child, then another so I wouldn't become pregnant again."

"What procedure?"

"He didn't say what it was called. I slept while he did it and my father said we made the right choice."

"Maybe it felt that way, but the procedure was done wrong. Otherwise you wouldn't be pregnant. How about the sonogram? It might help you to see the child."

"What does the video matter, if I can't carry it?"

"I'm not convinced of that," Wyman said. He pointed to a photograph on the wall: the doctor holding a black child next to an African woman. "Nadifa said she was cursed to not have children, that with another miscarriage her husband would leave her. I delivered the child in two hours. Mali, 1992."

"What changed?"

"For Nadifa, maybe nothing. Maybe she felt safer with a doctor. Or maybe the drugs helped a little. Birth is a mystery, even with science."

Doctor Wyman tucked my shirt onto the bare slope of the pecho. The estómago expanded like a balloon as I breathed and I felt shy about my new size. He warned me about a cold sensation and then squirted gel, spreading it smooth with a paddle. The white bell-shaped item he called a tranducer sent waves of sound into me. Wyman turned on the television screen. The image was black and white like an old film. He pointed out parts of the child's body: tiny fists, a head, veins like tree roots inside its heart—a little hairless alien.

"There he is," the doctor said. "Your child."

"What are the options?" I asked.

A shadow from Daniel's feet darkened carpet under the door. Wyman winked at me and held a finger to his lips. We were quiet a moment and the shadow disappeared.

"What options do you mean?"

"Do I have to keep this child?"

"A woman doesn't have to do anything she doesn't choose. That's the law. I think you can safely carry this child. About terminating the pregnancy, the procedure is safe until twenty-one weeks. There's still time to consider that."

"And if I wanted the abortion right now?"

"My policy is never to recommend abortions the same day as the first exam. There's emotion involved and it's not a good time to decide. I can recommend some clinics to help you with that."

"Couldn't you do it here?"

"After ten weeks I won't perform abortions."

"What if Daniel doesn't agree?"

Doctor Wyman handed me an envelope and said, "If he gives you any trouble, you don't have to give him my recommendation letter. De acuerdo?"

"Okay," I said back, and tried to hoist my mouth into a smile.

We drove in the direction of Daniel's mother's house. I'd seen the house on election day—the tall green shrubs shaped into rectangles, stone lions and a mailbox with rocks glued onto it. Daniel parked a couple blocks away inside the entrance to Volunteer Park. He said, "You don't want to go in, I assume. I just need to dig up my college transcripts." I smiled and said okay. He took the keys with him, glancing back at me.

A polished black circle in the middle of the park overlooked a reservoir whose fountain shot water upwards in an umbrella shape. Through the black circle I watched the Space Needle, downtown skyscrapers, a quilted gray ocean that reminded me of Doctor Wyman's eyes. Two camel statues stood in front of the Asian Art Museum. I ran my hand over their stone humps, cool rain droplets against skin. Now that the day started to meet night it had turned cold. Couples exited a glass building at the north end of the park, pushing their children in strollers.

Inside, the conservatory had moist full air, temperature appropriate for orchids. The orquídeas smelled rich, brillante. Filaments swam inside sharp, curved petals of many colors: black and white, red and yellow, brown, green, orange. Some were no larger than a fingertip. Other flowers were large as my head. Maps showed their countries, named pájaros who pollinated them.

Another room held the cactus. Protrusions stabbed from soil, thirsty soil with rocks piled up. Cobwebs grew from them and some were hollowed like old bones. A diminutive woman walked near me and leaned onto a walking stick. "This stick used to be one of those saguaros," she said, and pointed to the biggest plants in the room. "If you carve and gloss them right they can last forever."

"Very nice," I said and held it when she offered it to me, very light for its size.

"Let me know if you need anything," she said, taking the stick and pointing to a button on her fleece jacket—Volunteer Park Docent.

"How about Honduras," I said. "Any plants from Honduras?"

The woman started to walk away, her stick a compass. She took me back through the orchid room. Beyond a white-rimmed window, I noticed Daniel standing near his car. "This one's Bird of Paradise," she indicated a flower with a red beak and a yellow tongue. Ave de paraiso, we called it in the pueblo. The ones I remembered were larger. "A couple of these probably grow in the jungles," she said.

"Have you ever been?" I asked.

"A long time ago, sweetie. My husband was a Peace Corps volunteer in Nicaragua and when I visited we traveled. Didn't come back with any cuttings though.

Traveling was leagues easier then. Now you won't get me on a plane—those body scanners cause cancer."

"Well, maybe you'll take a ship," I said.

My reflection cracked in the woman's bifocals. The two of us were now alone in the conservatory. "Bye bye," the woman said and latched the lock behind me, sign flipped to Closed. Daniel spotted me and waved.

"Remember the last time we were here?" Daniel said.

"Seattle?"

"Volunteer Park."

"Do you want to see the view from the water tower? Unless you're too tired to climb all those stairs."

The stairs made hollow metals sounds. Voices echoed from the top into a cylinder of water the structure had been built around. Daniel pointed out Queen Anne Hill. To the east were the montañas and the cabin, beyond that Yakima—all swallowed by rainclouds. Still, sunset's pinks and purples stamped bits of ocean.

We hadn't yet spoken about the child, about what Doctor Wyman said.

Daniel touched his nose to the grate and said, "This used to be my favorite view."

"Not anymore?" I asked, wondering if I were the reason.

"All I see is the line between my mother's part of the city and my father's—everything south of Pike is his, everything north of Pine is hers."

I asked if his mother had been at home.

Daniel hesitated a moment. "My mom's barely anywhere these days."

"Did you tell her about me, that I was with you?"

"You and I haven't discussed that, Anza. Now it's just the three of us."

I watched a satellite disappear behind the clouds. "Yes, me and the hermanos."

"That's not the three I meant."

A young couple with the wide faces of mental disability drank cans of orange soda. They petted a runner's black dog, held on a leash as he ran in place, a brief moment of affection before they ran down the staircase's loudness. "That was a pretty dog," the boy said to Daniel and I. "Yes, she was," Daniel said back. "A female dog's a bitch," the girl yelled.

Daniel said, "Midwifery classes could start in the spring."

"By spring, I'll move back to Yakima. They need workers during cosechas and can't do any more raids."

Daniel placed his hand on the curve in my sweatshirt. "I like having you at the cabin with me. What did Wyman say?"

"He said there's a child inside. We watched it on the video screen. And he said an abortion would be simple."

"Wyman recommended that?" Daniel quieted his voice, gazing toward downtown, the line of his parents, our campaign office, the hotel. "I know the procedure is humane, I've been reading all about them."

"I don't mind an abortion."

"But if we keep the child we'll be in it together, juntos."

And I said, "That's not a very romantic marriage proposal."

Daniel rubbed his scar and his eyes burrowed deep into his head.

"I'm sorry," I said. "A nail is loose."

"No, it's okay."

Sky met ocean without separation, darkening to a deeper blue. The disabled couple left and wind rattled their latas on the concrete. In the parking area, a car flashed red lights like an ambulance.

"You want to become un partero. A midwife. You don't want a child."

"I want to know the child will have a good life," Daniel said.

"To your family, I don't exist."

"It's not about them. It's about what we want."

He hadn't offered an introduction, and I hadn't asked. Daniel touched his hand to my wrist. I pulled away, patted him on the butt.

So we agreed to wait, until we both knew what we wanted.

Paul played music on the stereo. Cigarette smoke hung in the cabin. He leaned down over the railing and said, "Where the hell you been?"

"In Seattle," said Daniel, "Spending the day with my mom."

"Anza too?"

"Just me and Sandy. She was with her friend Guadalupe."

"Good snow today."

"I'll bet," Daniel said, who yawned and pointed to the bedroom as an actor might. "We're probably gonna turn in."

"Yeah, you do that. I'm getting up early for another day on the mountain. I'll try not to make too much noise cracking the eggs, since I assume I'm skiing alone."

"Next time," Daniel said. "My application's due."

"You're the worst ski bum I've ever met. Both of you."

"Buenas noches," I said to Paul from the bedroom door.

"Yeah," he said. "Buenas fucking noches."

Daniel sat at the bed's edge facing the blue window. Above us a fan spun whose noise made Paul sound farther away. "I don't want us to keep worrying all the time," Daniel said. He unbuttoned his shirt, showed pale skin and dark hairs scattered on the chest. Our bodies touched beneath the feather-stuffed colcha Daniel's grandmother sewed. Shins rubbed against shins. Daniel brought his hands and mouth to my feet, told me that Tierra Del Fuego wasn't fiery at all, heat from his tongue melting glaciers.

He said, "There's another life inside you that might never see a day like today. Let's enjoy it for the child's sake."

"And how should we do that?"

"Cast me out." I felt him hardening against my leg, plastic turned to marble. A rough palm pushed on my shoulders. A tongue now licked my neck. With furious strokes of the hand Daniel rubbed his penis and spit onto it for lubrication.

"Turn around," he said. "Don't look at my face."

"No, Daniel."

"Yes, Anzana. Turn around." And he pushed harder against the shoulders, my pecho compressed against our mattress. Cotton pillowcase filled my throat. He pushed on the pillow.

"Daniel, please."

I felt him slide into me. He said, "How does that feel?" and he pushed deeper in, narrow hips against my culo. I told him to stop and his erection hardened. Like a metronome the fan clapped with each revolution and Daniel grunted with each thrust, his deeper-voiced impression of mamhood. The pillowcase soaked with my saliva and sweat. My vision became liquid.

A ball of sound gathered inside my stomach, reaching up through the lungs and throat, finally escaping my lips. It was a clean pure sound, a long unbroken note shattering into the bedroom and carried through the cabin, down the road. The neighbor's light shined our bodies blue. Daniel crawled free from me. Above us, Paul brought his boot-heel to the floor and yelled, "Shut up." White dust fell onto the bed.

With a guilty look Daniel held his penis, like a gun he'd shot by accident. "I thought this was what you wanted. It's what you'd asked me to do."

"That was my mistake," I said.

His pale shallow chest grew and shrank at a high speed. "Do you want me not to touch you?"

"I want you to touch me as you've touched other women."

"We've tried that. You don't respond."

"But you do. My body doesn't work."

"Doctor Wyman told you your body works fine, better than mine I'm sure."

"No, he said a child grows inside me. Even a broken body can have a child. Women birth children with AIDS, addictions to drugs, children from an affair, or from some old gordo. Just because there is a child doesn't mean anything more."

Daniel shrank further.

"Besides," I said, "some men just find pregnant women attractive."

"I'm not sure I should say that at my interview."

"This isn't an interview."

Daniel considered the situation. Then he rubbed himself again with his hand, the length expanding, an arrow rising from his waist, and again he was inside me. I closed my eyes and listened to his breathing, to the fan, to the movements of Paul. Inside me the child moved, swimming warm and blind. Thoughts passed. Thoughts of Guadalupe. Thoughts of my father and mother. Thoughts of my country and my arrival in Seattle. I wondered if a child is born with all of your memories. Or is a child born as newsprint sheets before the words are printed, skin waiting for life to print itself. Daniel pushed. His chest turned red. Shorter hairs above his ears curled with sweat. Finally he pulled away onto his side.

I asked him his own questions: "How did you like it? Did you have an orgasm?"

Daniel shook his head. He rubbed his chest dry with a shirt. The scar on his abdomen looked pink, irritated. He pulled a textbook from his end table and held it open. Air from the fan flapped its pages—a chapter about morning sickness. It said that women chew ginger. They drink peppermint tea.

Chapter Fourteen

I cradle my baby, and with airplane pillows I cradle my arm. I wonder if his body makes sense of miles we fly above the earth. Right now, his thoughts are silent. They come out as spit bubbles, fingers pointed at crooked angles. Eventually they will form into words and he will speak them. One day he will ask a question. It will be about birth. And I don't mean that he will ask how he came to be born. That's for his father to obsess over. He will ask why birth became so important to me that I've assisted with so many, drawn diagrams of the female reproductive system from memory. It's a beautiful image, although strange to most men. Men prefer everything on the outside, nothing on the inside. Simple phallic objects. Trees. Telephone poles. Baseball bats. Mountains—and perhaps I skied and hiked because of my own birth story.

It starts with an image of Ray Rose driving a Datsun with his hand on the stick shift. Sandy writhed in the passenger seat, thirty-eight weeks pregnant with yours truly. They'd been in Spokane visiting my father's foster mother. She lived alone and they decided on a visit before my birth. Ray drifted between the lane dividers, speeding somewhere between not-in-a-hurry and recklessly fast. This was an unassuming morning in 1980 and it wasn't a great day to head west. The Juan De Fuca plate had begun to fissure, Mount Saint Helens soon to relieve the pressure. The volcano erupted, ejaculating its crown into the atmosphere. That baby had to blow. The summit was leveled by over a thousand feet. Fifty-two people were killed and ash spread for hundreds of miles. Ray and Sandy hadn't a prayer of getting back over Snoqualmie Pass.

They couldn't even make it to the family cabin where they'd conceived their child. Barely past Ellensburg, the department of transportation turned them away. My mother, delirious from the prospect of a second miscarriage, was told by a man wearing a gas mask that she might have to give birth in a town she didn't know with a doctor she hadn't met. What options did my parents have? What can you tell mother nature (or father nature) about their behavior? Sandy told Ray to get them a motel room. They stayed two days until contractions began, and then he Datsuned her to the Kittitas Valley Community Hospital. Soot sugared the roads and buildings, ashes on the windshield and hanging from tumbleweeds. My mother described my birth as sulfurous. My father says he coughed before he kissed my placenta-slathered forehead, before he slapped my buttocks and said, "Go get 'em slugger." From an opiate haze my mother groaned. Little Daniel Rose, seven pounds nine ounces, sooty footprints.

And now Daniel Rose is the progenitor. He is the observer and studier of birth. He spews attention all over his baby, a baby who gurgles onto peach-colored lips and knows nothing about why he flies on an international flight. My baby cries from down deep basalt insides and it's time for him to be changed. He's had his own eruption, maybe the pureed apples did it—that's my boy. I undo the seatbelt and step into the seesawing aisle. The lavatory door folds open. Our images are harsh and fluorescent, my skin paler than his.

Chapter Fifteen

At fifteen weeks Anza had begun to show. Her belly pushed out from the perfectly round waist. Light brown flesh looked especially light, new skin to house the child or old skin stretched. Her face had grown a little plump and a small pouch formed under the sharpness of her jawline. New weight settled also in the butt and thighs, the upper arms. To grow a child was to grow yourself, to become someone different in the process. Acutely I noted these changes. I also wondered how much longer Paul would be fooled. Paul, who skied alone, slept on a futon, complained about AA meetings, and stink-eyed the couple he lived with—falling further and further into himself.

What was happening inside Anza? Fully formed fingers and toes now clung to each other. The heartbeat slowed significantly, no longer rivaling a hummingbird's. Oxygen flowed through Anza's amniotic sac and the umbilical cord gave steady snack supplies. Blood pumped into her veins and capillaries with a fifth more volume. The child had recently doubled in length and was covered by translucent skin. Veins inked Anza's body, some that might remain varicose post-birth.

When we made love, I considered how the fetus must think the motion was an earthquake, or Mount Saint Helens erupting. When we made love, I drifted into my mind. This didn't present a problem. Sex became a silent period, a meditation, a ritual that mattered more in form than in content. The contents that mattered grew inside her and I read textbooks to better understand. The child became a clock. Fetal development measured our days and weeks.

Doctor Wyman emailed wishing us luck with everything. The midwife school asked me for an interview, so I assumed his recommendation hadn't been too devastating. Anza requested to stay in the cabin and I drove alone to Seattle.

The program director was a black woman with hair styled into waves over her forehead. She scraped wax from her desk using a red-polished thumbnail. "My children have decided that melting crayons is their latest hobby," she said. "Children are unpredictable. As are childbirths."

"Absolutely," I said. "That complexity is my interest."

"Do you have children of your own, Mr. Rose?"

"No."

"Any much younger siblings, nieces or nephews?"

"None."

"People say everyone should get an equal shake for a job. That's a nice idea but sometimes it's bullshit. If I have a birth canal and a baby pushing through it with a thirty percent chance of ripping my perineum straight to the rectum, I want someone beside me who's pushed out a couple of their own. Would you trust a mechanic to fix your car if they didn't drive? My question is this: what about childbirth intrigues you enough to be sitting here?"

Through the window behind her, runners and kite-flyers passed—speedy blurs on a light gray day. Doctor Hayes ripped a wax oval from her desk. Stockings spanned her sandaled toes which she arched and stretched. One eyebrow dropped and the other raised

as I went through it all: my injury, the woman at the airport, emergency medicine, men-not-being-able-to-give-birth.

"You're a speech maker," she said. "I didn't see that on your CV."

"That's my only speech. So what did you think?" I asked.

"I've heard worse. One man applied last year and I'm pretty sure he just wanted to look at vaginas."

"I hope I've made a better impression."

"It would be hard to do worse. So is there anything you've left out?"

"Left out?"

"In his letter of recommendation, Doctor Wyman mentioned you and your wife are currently expecting."

I wondered why Wyman had said Anza was my wife. That would be more respectable, I supposed.

"I'm sorry," I said. "My wife, she's at sixteen weeks. A difficult time for her."

"The second trimester is known as a smoother period."

"Yes," I said. "Difficult but smooth."

Doctor Hayes blew wax from her fingertips. "Was there any reason not to mention your pregnancy?"

"I'm superstitious. My father works in baseball—no stepping on foul lines, no talking to a pitcher during a no hitter, no changing socks during a winning streak. Maybe it carried over."

"The superstition of not mentioning pregnancy ends at twelve weeks."

"You can't be too careful."

Doctor Hayes opened a manila folder and perused my application, sighing every few seconds. Fog rafted over the lake.

My leg had fallen asleep and I shifted it flat on the floor. "Ma'am, I know I'd make a good midwife. I'd be the best doulo you've met."

"That wouldn't be hard," she said, "because I've never met one."

"And a first time for everything."

"Mr. Rose, I'll be honest: I find your exuberance off-putting. Midwifery calls to you; you don't call *it* and wait for an answer. And we train midwives for careers. It's not a part-time gig. Do you feel ready for that commitment?"

"I believe I am, I just—"

"There's no need to answer," she said. "It's a rhetorical question. We'll take your tuition money and do the best we can."

Her words stayed with me. They echoed as we shook hands and she escorted me out. *Do you feel ready for that commitment?* They tailgated my southward drive on 99, the crumbling viaduct along the waterfront shaded by Belltown's balconies and one pancake cloud covering the sky. Giant pregnant bellies appeared in the distance—the domed sports stadiums. Lines now painted my father's parking area. My father and Joanne had timed their flight to spring training so I could drive them to the airport.

Joanne ran her fingers self-consciously through blonde hair cut short while my father hugged me and breathed me in as though it were the best way to know me. Their

luggage made a symmetrical stack against the couch. I wanted to vomit all over Joanne's pink rolling suitcase. Dinner was on the table—chicken and quinoa salad, to-go boxes on the countertops.

My father took his seat and said, "This is Joanne's first spring training. Exciting, don't you think?"

"Thrilling."

"Ray said you went to Arizona with him once before."

No more than thirteen, I'd stayed for five days and stalked the hotel lobby of all my favorite Mariners for their autographs—Randy Johnson, Ken Griffey Jr., Edgar Martinez. Now I said to Joanne, "I can barely remember. My mother went also. She collected old maps from the Southwest."

The salad's cashews and grapes gunked into a paste that filled my molars. Flat mineral water washed down the chicken and mixed poorly with the residual nervous chemicals from my interview.

"Daniel's becoming a nurse," my father said to Joanne.

Her eyes opened wide and she held her hands up, fingers toward the ceiling. "That's wonderful."

"A midwife," I said. "Not a nurse, a midwife."

"Well, that's wonderful too," she said, playfully striking my father's shoulder.

He said, "I can smell the placenta now," and turned his face aside as though an awful smell wafted from the chicken impaled on his fork. "How long's that take?"

"Three years, starting this spring."

"You'll take classes up at Snoqualmie?"

"No, at a midwifery school by Green Lake."

My father poured his beer into a glass and slurped the foam. "Whenever you need, make yourself at home here. I cancelled the internet but that's an easy call."

"Thanks," I said. "Don't get too sunburned, use aloe."

"Joanne can't get burned at all. She'll be doing player interviews and sunburns mess with the white balance."

Dust had settled in the condo and I noted a couple marks on the leather sofa, a slow climb from artificial habitation toward actual living, yet it remained a stage set, an impression of a home. Or maybe I was slow to accept the severance between parents.

My father offered his car for the airport ride and I said I preferred mine. We took the back way, my commute route, and raced a freight plane that pulsed red landing between rows of white light. Joanne wheeled her suitcase away and my father palmed me a fifty as if I were a valet. Gray stubble sprouted from his cheeks, the prominent jaw. His eyes were full and colorless. "I'm sorry," he said. "Christmas in the cabin didn't feel right for me. I hope you had fun."

"When Saint Helens erupted, did you ever think it was a bad omen?"

"To me it was fireworks, a twenty-one gun salute."

"And if I hadn't been born, how long would you and mom have gone on pretending to love each other?"

"Daniel, you were the actor. You tell me. We didn't commit because of you and we didn't stop because you grew up."

On the other side of the revolving door, Joanne tucked a scarf into her collar. I took my father's money and hugged him, then said, "Enjoy filming the balls and bats."

Ray Rose slid his hands behind my shoulder blades. "I don't expect you to be all smiles and congratulations when you see Joanne and I together. But I've loved baseball since I was a toddler crawling in orphanages, and showing it to thousands of others is enough for me. I didn't grow up like your mom did and you did, with a cushion beneath. I was thirty when we had you, barely older than you are now. I'll be glad if midwifing works out, and I hope you can wish me the same."

"You'd better check in," I said. Then I separated from my father and wished him a safe flight. My hazards flashed and I lingered until they'd checked their luggage, Joanne's arm wrapped around his like a train car pole, two anonymous travelers, no different from those I watched for years during EMT shifts.

I'd missed a call. Marjorie left a message asking how things were going in the cabin with me and Paul. She had the weekend off and wanted to discuss a visit. I called her back and proposed we meet at my father's condo instead.

Marjorie brought catering leftovers, a bottle of Walla Walla cabernet. Buttery croissant flesh caravanned down as I drank more uncarbonated mineral water, and she said something about her wine's tannins, tanic acid she called it. One whiff and I thought it had rounded the base toward vinegar.

She said, "So Paul's doing good with not drinking?"

"Yeah fine, unless he isn't actually skiing during the day."

"Have you two been going a lot?"

A thread poked through the sofa arm and I pulled on it, lengthening the downy white curl. "Mostly just Paul. I've been studying the midwife stuff. It turns out the stork theory has been debunked."

"Did Paul ever mention how he delivered a baby in Afghanistan?"

"He didn't."

"Yeah, one night he told me about it. His unit was patrolling a mountain village when someone called for a medic. Suddenly there's Paul in a little room delivering a little girl with two jarheads helping."

"Jarheads are Marines."

"Well anyway, in a country where women barely leave the house and never talk to strange men, my brother rolls up his sleeves and does that. Almost enough to be proud of him." She smiled as best she could, city fluorescence coming in through the window and speckling her hair.

The couch thread now made a little ball and I tucked it inside its hole. "Paul and I haven't talked much."

Ulna and radius bones tapered toward Marjorie's copper bracelets of looped wire. One wrist looked significantly larger. "I'm sorry if I pushed him your direction," she said. "The boozing was getting bad. Mom was taking it hard, quiet as ever. Her boy getting back from the Army was all she had to look forward to. Then he's just sitting watching TV and slugging Olympia. It wasn't working."

Cabernet had stained her gums. I noticed the bright cylinder of a ferry drifting beyond the West Seattle waters.

I said, "He probably just needed clean air, something to clear his military haze. I think he'll be fine."

"We're talking about Paul like a child, like we're fighting over custody of our cantankerous veteran."

"You can have him."

"Except I don't want him," she said.

"Then we'll put him up for adoption." I poured a little wine into the estuary of my mineral water.

"So the visit," Marjorie said. "How about it?"

"We're visiting now."

"But Paul's not here."

"He's here in spirit."

"Paul needs to stay sober. He needs someone to push him in a direction, preferably someone with direction themselves."

"I've got direction. You know about the midwifing."

"I'll believe that when you clap your first baby's behind."

"And working to elect our president doesn't count as work?"

"You're on unemployment now. Daniel, you're a Gemini—you'll never stick with one thing."

"Let's focus on Paul."

"You've always focused on Paul. He was the boisterous one and you were the quiet friend, the chauffeur, the one who came over to eat our pancakes."

"You weren't complaining when you were in a pinch and needed an EMT."

"That's true. Daniel Rose—Mr. Reliable. So when does Ray get home anyway?"

"Not for two months, spring training in Peoria with *Joanne*."

"You're the crown prince of empty family homes."

We threw on our coats and walked to the porch. Dew slickened the stamped concrete, gray squares meant to look brickish. From our low maritime vantage the ocean spread black, the east steeply partitioned by Beacon Hill, First Hill, Capitol Hill. Cold covered my body, colder than the mountains. Marjorie shivered and rubbed her forearms together like fire sticks. A butted chin lent her clear face just a touch of masculine.

She said, "Are you uncomfortable with me coming to the cabin?"

"It's bad timing," I said, opaquely.

Then Marjorie wound her fire stick arms around me. A train announced its passage by Union Station; I couldn't tell which direction it moved. The convex and concave segments of our bodies aligned. I felt her loneliness—the responsible daughter and sister who catered to others and never to herself. This would've been the time to tell her about Anza, preferably before the embrace had begun. Time to untangle. Instead, our heads moved magnetically closer and her lips covered mine, a serpentine tongue slithering inside my mouth. The smell of her filled my nose, wine and perspiration. Our images reflected in the sliding glass door. My grownup reflection surprised me

somehow, as though I expected to see fifteen-year-old me. A string of saliva bridged our mouths and I severed it like a spider web.

"This isn't a good idea," I said.

"Because of Paul? You've already kissed his sister on your father's porch. And a couple times before that."

"Still…" I slid the door open and returned to the living room. Marjorie's croissant was a carcass, meat picked clean from the ribs. She didn't hesitate to reassemble her purse, to straighten her hair, to draw chapstick across her lips.

"Just let me know what's going on with Paul," she said. "I'm worried about him alone up there."

"I'll drive back tonight," I said, the second time an evening drive separated us.

Wending toward the door, Marjorie said, "They're calling for icy roads."

My father had a coffee maker that brewed individual cups. As soon as Marjorie was gone, I pressed two into my thermos and clouded the decaf with milk. I removed my interview outfit and left it in a hamper. As I packed up, I thought of something from the book *Fatherhood Fears.*

Question: Will I do a good job at the birth?

Answer: Like it or not, men are generally pretty squeamish. A fear that many have before the birth is that they will not be able to handle all of the blood and bodily fluids that will be around. They fear that they may faint or throw-up. In reality this almost never happens. You may not like the blood, but you will probably be too concerned with your partner and child to let it have much of an effect on you. In follow-up interviews, it turned out only one out of 600 men fainted, and that was in August in Fresno (California), and the air conditioning had gone out and two of the nurses had to leave the room, too.

Interstate 90's often backed-up exit was empty and the highway sparsely populated across the Lake Washington bridge, through Mercer Island and Issaquah. Mountains turned the night darker inside a deep u-shaped gorge, white crosses dotting the shoulder. An El Camino passed into view and I dimmed the headlights; when it had gone, I shined my brights against granite walls and pine trees, capturing them in a still photograph. The speedometer read nearly eighty.

Was I in a hurry to return? Did I want to lie under my grandmother's blanket with Anza? By letting Paul occupy the loft, did I help or hinder him? I counted the days spent with Anza, the years I'd known Marjorie, the weeks of the pregnancy, the number of times I'd done this drive.

Lane dividers looked like yellow turtle shells. I downshifted. The red-glowing radio adaptor hung from the cigarette lighter and I remembered the radio programs of Anza's father. I drove past skiers who zigged and zagged under domes of resort light. Classic rock emanated from distant speakers nailed to the lift towers. Should Anza have this child, I wondered. If tonight were election night, would I have used a condom? I settled on a soft no. But what did it matter? Now that I had the direction of midwife school, my life and my profession comingled in an imperfect union.

Quietly I entered the driveway in the manner of a stranger or an incidental occupant rather than the de facto landlord. Maybe Paul had noticed Anza's stomach in my absence. Maybe he had tried something with her. Somehow, these prospects didn't bother me. They might equalize things, erase my secrets from the chalkboard. Both were

asleep. Both had left traces of themselves in the living room. Paul's cigarettes. Anza's newspapers. Dishes in the sink. Embers in the fireplace. I considered whether I could still return to my car and drive to my father's, with no intention of returning to the cabin. Cut the ski season short. End the friendship. Abort the child.

Anza stirred and pulled the blanket over her hips, awhirl in dream. Our neighbor's light was on and I paused in front of the blue sheeted window, my shadow cast over the bed. Anza slept on her back, arms crossed. In a single-buttoned sweater her breasts hung low. A wave of black hair crashed behind her head. Where had I first seen Anza? I realized it hadn't started with the campaign. I'd known her longer than I'd known her.

Blue light on her skin reminded me of a Picasso I'd seen with my mother. A woman crossed her arms in the painting, dressed in a single-buttoned sweater. Their lips were held together in the same terse manner. My mother had pointed out the lithe figure typifying Picasso's Blue Period. She explained how the painter's friend committed suicide—the impotent Casagemas whose beloved Germaine Florentine was carrying on an affair with the painter. Anza resembled this woman; in my grandparents' old bed lay the beloved of Casagemas, in whose apartment Picasso conceived the Epoca Azul.

The next morning Anza asked about the interview. Paul had already gone to the mountain and we sipped oatmeal—hers with apples, mine with raisins and licorice root.

"I'm glad to hear it went well," she said. "You will be a partero after all."

"There are lots of classes before then. The first one is reproductive anatomy."

"But I am your course on reproductive anatomy."

"You don't show up on a college transcript."

"No," she said. "Not on any documents." Anza's voice slowed. Her spoon rattled against her lower teeth and she used a second hand to stabilize it.

"Is the oatmeal okay?"

Anza didn't answer. She just slid a newspaper against my bowl. A picture showed a black van and a line of handcuffed people.

A day after immigration authorities descended on Yakima in a sweep that netted 30 arrests, local groups are trying to settle a shaken Latino community. Local churches are providing food and money to affected families and have brought in immigration attorneys to offer free legal advice, said Robert Siler, chancellor of the Diocese of Yakima.

Others are trying to find families that are either hiding or have left home out of fear of another sweep. "We're trying to locate them now," said Philip Garrison, president of APOYO, a local nonprofit agency that runs a food bank and provides other services for Latino families. "You've got people fleeing or hiding."

Early Thursday, U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement agents carried out 6 search warrants in and around Yakima. The agency said the raids, which were directed at homes and employment sites as part of a larger investigation into expired and counterfeit visas.

Many employees at two local hotels and a hay pressing plant didn't show up for work Friday, Garrison said. Garrison, who is in contact with some of the families, said he's been told that during the raid, handcuffed children were left outside for a long period of time.

But an ICE spokeswoman said the raid has prompted a flurry of false rumors. They didn't know whether anyone was actually forced to wait outside while their home was being searched and she was certain that no children were left unattended.

"We interview suspects to find out if they have children," she said. "We identify if they have family or friends that can take care of the children. It's a deliberative process where we make sure that no child is left without a guardian."

Said County Commissioner Peter Bennett, "Families are Yakima County's first priority. We keep families safe, which sometimes means taking action against the bad apples."

-*Yakima Herald Republic*, March 12th, 2009

"Wait," I said. "I know this Bennett asshole."

"They took Jose Luis."

"Who is Jose Luis?"

"He ran the center. Maybe you saw a big mole on his nose. I never liked him but now he's gone."

"I'm sorry."

"And Lupe is hiding."

"How do you know?"

"We keep a number at the center where we can check for messages. Lupe left me one from a grocery store."

"I'm glad she wasn't arrested."

"Daniel, remember when you offered for her to stay here?"

I slid my spoon into oatmeal guts. "I remember."

"Now tell me if that was true. Can Lupe come to the cabin?" Anza folded her arms again and rested them on the belly crest that pushed against white sweater.

"Okay," I said. "But I'm not sure how Paul will react."

"Then ask him to leave."

I pictured Paul bursting into his house, where he and Marjorie would lay all their Daniel Rose cards onto the kitchen island. Maybe he knew about the pregnancy and was humoring us. Paul had delivered a child, while for me this remained secreted away inside

textbooks and inside Anza. Maybe Marjorie would tell Paul about the porch, our embryonic relationship.

"I can try."

"Will you tell him about Lupe and the raid?"

"He has issues with the immigration stuff—better I say something else."

Anza rubbed the space between eyes and cheekbones. "So say I'm pregnant."

"Why would I say that?"

"Because I am pregnant. Because Paul said you weren't a very good actor."

"I'm not sure it's a good idea, with our situation."

"Our situation is a huahua growing inside me. Besides, he has seen my body and heard me in the bathroom."

"I'll talk to him today," I said.

Anza took a bite of apple-infected oatmeal. Steam flew through her lips like cigarette smoke.

Paul was still skiing at Alpental when I called. He waited for me there. Today was cold and about to snow. I hid my face inside a balaclava, scanning the hill. He wore a wool hat which made his head seem enormous and he pulled it down to where red beard met eyes. He clapped and swung his arms for warmth. "The fuck took so long?" he said.

"I didn't know which lift you were at."

"That's cute," he said. The resort had only two lifts.

We rode the chair toward the upper mountain. A black iron pole separated us,

wallpapered by stickers, connecting us to the metal haul rope. Warm breath fogged my goggles. Snow crystals melted into islands.

"It's nice to be up here," I said.

"What is this, your third day of the season?"

"I'm not keeping track."

"You won't pay off your season pass at this rate. And shouldn't you be wearing a helmet?" Paul tapped his glove against the crown of my head.

"Come on," I said, "we'll ski wherever you want."

We traversed in a direction I considered east. The track dipped and rose. Paul conserved his speed at the right moments and I skated to keep up—ducking beneath tree limbs, shirking my body between trunks. Where to descend was complicated. The longer we traversed, the fewer tracks beneath us. The longer we traversed, the less hill to ski down. Paul chose a long route and then we shouldered our skis and bootpacked uphill. This required us to duck under a ropeline marking the ski area boundary. Paul broke trail and I sank my boots into his prints.

From the top, he fingered our route. "If we cruise down there," Paul said, "we can make a few more runs before they stop spinning chairs."

"That sounds good." I adjusted my boot buckles in search of courage.

"You all set?"

"Just a minute. There's something I wanted to ask you about."

"Daniel, those meetings are a waste of time."

"It's not about drinking," I said. "But are you drinking?"

"What's this about?"

"It's about Anza."

"Oh right, the illegal immigrant keeping your bed warm."

"Have you noticed anything different about her?"

"She's better dressed now that she's adopted your mom's wardrobe. Why? You think she's getting heavy?"

"Heavy would be one way to put it," I said. "The other way is pregnant."

Tantrums of wind dropped the snow in spirals.

"Pregnant? Come on, pal, unless a woman's rich I always use a condom."

"I'm serious, Anza's pregnant. That's why she's staying in the cabin." These words had grown large inside me and it felt good to release them.

"I thought she came because of an immigration raid," Paul said.

"Maybe it's both things. Election night went a little too well."

Paul laughed. "So you're becoming a midwife to figure out how that happened. Ray must've never given you a decent birds-and-bees talk."

"You're the only other person who knows."

"This whole time you've been lying," he said. "And I've been waiting to give you these." Paul opened his backpack and passed me a huge bottle of folic acid pills.

"We need some time to figure out what we'll do."

Paul panned his head to check for skiers who weren't there, just the mountain's granitic outcroppings. "So you waited until we booted up here to give me the boot?"

"I appreciate the pills. I'll make sure she takes them."

He opened his jacket and pulled out a water bottle. Drops fell onto his beard and he wiped them with his sleeve. "You want a sip," he said, "to make sure it's water?"

"It's not like that."

"You've wanted me out since before I arrived. You think I'm so terrible."

"Paul, you've done good things. You saved lives, you delivered a child."

"My sister's got a crevasse for a mouth. And if I told her about Anza, the whole world would know soon enough."

"Don't do that."

"Why wouldn't I?"

"Because you're the only friend I've got."

Paul readied his boots and pulled on the cuff of his gloves. "Yeah, and friends change. Just say you're done with this friendship so we can ski down and move on."

"Please keep this between us," I said.

My friend bit his teeth together and I could see the serration where he'd been grinding them. Light wrinkled over the slope and we looked out. The North Cascades are steep young mountains and Alpental is no exception.

We skied in silence. Paul leaned forward while my stance set me further back on the skis. Our run cut through a chute, a snowfield, a stand of trees. Paul weaved through hemlocks and firs at a speed I'd never attempt again, music with an invisible time signature. I braked before a trunk that wasn't there. I ducked under branches feet taller than me. The glade opened up and rejoined the ski area. My skis slid through the

uncertainty of new snow and I pulled to a stop. Paul was already at the bottom. I watched him in the middle distance taking off his skis. He threw them over his shoulder and tromped away toward the truck.

By evening, Paul was gone. He took all his stuff like he'd never been there. The only trace he left was the vandalism of my mother's seaglass art. Pieces of glass lay scattered about the fireplace's brick base. The fireplace where Christmas stockings had hung with our names on them. Wood from the frame had been split in two and the Americas separated roughly in a line through Canada, the Midwest, Mexico, and the Pacific Ocean west of South America. Coarse dust from the map's paper marked the tear. Anza thanked me and set carpenter's glue along the frame.

She cracked her knuckles anxiously as we drove. Lupe was waiting at the bus stop. Trade in an actor for an actress. Paul for Guadalupe. My friend for Anza's. The only other person who knew about the pregnancy for the only *other* person who knew about it. Tall traded for short. White for brown. Red hair for black. She was a decade older, maybe two decades. Her eyes were set deep into her broad face, lips tightly held and slightly vibrating. Lupe. Guadalupe. La Virgen. The candles which burned in glass cylinders. Where would she sleep? Where Paul had slept. I changed the sheets, corners pulled tight across the futon and fabric stretched like skin. While I did so, Anza and Lupe fought downstairs. They spoke in Spanish and I could understand just a few bitter syllables. La migra. Putas. Donde estabas? Jose Luis. Yakima.

"I'm glad you're safe," I said to Lupe. "Make yourself at home."

"I will find another place soon," she said. "Te prometo."

"Stay as long as you need."

She and Anza hooked eyes again and I saw a softening, a lowering of their brows—Lupe's follicles now grown Kahloesque.

"I will cook for us," she said. "The huahua needs good Honduran food."

That evening, Lupe roasted bananas and soaked beans, sliced sweet onions without even looking at them. She baked cakes in muffin tins. Weight had been shed from her frame and still Lupe was plump, a resemblance now between the two women. Would Anza look like Lupe someday? While we ate, I considered this. I ate until the mountain in my stomach grew tall, close to my throat. But where Lupe's bones were short and rounded, Anza's were long and angular even in pregnancy. Anza was built for movement. Lupe was built for staying put, and I couldn't help picturing her thick legs on a factory line. Or maybe she was made for a kitchen because her cooking was excellent, savory paired with sweet—cumin and cayenne counterweighted by cinnamon and brown sugar. My fickle stomach was even tricked into tolerance. Lupe hovered over my plate and scooped more. "Muchas gracias por todo," she said, with a smile clearer than any I'd made since my accident. I couldn't believe I basically owned this place, while others had to enjoy such luxury in stolen days only.

Anza picked at her food. Tines whined across porcelain. She chose a bite and dropped it upside down onto her plate like a tractor's load, smoothed it over, chose again, and chewed unconvincingly. Her stomach pressed against the table and she sat a hair

further back in her chair. Anza was glad for Lupe's safety and yet our predicament remained. The deadline for a decision drew close. Twenty weeks arrived, only one more for a safe abortion. I wished time could be paused, or smashed like my mother's art.

Week 20: You will notice your baby being more and more active, and may even be able to see some of its movements. The growing uterus is pushing up against your lungs and pushing your tummy outwards. Your navel may suddenly pop out and stay that way until after delivery. Your chest (rather than your breasts) has expanded and, if you do not already have an adjustable bra, now is the time to buy one.

Sebum from the sebaceous glands mixes with skin cells and begins to form the vernix. This protective vernix clings to the lanugo all over the skin, especially on the hairier parts and in the creases. The baby is now about 10 inches long.

-*The Complete Book of Pregnancy and Childbirth*

"Anza," I called from the bedroom, she and Lupe sipping cold tea on the couch.

"Yes," she said, "Lupe and I are just platicando."

"Of course," I said.

"The huahua grows well," said Lupe, who already looked healthier herself. "I think he kicks, he will be a futbolista."

I said, "Those raids shouldn't happen."

"Daniel knows someone from the article," Anza said, touching Lupe and pointing at the folded newspaper.

I pulled the newspaper back and told Lupe I didn't really know him.

Still, Lupe looked at me in a different way. "This is what your amigos do?"

"Peter Bennett's just someone I met during the campaign. And illegal immigrants aren't his favorite people."

"So that's what we are," Anza said, "Just illegal immigrants?"

"Of course not," I said. "Illegal, undocumented, it doesn't make a difference to some people."

"So maybe you will call and say we are here?" said Lupe.

"No, of course not. I just—"

The two women laughed. My fist was raised and it dissolved open. A joke. I was the joke. The telenovela character in the middle of colliding events. Lupe kissed Anza once more on the belly and made her way to the staircase. Anza watched her go. With a newfound understanding between them, I wondered if she wouldn't prefer to spend the night upstairs. "You can go," I said, and motioned there.

"Thank you Daniel," she said, pronouncing my name the Spanish way, like Danielle. "Lupe won't sleep unless I read to her," and she grabbed the newspaper.

I left the door open, listening to Anza's translated stories. The quote from Peter Bennett clapped against my skull. I drifted into half-consciousness and saw the story through the windshield of a black ICE van, guns and country music behind me, as though I were one of the agents. Everyone from the center would be deported, everyone from the Seneca factory. They had their own countries. We were there to send them home. Vaya con Dios. We depended on them. We were paid to play Cowboys and Indians, Capture the Flag, kids games like Paul and I used to play. Anza and Lupe were on the same team; I was on the other. It wasn't a woman and man thing. It was the United States at the top of the map and Latin America at the bottom. It was white guys with a line of brown people in handcuffs. My Adam's apple separated from my throat and I couldn't speak, a familiar silence from a jaw wired shut. I sat up and pulled open a

textbook. In a diagram of the female reproductive system, ovaries were wings. Or the flapping arms of a headless woman. My eyes couldn't focus and the ovaries doubled from two to four. The book threw itself onto the floor.

I overheard Anza talking about Honduras. She read articles we printed at the library. Things had grown more complicated. Prospects for rewriting the constitution had polarized the public. One story said: "Illegitimate protests in the name of an illegitimate president." Another described factory strikes and rallies which supported rewriting the constitution. "Hondurans are teaching themselves how to fight." Police cracked down with tear gas and water cannons, the first reported death. My only analogy was the WTO Riots, the Battle of Seattle, which had ended in a matter of hours.

Anza described her father's broadcasts and said to Lupe, "Mi padre es un cobarde." My father is a coward. And what could I have said to that? I had freedom of speech with nothing to say. Anza discussed a political situation I didn't grasp, in a language I barely understood. Their country sounded more and more foreign: Honduras, the belly button of the Americas.

Chapter Sixteen

Lupe kept from crying in such a way: when she spoke and her eyes wetted, she moved her thumb into her mouth and pushed on a rotten tooth. Edges of pain kept her lágrimas dry. My compañera returned to me, even if she looked like a tired child sucking on her thumb.

As Lupe recounted her historia of the weeks separating us she ran the details through me: a place in Yakima I knew, something a trabajador said, someone who asked about me and the huahua, which she'd told them about. And Lupe spread the word widely. I couldn't blame her for this. On my behalf, she had called my father. Normally the station would not give his number, although her reasons for the call were convincing. Lupe told my father that his daughter was either in Honduras or in jail or dead; she mentioned I was pregnant and that the American father had a scar across his face like half the letter equis. Minutes passed on the phone before he finished crying womanly gritos.

I regretted not contacting my father or Lupe after the first ICE raid. But would I have done anything different? Pride and resentment melt slowly. During my time in Daniel's cabin, Lupe and Jose Luis lived in the office at the day worker center. It was a small room. They operated the centro during the day, locked the gate, and drove away each night. They would park the truck at the edge of a wheat field then walk back to the centro, climb through a hole in the fence, and sleep on the office floor. They lit velas for their only light and bought meals for the microwave. Then in the mornings they would return to the truck, drive for a while, return to the centro. When the ICE agents arrived

with flashlights, Jose Luis was naked except for a cowboy hat. He rubbed Lupe's breasts through her Obama shirt. The agents touched her also through her shirt and felt her excitement, asking in Spanish if she was caliente and she said, no, she was fucking cold. Then something unexpected happened: Jose Luis pushed the two agents into the desk and ran. His white hat disappeared into the white field, the flashlights following him with their yellow beams like motorcycle headlights. Lupe had time enough only to find shoes and pajama pants. Through the fence she crawled and ran the opposite direction. The shivers began almost immediately, she said. My compañera found a similar hiding spot to my own and listened. ICE called to her. They told her she wouldn't be arrested or deported. Guad-a-lu-pe. Guad-a-lu-pe. Because they called her by name she knew they'd caught Jose Luis. They broadcast their voices through my old megaphone, Lupe said, although I find this hard to believe.

De todos modos, Lupe told me this story without tears. With a thumb in her mouth. We both knew happiness had to be found when it was available. We had reason to celebrate amongst our misfortunes. We were both alive. We were now together. And I had a huahua inside which Doctor Wyman told me grew healthy. This was hard to accept: that the Honduran doctor lied to me; or that he'd been so poor at his surgery he could have killed me; that I lied to myself about my womb being a grave. Why so morbid, Anza? Many women are acosada sexualmente. This is the story of women. But pride and resentment melt slowly. They wait for the primavera.

Together with Guadalupe I felt stronger. We each did. We were steroids. And though Daniel and I remained between the wall and the sword with the baby, Lupe had a different view. Keep the child, she said, that is the first thing, consider your relationship with Daniel second. Lupe barely knew her own children and still retained optimism. She said she wanted to support me, but preferred supporting pregnancy than abortion. Lupe held my stomach.

"Do you know about Ix Chel," she asked. "How can you not know? Ix Chel was the goddess of fertility—her shrine stood in the middle of my pueblo." Lupe grew up on the Caribbean side of Honduras, where Mayan deities still enamored the people. She continued: "Her head is like the moon and her body is a snake. Ix Chel holds a jar upside down and the upside down jar releases rain. Her jar also shows how she controls childbirth—the jarra's liquid is the same as a woman's water when the child is born."

"In that case," I said, "Daniel must be Ix Chel. He thinks he will be the one who controls childbirth."

"You can't let him decide."

"I don't mean decide," I said. "I mean that he will be the partero delivering children. He studies for this profession."

Lupe started to laugh and now the laughter brought a tear. "If men are midwives," she said, "then what professions are left for women? The problem with birth is too many men are brought to the earth."

"De acuerdo," I said, and with a tissue I dried her face. "But some men are worse than others."

"True," Lupe said. "Some men have their own houses. Some men may decide to marry their women."

"That is if their women agree," I said, my own hand against my stomach. "Men expect so much for so little. Just like Jose Luis. How could you kiss him with that nose? He expected sex from you because he drove you in circles and shared the centro."

"No, I expected sex from him. And when his miembro was cold I warmed it in the microwave. Maybe you'll see when you're older. You appreciate a man's touch when you haven't had it."

"It had been a long time before Daniel."

"Yes, and the closer you've been to a man, the more distant you feel when you are away, the more you need another touch."

"You're just an old puerca," I said.

"Could be. But a puerca well fed is a happy puerca. Men and woman can work together if they both get what they want. But to have a child is a wonderful thing and either way I can be with you. Ruben misses you also. You should tell him you're alive and not in prison. You did not tell La Lupe but you should tell your father. If not, he will ask the American government about you and they will staple your picture onto phone poles like missing white girls."

"There's not enough money for that," I said. "And I wouldn't be worth their ink. To them, we are all the same. You might as well be me. And I might as well be you."

"Then I would be much prettier. And I would be pregnant and happy with my handsome ugly-faced gringo."

My mouth tasted like salt. It was good to be together, even in confusing circumstances which reminded me of Lucila Gamero stories, and I wished for her books. I would read them to Lupe and to Daniel, maybe to the huahua also. I would alternate pages between English in Spanish so everyone would learn some of the story and only I would know the whole story.

I wanted Guadalupe to know snow in the forest. Lupe never knew snow could be enjoyed. In her village it meant nothing. In Seattle it was a rare occasion. During nights shared with Jose Luis in the centro, snow meant a chance for them to be followed. They carried a broom to clean their tracks. To me this sounded silly.

Daniel had a third set of snowshoes and enough spare clothes for everyone. We packed lunches from a leftover dinner Lupe cooked—chicken roasted in butter and garlic pressed between sandwich bread, boiled eggs, fruit, and chocolate. What if the jar of Ix Chel contained snow? How would it look falling onto the bricks? Would the pueblo watch the snow melt or would they run it to a refrigerator? Only once had I really been around snow before Daniel showed it to me and now I watched he and Lupe from a distance: he tightened the snowshoe straps around her boots, pulled her gaiters taut against baggy snow pants, handed her ski poles and taught her to alternate them with her steps. I watched him showing Lupe how to ball the snow in her hands and with the edge of her fingers carve it into a sphere. They threw their snowballs at me and neither hit. Neither would make a pitcher. My return throw knocked Lupe's hat from her head and her white face looked like Santa Claus. Yes, Honduras knows Santa Claus and instead of

snow in the yards there is dirt. Our decorated trees sit on the table and children light fireworks. We are Christians as well as former Mayans. Today felt like a truer Navidad anyway—snow enough for ten thousand jars filled the woods and while we walked I told Lupe to ignore her tracks. No one followed us. We were alone together.

A clean white sheet covered the ground. Rocks and coronas of shorter trees had disappeared. Because of what Daniel called flat light it became difficult to sense the grade we walked. With some surprise we reached an uphill and our bodies tilted back, then a downhill which tilted our bodies forward. We reached a treeless area and Daniel laid on his back carving snow away with his limbs. "These are snow angels," he said, and flakes fell onto his blue chaqueta.

"Where are we?" Lupe asked, hesitant to join Daniel, laughing a little at him.

"It's a shallow lake the rest of the year," he said. "I bet the ice is strong enough to stomp a dozen times and not break through. That doesn't mean you should."

When he was finished Daniel brushed the snowy remnants from his shoulders and unpacked a tarp. He spread it over the snow and weighted the corners with his snowshoes. We arranged the plastic lunch containers in a half-circle. From a dented thermos Daniel poured a lid of decaffeinated coffee which we passed around.

I said, "I'm sorry we can't both have our compañeros here."

"Paul only would've wanted to ski."

And I'd like to ski again too," I said.

"Well, sometimes the umbilical cord falls off on its own," Daniel said. "Other times you have to cut it." He bit into the chicken and passed Lupe some coffee. She

gazed down and saw her reflection. Had such a tall pointed wool hat ever covered her ears before? Lupe tasted it. She opened her mouth wide and gurgled coffee back onto the tarp. The liquid streamed into the snow and melted a black divot.

"What's wrong?" I said.

She used her arms as support and Daniel held her up. "Was it too hot? Did you burn yourself? Don't speak if it hurts."

"No," Lupe said. "It's only my tooth. I'm sorry about the coffee."

"That's okay," Daniel said. "You didn't go to the dentist in Yakima?"

She shook her head slowly.

"I told you the dentist wasn't checking passports."

"It's fine," Lupe said. She stood up and wiped drops from her pants and jacket. "Just too expensive for me. I thought my sons might send a check but no check."

Daniel asked where they lived and she said Nicaragua. To him the idea of migrating to another third-world country must have seemed foolish. But he didn't know Honduras. He knew the United States. He knew snow and mountains and highways. Maybe he soon would learn more than I knew about women's bodies, too.

My bare fingers ached from cold and I melted chocolate into the thermos lid, watching it disappear into a sweet oily residue—coffee and chocolate both made from beans. I remembered reading in school about how Columbus landed in Honduras, where people used cacao beans as currency. Columbus wrote: "They hold these almonds at a great price; I observed that when any of these almonds fell, they stooped to pick it up as if an eye had fallen." After robbing a Mayan trader, Columbus returned to Europe

without realizing his cargo's possibility. Now I sipped liquid made of these two exports. Whether or not they came from my country they came from my country.

A hand rubbed my own. Daniel started at the fingers and wrist and moved up toward the elbow. Blood swam toward my heart and left my hand pale. There was a tingling. There was a firmness. There was soft.

Then I felt a second hand. Lupe started at the shoulder and moved down. The blood swam toward my fingers and fattened them like Lupe's. A warmth gathered.

Daniel and Lupe watched each other and coordinated their speed and pressure. He smiled past his scars. She smiled with her rotten teeth. I closed my eyes. Flakes fell onto my eyebrows and the tip of my nose. They melted and ran warm inside my collar like tears without salt. The tears of my father. The tears Lupe didn't cry. The snow that melted into rivers toward Seattle and no matter what reached the ocean. We sat on the tarp on the frozen lake in the mountains in a small clearing of no árboles quieter than the crows, who sang in excitement for our scraps. Something inside me grew. The huahua shifted its position and I slowed my breathing.

The three of us traveled from one meal to another like children. That evening we cooked together—flour mixed with water, corn meal, olive oil, salt, and an egg. Using a bottle of wine Daniel pressed the dough flat. I chopped onions and garlic and mushrooms while Lupe ground tomatoes into pulp. The pizza cooked and we built a fire. Our clothes dried on the railing. Lupe sliced pears into wedges and covered them with honey and cinnamon and cayenne. Their white flesh browned in the oven, green skin wrinkling.

I slept again in Daniel's bed. The tightly tucked blankets constricted my toes and pulled them toward each other. He asked if I thought Lupe was comfortable and I told him, yes, I thought so. I touched his arms and rubbed them in opposite directions.

"That felt nice today," I said. "The two of you touching me this way. And being outside. I felt sewn together. Cooking too. Everyone loves pizza, even in Honduras where it isn't made well. Our only Italians got lost on their way to Argentina."

Daniel sat up and winced. "Things aren't going well."

"Were the pears too spicy?" I asked.

"Maybe," he said. "But I mean in your country—what your father reports on."

"The politics? Were you listening to us?"

"I couldn't fall asleep."

"Your Spanish is less mierda than it used to be," I said. "The companies that run the country are shaken by Zelaya's boldness. I wish my father would speak with his own voice about it, unless he forgot he has one. And I suppose he knows that I'm pregnant."

"You *suppose* that he knows."

"Guadalupe told him. She thought I was dead or deported so she told him."

"Paul knows and Ruben Guillardo knows. I guess we're even."

"But Lupe knows too. And other workers in Yakima."

"Secrets aren't good on the inside," Daniel said, touching my vientre. "Especially not for someone whose insides matter so much."

"Hasn't the date passed for a decision?"

"My book says that's flexible."

"I've made my decision anyway," I said. "If I can have this child I will have this child. Nobody likes to cook a pizza and not see how it turns out."

"So you're going to eat the baby?" he joked. "Cut it into eight slices? I'll ask my midwife school about that next week."

Daniel's arms felt stiff with thin, tight muscles. He touched his ear to me and listened. Bristled hairs grew on his face and oilier ones on his head.

"I'm glad we worked together on the campaign," I said. "I'm glad we met."

Daniel hesitated a moment longer than was comfortable and sat up. He pressed his hands on my ribs as though measuring my width. "I'm glad too," he said. "I've learned more in these months than the rest of my life."

That night I dreamt of Manuel Zelaya's hat. The white Stetson was upside down in the ocean. I was inside the hat, floating in whichever direction the wind and currents moved. When I crawled to the edge of the hat so I could steer, it began to sink. I returned to the middle and bailed water with cupped hands. The stars flashed red like airplane wings.

I slept deep into the morning. By the time I swam into the kitchen, Daniel was dropping bread into the toaster and teabags into three mugs. He smiled and turned on his phone. The black rectangle shook against the table as though having a seizure.

"Thank you," I said. The teabag bled a cloud of red into my mug.

Daniel knifed butter and jam onto his toast and carefully removed the shell from a hardboiled egg. His phone vibrated again and migrated a couple inches toward me.

Marjorie Calling.

"Marjorie is calling," I said. "Do you want me to get it?"

"No, that's okay. She's probably calling to ask why I sent Paul home."

"And what will you tell her?"

"That Paul's life needed CPR and I was never good at that."

"What if he tells his family about us?"

Daniel took a bite of egg. Yolk fell onto the plate and he put the phone to his ear. "Then that's okay. It has to be."

I watched a sleepy Lupe come into the kitchen. She watched Daniel, her broad hollow face sinking deeper into itself and her eyes widening.

Only Daniel's half of the conversation could be heard and he made short stuttering sentences: "Wait." "What do you mean?" "Where?" "Well, how bad?" "No, he was fine." "Shit." The door clicked open and closed and he spoke on the back porch by the firewood. A sliver of cold joined the room, which smelled of burnt toast and pine needles.

Lupe and I said nothing. We waited for the conversation to end and when it did Daniel stayed outside a while. The silence grew loud. Lupe didn't like silence and usually played music even when she slept. Now she remained quiet on the couch curled as a pillbug.

Daniel's face looked sunburned and he stared a hole into the carpet at the center of the room.

"What happened?" I said.

"Yes, qué pasó?" Lupe said.

With the side of his fist Daniel wiped a tear. "Paul," he said. "Paul is what paso'd."

I asked what he meant.

"Paul's in the hospital. He drove his truck over a guardrail. Now he's in a coma at Harborview."

"I'm sorry," I said.

Even though she wasn't part of the conversation, Lupe knew she was implicated. She was more change in a changing environment, the mercury in the thermometer. Couch cushions cupped her body and she would've crawled deeper and deeper into them until she wasn't there.

This was my fault. I'd invited her and told Daniel to make Paul leave. Then again, Daniel and I wouldn't be here if not for the immigration raid—if not for one sperm that swam especially well, and because his grandfather left his family a cabin. A car accident happens because of a mistake, ice or old tires, an unsafe driver.

Daniel threw his breakfast away. A corner of the plate broke against the sink and he swore. What did it matter, I thought, these convergences and coincidences? What did one plate matter, or one meal? What did one life matter anyway?

He disappeared to the bedroom and returned with a packed bag. Standing in front of an open refrigerator, he took nothing from it. "I have to go see Paul," he said. "I'm not sure when I'll get back. Do you have enough food for a bit?"

I didn't know which of us he was asking and so we both nodded like mutes. We made sad looks. He left some money and we thanked him for it. We swallowed our words until his headlights shone through the window and we heard the car roll away.

Lupe picked the plate from the trash and asked if we had glue. I found a drawer of coins and scissors and passed her a tube. She slid the broken piece back into the porcelain circle.

"I'm sorry," she said. She said it again, and couldn't think what to say after.

"Stop saying that," I told her. "It won't help Paul, it won't help anything."

"I saw how you both looked at me. Like it's my fault." I couldn't disagree, and she kept speaking. "And maybe it is La Lupe's fault. I know I should leave, before Daniel comes back."

"Don't leave," I said. "Maybe we will leave together. Where would you go?"

"Spring isn't far away. The winter is mild and there will be more crops soon."

This was one of the few times I'd been alone in the cabin without Daniel. The last time, he was talking to Paul. "You can't go to Yakima," I said. "Not after the raids."

"There are other places that need hands. Anzana, this accident will change how Daniel feels about you and the huahua. Maybe it will change how you feel too."

"It doesn't matter how I feel," I said. "An American grows inside me."

Lupe bent over the sink and soaped the dishes. "What will happen to Paul?"

"How do I know? A coma is serious, but Seattle is known for its doctors."

"And will the doctor from the centro see him? The one who showed you the picture of the baby?"

I found a cloth and dried the dishes Lupe handed me. "It will be someone different, someone who sees blood not only from the vagina but from everywhere. Sometimes I forget you were raised in such a small place, Lupe. You don't know your culo from your codo."

She pulled the drain plug and water fell with an empty sucking sound. "I don't know this Paul," she said, "but I hope he lives."

Then Lupe turned on the radio. We sat listening to songs from the Beatles, the Rolling Stones, and Jimi Hendrix from Seattle, until night swallowed day, the same English songs playing through a million stereos, songs known everywhere in the world, songs amplified across oceans and even into space. What if this cabin was our spaceship and we were the aliens? What if we flew anywhere we wanted? But la gravedad held our feet to the ground, the concrete foundations like the roots of an árbol, the acorn fallen into soil. Now an alien grew inside me with its tiny body and its humungous head. Daniel had said it was over half the size it would grow before birth and heavy as a Spanish onion.

Lupe and I walked to the grocery store to buy ingredients for baleadas, a dish far too spicy for Daniel. The same boy from my arrival spoke to me again. "You must be having one hell of a ski vacation," he said, growing shy and silent when he noticed my

belly. With my jacket unzipped, a green Obama camiseta stretched in the middle. "Absolutely," I said.

Lupe found tortillas and a can of refried beans and serranos and sour cream and an avocado and a carton of eggs. Baleadas were the best street food in Honduras and weren't so different from the Mexican food sold in Yakima. We fried everything and held it inside the tortillas in a delicious steaming pocket that burned its way down toward our stomachs. Lupe brought her hands parallel above her elbows and shuffled her feet in a dance known as La Punta. "Wa wa wa," she counted the rhythm, "wa wa wa." For a moment we were back in Honduras. We had created a temporary embassy in Snoqualmie Pass. "Why don't you dance," she said. "Babies sleep better when you move a little."

"You're in good spirits," I said.

"Why not?" she said. "When you can't control your future you control right now. That's why I put on music and sing to myself."

"You sing because you cannot sleep. Because you are lonely."

"And I am lonely because I love my children who are far away, because their wrinkled mother seeks work like a teenager. It's true I miss them and true I am lonely and true that my teeth ache, but without beautiful sounds the heartbeat stops."

I finished the baleada and wiped beans from my hand. "You sound like a silly teenager. A silly teenager who believes in the beauty of life before you know a thing about it, a person who doesn't believe in night because they've seen only day."

"Yes, and I used to stare into the sun like they say you're not supposed to. And I rested on the ground waiting for my vision to return from white."

I joined Lupe in a slow version of the Punta. My feet alternated: left to the outside and back to the middle, then the right outside and back to the middle. "Would you ever return to your village?"

"What is there for me in my village?" she asked. "A bunch of dusty ruins and a statue woman holding a jar."

"And what if you had been deported? Where would you have gone?"

"Anywhere else, Anzana. There is no family of mine there, no friends after these years. I will avoid Honduras. A few protests won't make any difference in that country. The companies tell the politicians which dances to dance. Even with all that has happened, I still prefer the United States. I don't have to be a citizen to be home. I have lived in Seattle and I have lived in the country. Now I live briefly like a gringo near skiing mountains."

"Why briefly?" I placed my hands on my waist and dipped my hips to an invented rhythm.

Lupe shimmied her shoulders and batted her eyelashes as though to get attention from a man on the dance floor. "Because I cannot stay here, we both know this. And I will not be bitter, mine is not an amargo spirit."

"I wish you could stay."

"Save your wishes," she said. "Save them for the health of your child. He will need all your wishes."

"Why do you say *he*?"

"Because I had boys inside me. When you have, you know who carries them too. This becomes your special gift. Otherwise, to have a boy is a burden. A little devil."

"You said you loved your boys."

"What woman doesn't love a devil? Especially a devil who's grown inside you from a peanut to a chiquitito."

"And what if I want a little girl instead?" I said.

"This isn't an election, there's no voting for it."

Lupe fanned herself and sat down. The food had cooled and she scooped more into a tortilla. She passed it to me even though I shook my head no. A small volcano erupted inside me, like the one Daniel had described. I dropped the baleada and watched the contents splatter the floor. Barely could I make it to the bathroom before acid walked up my throat and straight down into toilet water. It was red and white and brown and all of it floated with a sickly current.

Lupe smiled and brought me a glass of water. I took slow uncomfortable sips and tasted vomit with each one. She cleaned the toilet and the room soon smelled of bleach.

Chapter Seventeen

Scars jigsawed Paul's face. Both eyelids were swollen and the doctor had attached a separator to keep them from healing closed. Each vein and artery rose to the skin's surface, their exchange of oxygen to and from the heart. The jaundiced skin was dry as fall leaves, not that leaves stay dry for long in Seattle. The respirator made mechanized lung sounds like Darth Vader. Rods and pins stabilized his spine in case he moved, which the doctor said not to count on.

The Turkish man explained Paul's condition outside the room after I told him we were friends, that I worked as an EMT. "Ignore the superficial wounds," he said. "Lacerations, abrasions, scrapes and scars, broken wrists, a separated patella. Your friend has a collapsed lung and a snapped-off piece of floating chest bone that could still stab into him. The pelvic girdle is snapped, femur too. His organs are a mess. We have him on dialysis, oxygen, everything we've got. Tissue damage happens slower than it used to but it still happens. We started the blood transfusions the minute we thought it safe and induced a coma using thiopental. Now we just have to wait and see."

"What's the upside?" I asked.

"Upside?" said the doctor, who smoothed silver hairs in his dark beard. "That I'm still here talking to you."

I stood in humid quiet, my body vertical and Paul's horizontal. The instinct was to grab fingers but they barely poked through his hand casts. I touched his pale fingernails, cold and vitreous. The hospital room smelled like a locker room, a library, a

morgue, a car wash—not necessarily in that order. Light hovered outside the downturned mini blinds. The television had been left on, muted, and King 5 News covered some kind of costumed footrace. A woman dressed as a butterfly answered the reporter's questions. Her boyfriend wore a Hulk costume and shivered in purple tights.

Over his bed hung a painting of a heron walking through reeds. The bird's knee bent to ninety degrees and its neck curved in anticipation of striking at a fish. I took this painting and slid it under the bed. Onto the nail I placed my mother's seaglass piece. It wouldn't sit flush. The thing didn't look quite right, but it never had. At least this map bordered by glass along American shorelines provided some shield from the full impact of my broken friend, or ex-friend, as he'd characterized us not so long ago. The art would have to do.

And did I cry standing there over my friend? Sure I cried. But it didn't feel cathartic, it felt toxic. Each tear came out tough. The footsteps of family approached, whether Marjorie or Cheryl, or both. I considered hiding under Paul's bed, encircling the Heron painting with my fetal body. I'd made similar poses years before when his mother put him on curfew and we wanted to smoke a joint out the window, drink some beers; they had short conversations and his mother closed the door. Today Marjorie opened it, alone. She wore jeans loose in the hips like maybe she'd lost weight from the grief. A pencil barely held her hair into a bun. With a twist of the wrist she opened the blinds and light flew in. She replaced a yellow tulip with a fresh one on the opposite side of the bed.

"Marjorie," I said.

"Daniel," she said.

"I'm sorry. Sorry Paul's here like this."

"And I'm sorry you had to break away from your mountain retreat," she said.

"I came as soon as I heard. My phone was turned off."

Her hands unfolded and refolded busily over her stomach, chipped black nail polish. "It doesn't matter. You being here doesn't matter. Not for Paul, not for anyone."

"I guess there's different schools of thought."

"So what school of thought do you attend?"

"Just tell me what can I do for you," I said. "I want to help."

"Daniel, what can you do? Paul slammed into a guardrail and flipped his truck four times before it skidded into a rock wall."

"I couldn't watch him all the time. And just because he attended AA meetings—"

"Daniel, his blood alcohol level was zero point zero."

"All his stuff was packed in the truck."

"You wanted him thinking about the future, not wasting time in the mountains."

"This wasn't what I had in mind."

At the end of the bed I noticed pink booties that held Paul's feet. I pictured some medical assistant coming in once a week and changing the booties, putting vaseline between his hairy toes. I wanted to punch something.

"How's your mom?" I asked.

"Guess," she said dismissively, though my mention of family stimulated tears. They welled and flowed from one eye, as though sadness resided in her brain's right side.

"I'll be living back in Seattle soon. I can visit a lot. Give you a break. I'll stay all day and study."

Marjorie moved a little closer but still kept her distance from me. "You slipped in while I had my cigarette. It was the first time we'd both been away."

"So you smoke now?"

"I'm not proud of that."

We watched Paul's chest rise and fall. Doctors had programmed this, determined the proper breathing rhythm. A machine breathed for Paul. Inside Anza, my child also didn't breathe. I thought about how children only breathe upon birth, their entrance into the light. Babies make breathing movements inside the womb but it's only a rehearsal. In utero, babies take oxygen from mother's blood and return carbon dioxide through the placenta. It's an unfair exchange.

I left Marjorie on the third floor of the hospital and on my way back to Snoqualmie I stopped at Paul's accident site. The shoulder was so narrow I had to pull in my side mirror. The broken guardrail had been shaped into wide metal wings and a hillside of gravel laid bare where Paul's truck rolled. I slid on my butt down the frost-slick slope. His vehicle reminded me of a crushed can. It still sat there, upside down, all undercarriage and hoses and tweaked metal. The driver's side door had been pried off and cast aside amongst windshield glass. A still life.

Flakes fell in faint bursts, so faint it could've been old snow recirculated by wind. I imagined the team that must've carried the litter up the slope, one step at a time. Step,

together. Step, together. Step, together. Crystals melting over Paul's jigsaw face. It couldn't have been easy. It couldn't have been quick.

After spelunking into the truck I gathered what I could. His baseball duffel. A binder of CDs. A Hemingway paperback, *For Whom the Bell Tolls*. His skis slid under the collapsed roof. They were snapped like trees under too much snow, with half of their logo adorning each broken piece.

I gathered the unsteady load and ascended the slope with the same caterpillar motion of Paul's litter. I set his things in my trunk and looked down at the scene once more. I wondered: How long would the truck stay here? And what type of pulley could possibly lift it to the highway?

Cars passed at incredible speeds. Sixty miles per hour felt like a thousand when air rushed over my face on a cold spring day standing by the interstate highway between Seattle and the mountains where my oldest friend rolled his truck and I felt like it was my own fault and somehow that wasn't even the most pressing concern.

No one greeted me in the cabin. Lupe napped in the loft and I could hear her round snore. Anza was also in bed: awake and restive. She'd propped pillows under her back until her body almost folded into a right angle. Newspaper sections were arranged over her lap, sections she wasn't reading; instead, she stared forward as though trying to read the wallpaper.

"How is Paul?" she said, each word a struggle.

"He's in a coma. His organs are a mess."

"I'm sorry," she said.

I asked Anza about her skin, which looked a little jaundiced.

She said, "Earlier I threw up. I couldn't stop until my stomach was empty. The baby's upset. He knows something's wrong."

"I don't think baby's are that intuitive," I said, pouring her a glass of water. "And why do you say it's a boy? Did Doctor Wyman tell you the sex?"

"No, Lupe told me."

"And who told her?"

"Sometimes people just know things, Daniel. And I know that you think Paul's accident was our fault. My fault maybe."

"No, it's on me. What I said to Paul might have pushed him in that direction. I invited you and Lupe, and now I have to see that through."

"I'm sorry," Anza said. "I hope he recovers."

"Keep hoping. Now explain to me how you're feeling. Have you been throwing up other times?"

Anza nodded her head and smiled, like that somehow put her at ease.

I said, "You have to tell me this stuff. Sadly, I'm the closest thing to a doctor."

She glanced down at the *Seattle Times* for a moment, her eyes following the flow of words. "Your classes start soon."

"Next week."

Anza said, "And I know you won't ski anymore. You'll only study your books. It would be easier for you not to live here."

I picked up the newspaper so she'd have to look at me. "My classes aren't every day and there are worse things than driving."

Anza touched her hand to the top of mine. Her knuckles formed dry, cracked ridges and I wanted to rub them with Vaseline.

"Daniel, you don't need to care for me anymore."

Something swam inside my own stomach and I had to sit down. "Anza, you said you wanted to have this baby, right?"

"Yes, Daniel, seguro. He wants to be born."

"Then we're done debating," I said. "We're having the baby."

She said, "Es una broma. It's different for a mother and a father to say that."

I told her I wasn't joking, that I'd support her in pregnancy and in labor. "I know it hasn't been a traditional relationship," I said, "but when I leave the cabin for Seattle, you'll come. Lupe too."

"No, La Lupe wants to leave. She doesn't want to be a problem like I am."

"You aren't a problem."

"That's true. Me and the huahua—we're two problems. And I still have no money to give you for anything."

"Money isn't important."

Laughing, Anza said: "Maybe this feels true when the gobierno sends you checks for not working."

"That money also goes to you and the baby. The baby boy, I guess."

I watched Anza have a sip of water and set her glass on the end table, staining a circle over the newspaper. Our bedroom was dissolving into old newspaper too. What else could I say to Anza? I wish I'd thought of something good. But I could think only of the child inside her, of what books could tell me about it.

At 24 weeks the baby is about the length of your telephone receiver (13 inches). It is covered with vernix, a creamy substance which protects its skin inside the uterus and prevents it from becoming waterlogged. This vernix sticks to hairy parts and many babies are born still coated with it. You may notice that your baby responds to loud noises and to music, especially to the brass section of an orchestra. If you are practicing relaxation and slow breathing, you may feel the baby become remarkably active and begin to leap around energetically.

Lupe made calls about somewhere to go. I told her we would be patient, and I tried my best to be. Then, on a Friday morning, the three of us drove east. We stopped at a dentist. The dentist gave four silver fillings and pulled Lupe's rotten tooth. He didn't have a replacement tooth that fit and said for her to come back soon. I paid in cash.

We pulled up to an apartment building outside Wenatchee which Lupe said was occupied by other farm workers. The building stood at the end of a cul-de-sac and bordered a vacant lot. A stream running through the lot made burbling noises. The housing arrangement suited Lupe and she preferred we didn't come in. She hugged Anza and kissed me on the cheek. "You're like a little family," she said, smiling with no front tooth. "Don't worry about La Lupe. I'm where I belong; the cosecha starts soon."

Anza stopped her at the porch and for a few minutes I watched them speak. Creek sounds muffled their words. They stood close and their bellies touched. Diagrams from my anatomy course came to mind. The reproductive organs were exaggerated, Amazonian in proportion, and a bulbous fetus cramped inside the woman's womb.

We made two more stops. The first was Kittitas Valley Community Hospital. Place-based street names surrounded the building. Spokane Street. Seattle Street. Washington Street. Tacoma Street. We sat in the parking lot and Anza politely asked what we were doing there. I had no idea, but somehow it seemed relevant to idle there, those four walls where life and death were arbitrated. "That's where I was born," I said, and I told her about the Mount Saint Helens eruption. We drove on, flecks of ash bordering the highway and intermixing with tumbleweeds.

Our next stop was further out of the way. Highways 12 and 82 merged and ran alongside the Yakima River. I drove to the County Commissioners Office and asked Anza if she minded waiting in the car. She didn't mind; we'd downloaded her father's latest program and she wanted to finish listening. From what I'd heard, there would be an official vote about whether to rewrite portions of their constitution. The national Honduran baseball team had lost to Costa Rica 4-1. I took Anza's hand and kissed her knuckle. A black truck with vanity plates struck a cord of recognition, its windshield criminally clean.

Peter Bennett's office door was cracked and I pushed it open the rest of the way. A cowboy hat hung from the coat rack and while he bent over some document I noticed his receding hairline shaped like a soft W. The sage greens of the chaparral canyon behind him might've been a painting. He wriggled an eye up toward me. "Can I help you with something?"

"You won the race," I said, pointing at his name and title on the door. "Third district commissioner, congratulations."

"Why thank you, son. And we'll get your plans looked at soon as we can."

"I'm not here about any plans."

Bennett brought his second eye toward me, and then sat up a little straighter. "No plans, huh? Well what do you need in that case?"

"You remember me at all? The veteran's hall by the highway? We spoke there during the campaign."

"I remember your face. You were the Obama guy. Talking about immigrants."

"More or less."

"I'm just lucky folks don't vote for county commission down party lines. That election was a massacre for Republicans. I should be the one congratulating you."

"Well, I didn't win anything."

"But you finally got a Kenyan into the White House. Plus, you got away with applesaucing my window."

"Applesaucing?"

"Kid, I'm up to my ears in rezoning permits, so don't bullshit me. You're the only one who left the hall before some games of pool. And anything south of a brick's no big deal. Of course, it reminded me not to trust folks who aren't from around here."

"Seattle's not that far."

"I don't mean just Seattle."

"Yeah, I know what you mean. I read your quote in the paper. Saying how ICE raids are keeping families safe."

Now Bennett ran a palm over his scalp, pulling the hair even farther back. "So you like my work. What was your name again?"

"Daniel Rose."

"Right. So, Rose, you're probably thinking woe is me about anyone who's had a bad experience. And there's the occasional story about the kid from Union Gap sent to Mexico. But they make their way back. And what a fucking story to tell their amigos. To help out unemployed citizens in our county, I'll support a lot of measures. And to get unlicensed drivers off our roads, shoplifters out of our stores, it takes a concerted effort."

"I just drove here from Wenatchee," I said, half-sitting on the arm of a chair. "And you know what I saw the whole way? Signs that say *Pickers Wanted*. The season hasn't started and they know there could be another shortage. I'm not much for apples, but I don't want grocery stores stocking Fujis from Japan."

"From what I remember you weren't running for office. So why are you here jabbing me in the ribs?"

"I want you to say you'll think about calling off your boys from the raids."

Bennett stood up and folded the plans he was looking at. He grabbed the cowboy hat, situating it on his head a tad off-center.

He said, "So long as there's fruit to be picked there's gonna be people willing to pick it. If it wasn't worth the risk, they'd stop coming. Here, I'll walk you to your car."

I pulled back from the advance of his handshake and thrust my hands in my pockets. "I'll find my way out."

"That's all right, I can't afford any vandalism today."

I walked slowly down the hallway, so slow it might've looked like my legs weren't working properly. But Bennett matched my slow progress, pointing out which office was whose and how the building had been a school in the sixties. We reached the parking lot and I could see every atom of Anza beaconing from the car.

"Take care," I said.

And the man kept following, heels of his cowboy boots clomping concrete with the tenor of a Ball-peen hammer. Anza saw the two of us and shirked into her seat. Bennett came over to the driver's side and leaned in toward her.

"And who do we have here? My name's Peter Bennett."

He extended his hand over to Anza and she took it. "Marjorie," she said.

"Nice to meet you, Marjorie. So how is it putting up with this apple blossom?"

Anza pulled from his grip with a snap of wrist I knew well. "Depends on the day," she said, folding her arms over her stomach.

Bennett gave my hair a rough mussing and slapped me on the back. "Thanks for dropping by," he said. "Don't make a habit of it."

The radio show was finishing when I started the engine and I only heard Ruben thank his producer.

"So you had to stop and see your old friend. Was it worth the extra driving?"

"There are worse things than driving, Anza" I said. "I mean, *Marjorie*."

She said, “Very American-sounding, don’t you think?”

I wasn’t sure the significance of this and did my best not to think about it.

Anza and I packed up from the cabin. I covered the furniture with plastic. Locked the doors and windows. Piled an extra tarp over the lattice of firewood. The silence was too loud for me, the miles to Seattle too many. Anza and I brought our community back to Seattle, following the western slope of the Cascades. With my father gone at spring training we could stay awhile at his condo.

From my father’s deck, Anza marveled at the view of the baseball stadiums. “Que bonita,” she said. “I can’t wait until the season starts. Can we have tickets?”

“Definitely. But the season means we’ll have to move again.”

“Moving is what Hondurans do, Daniel. It’s only a problem for you, not the pregnant woman who is your luggage.”

“Luggage?”

“The huahua feels like luggage. He grows heavier every day and so do I.”

“That’s a good thing. If he wasn’t growing then we’d have a problem.”

In the glossy reflection of her eyes I glimpsed my own face and I turned until the scars disappeared.

“Tell me where we’ll sit,” she said, pointing toward the stadium. “First base side? In the outfield?”

I stood behind and spanned my arms around her stomach, my thumbs massaging into her. "Paul and I used to go a lot in high school. Their best seasons were freshman and junior years. My father found us seats in left field where he panned the camera and later showed us clips of ourselves. This made it hard to drink, so we'd go to the bathroom and pour something into our cokes."

"How did it taste with the urine?" she asked.

"Eres muy cómica," I said.

A hair on her neck curled away from the top of her spine and I licked it back into place. I remembered standing on the balcony the day after the election thinking about a coworker who I thought had returned to Honduras; I remembered thinking of her again while I was with Marjorie. Now I had Anza in my arms and she even turned into my embrace. We kissed a long slow sad kiss that felt true for the moment and took in everything which surrounded us. Paul unconscious in a hospital bed. The baseball season on its way. Lupe in Wenatchee waiting for the apple harvest. Our baby growing by the minute while I brought my chapped lips to the woman who carried him. My father filmed spring training while Anza's father reported the news; my mother made art from old maps and found objects while Anza's mother slept six feet beneath a highway, President Obama drove the American steamship while President Zelaya waited to hear if Honduras wanted a new constitution.

I moved my palms down Anza's front side until I reached the zipper of her jeans and the inward curve of the fabric. Her legs felt strong, swollen, with a little sway to

them. Diagrams of women's reproductive systems swam in my head and I batted them away. Hands-on experience was preferable. I was nervous for the first day of school.

"You haven't seen the bed yet," I said.

"Is there another quilt from your grandmother?"

I laughed. "My grandmother never sewed for Ikea."

We walked together to the bedroom, our bags still packed in the living room. This: the closest to a real couple we'd been. So we took it slow as though this speed could make it last forever. But nothing lasts forever. Not sex. Not friendship. Not pregnancy. Not a baseball season. Not a visa. Not a harvest. Not life. This isn't much of a revelation really, just a reminder that recurs every once in a while, whether or not your mouth is passing over breasts the color of Canadian maple syrup with blue veins running through them in an approximate map of rivers running between Snoqualmie Pass and Seattle. How I suckled at her engorged flesh like the child himself. I bit a little, pulled at the nipple and watched the bumps on her brownish-pink areolas known as Montgomery glands. I sucked and sucked to diminish the space between us, water siphoned through a hose.

A wetness dabbed my cheek. Had I started to cry again? The liquid felt sticky on my fingers. On Anza's nipple I saw a droplet—a perfectly round buttery jewel. I touched it with my tongue and continued to suckle. A spring burst through of this yellowish white liquid which I lapped with absurd thirst. Her colostrum tasted sweet and rich and chalky, and I knew it was filled with all sorts of protein. Not yet milk, colostrum nonetheless foreshadowed its arrival. Again I dabbed my fingers against the liquid and

held them up for Anza to see. She looked panicked, as though this was proof of miscarriage.

"This is normal," I told her, "My book says colostrum is normal."

Anza looked down at herself as though she didn't recognize her own appendages. "It's normal for urine to come out of my breast?"

"Do you think I would drink your urine?"

"You would do anything," she said. "This is the man who lives in his family's cabin and condo without telling anyone about the pregnant woman who is his luggage."

"You don't have to trust me, Anzana. You can read for yourself if you'd like."

Anza laughed and told me to bring her the book. I opened the drapes to the green ribbed roof of Safeco Field. While it wasn't the neighbor's motion light, it did the trick.

During the latter part of pregnancy, the woman's breasts enter into the *Lactogenesis I* stage. This is when the breasts make colostrum, a thick yellowish fluid. At this stage, high levels of progesterone inhibit most milk production. It is not a medical concern if a pregnant woman leaks any colostrum before her baby's birth, nor is it an indication of future milk production.

Anza took the book and read this aloud—something she hadn't done before with me. "There," she said, setting the book upside-down on the comforter. "Very interesting. Maybe I'll become a midwife too."

"I'm sure you'd be great," I said. "People would trust you better than me."

"Adulador," she said. "A flatterer, that's what you are. A nice word for liar."

Although glad to be back in Seattle, I couldn't ignore the calendar of her pregnancy. This wellspring of colostrum literally rubbed my face in it. The "latter part

of pregnancy" meant Anza had turned the corner from second to third base, heading toward the full development of the child. And still we didn't know exactly what we wanted from each other. That night we ordered zero star Thai food and didn't once leave our condo's sequester.

The next time I did leave, I was late for my orientation. The others sat in a circle doing introductions with Doctor Hayes. "Open the circle for Daniel," she said. "He's our Title Nine participant." A dozen women and me. They talked about ovarian cysts, their own children, views on breastfeeding. Before I left, Doctor Hayes handed me a book: *The Making of Man-Midwifery*.

"Is this required reading?" I asked.

"Yes it is," she said. "Required for you."

So I ran my fingers over the words and learned of other men who sought to assist with birth, from the Romans to the Mennonites to my small handful of contemporaries.

I came home to find Anza watching a Mariners tape from 1995, the playoff series where we beat the Yankees. This success, however minor, was enough to keep the team in Seattle, enough to justify a new stadium. It's one of few victories Mariners fans hold close to their hearts. Seattle. City of losing teams. I didn't know my father had burned the tape to a DVD.

"Is this all right?" she said.

"Yeah, it's great. Which game is it?"

"Final game in the series," she said. "The fourth inning."

I brought bagel sandwiches from my old neighborhood deli and arranged them on a plate, a couple sodas that fizzed open. "Hungry?"

Anza shook her head and unwound her fist into open fingers in front of her mouth like a blooming flower. This gesture meant she'd vomited. A blanket covered Anza's torso and I gave her a second one to cover her feet.

"Have the soda at least," I said. "Maybe it'll settle your stomach."

The vomiting should have stopped by this point, but who was I to talk? We watched the tape and I remembered seeing this game live at the Kingdome. The Yankees had won the first two games in the series and the Mariners the next two. We were too young to spike our drinks then and the chance at a playoff series victory was intoxication enough. My father had gotten us seats on the third base side where he could pan the camera and put us on TV. He would focus a moment too long just to make sure we saw ourselves on the Jumbotron. The Yankees' Don Mattingly hit a double to put them up 4-2 in the sixth inning. Anza squeezed my leg as if worried we could lose this time. In the eighth inning the Mariners tied the game and it went to extra innings.

One complaint about the aging Kingdome was its uninspired concrete aesthetic, the dome a white belly ribbed with concrete supports. After sections of the roof started to fall the owners clamored for a new stadium but the tax money wasn't there for a losing team. Nevertheless, with a full house the Kingdome got loud. Stupid loud. Sea of voices loud. The Kingdome was one big confined space with a postage stamp of green turf in the center and the sound had nowhere to go.

The Mariners brought in our ace pitcher in relief. He was the absurdly tall Randy Johnson, a man with sweaty flowing hair who psyched himself up by pretending the other team had cursed his family. Randy knew two ways to throw: hard and harder. When he threw hard, the crowd got loud. When he threw hard, the crowd got louder. 97 miles per hour. 98. 99. 101. Was there a speed at which a human cannot throw? 102. Anza watched me slip into this reminiscence and might've wondered why I now spoke ill of my father, why I'd lost my zeal for going to Mariners games.

The Yankees countered by bringing in their ace, Jack McDowell. By the eleventh inning, both teams were playing stiff but the pitchers were wild and punch drunk. Mariners second baseman Joey Cora bunted for a single which the opposing manager came out to dispute. Ken Griffey Jr. singled to center field. Then Edgar Martinez came to the plate—the only designated hitter to win a batting title, a man with a Seattle street named for him. They called him Gar, they called him Papi. He had to earn that street.

Right now, the Mariners looking for the tie. They would take a fly ball; they would love a base hit into the gap and they could win it with Junior's speed. The stretch and the 0–1 pitch on the way to Edgar Martinez; swung on and lined down the left field line for a base hit! Here comes Joey! Here is Junior to third base, they're going to wave him in! The throw to the plate will be...late! The Mariners are going to play for the American League Championship! I don't believe it! It just continues! My oh my! Edgar Martinez with a double ripped down the left field line and they are going crazy at the Kingdome!

"Hey, you won," Anza said. "Congratulations."

"Thanks," I said, finishing the last bagel and washing it down with fizzy soda. "I've hardly got any fingernails left."

"So your father filmed this?"

"He operated one of the cameras. It cuts back and forth."

Mariners players dog-piled all over each other at home plate. The camera zoomed on their faces and then showed crowd reactions. There was a shot of Paul and me. We both wore replica jerseys. We were hugging, we were jumping up and down. Anza paused on the frame. You could see my strange friar haircut for a school play. Paul's red hair flared out from under a backwards cap. Both of us looked so young. The bones in our faces hadn't yet settled on their final patterns. This was before my injury. Before Paul's too. Seated there on my father's couch my eyes grew into two goldfish tanks and it became hard to see. Anza asked if I was all right and she looked really far away. I could barely see the television as she switched it off and said she was sorry. Soda burbled in my stomach—soda and the memory of soda.

I stumbled out to the balcony and wiped my eyes until the Mariners new stadium entered a reliable focus. Anza touched my shoulders and kissed me on the jaw. She said something like, "Are you all right? Are you going to throw up too?"

The next three years would be spent learning about pregnancy and childbirth. My father was returning soon from spring training and we needed a new place to stay.

"Fine," I said with a distant tone. "Couldn't be better."

The next week I had my first lab practicum. Front and center of the classroom were a dozen young pregnant women each covered by billowy shirts with matching flowers. Uneasy as first-time nude models, they stood close together not wanting to be called on to do the thing they were being paid to do.

"Please choose a partner," the instructor said. Eleven other students and I was the only male. I lagged behind with the pairing-up and by the time I introduced myself to Karen the others were already putting their patients at ease. Karen had a black tattoo of a hummingbird on the side of her neck and looked unbelievably large in the stomach compared to her skinny legs whose tiny kneecaps were outmatched by enlarged thighs. With her head held off to one side, I might've thought she was drugged or sleepy, or maybe wondering what in the hell I was doing extending his hand to her and offering to bring a cold stethoscope to her skin and a latex hand to her genitals.

"I'm Daniel," I said. "I'm training to be a midwife and I'm supposed to do an exam on you today."

Karen took my hand and we didn't so much shake as lightly touch hands. "You're not very enthusiastic," she said, her gaze trained on the other pregnant women and the women comfortably speaking with them.

I pulled on the sky blue gloves from my bag, a reliable feeling of plastic stretched over my hands. "If it would help, Karen, just pretend I'm a woman."

She started to laugh a little bit. "Not many women would want that scar. Look, I'm no sexist. You're here for a grade and I'm here for a few bucks. We'll both be fine."

Rubbing wrinkles free from the gloves, I said: "That works great for me."

The instructor led us verbally in our exams and we followed in attempted unison. We unbuttoned the women's flowery shirts and inspected their breasts for lumps or chafing. We palpated the lymph nodes at their necks and armpits. Karen had a second black hummingbird tattoo over her clavicle, where a knot in the bone told me she'd once

broken it and it calcified this way. We brought stethoscopes to the left side of their chests to listen first to their hearts. So long as the sounds were normal we logged this on a sheet of paper and then listened to their breathing. I asked Karen to take one deep breath for each side of the chest, two for the lower back, two for the upper. The lung sounds were the slightest bit cloudy.

"Smoker?" I asked.

"I play drums," Karen said. "Drummers always smoke, but I haven't since the stork brought this one." I logged this too, the smoking not the drumming. Then the real work began. I asked Karen to recline on an examination table and put her feet in the stirrups. At this word she grimaced as do most women: stirrups. I squeezed clear lubricant onto my palm and rubbed it around. The instructor told us to identify and inspect various external parts. Rectum. Perineum. Labia. She stood behind me as I located Karen's organs, which move during pregnancy. I dilated Karen's stomach which had shifted to the upper left quadrant of her abdomen, crowded by the placenta surrounding the child. As I ran my gloved hand over the amniotic sac where the child swam I felt a slight motion, though it could've just been my shaking hands.

"You touched a woman before?" Karen asked. She wore a confident smile.

"Yeah." My voice was a small bell rung in a large room. I listened for the next instruction, wishing I hadn't honored her question.

"I'm just playing around," she said. "You're supposed to tell me to relax."

Next we recorded our patients' medical histories. Ordinarily the first step, our instructor reversed the order so the women would be more comfortable in this semi-

public setting getting the nudity over and done with. I asked the date of Karen's last menstrual period and discovered she was thirty-four weeks pregnant, a month ahead of Anza. Karen was a Para 0, which means no previous births. She'd had an abortion in high school and a miscarriage in 2006. My patient's family was from Ukraine originally. I asked what her husband did and she told me, "He plays the bass marginally well. And he's the father, not my husband. Why do you think I'm here?" Karen's genetic line had no history of twins. She'd had no major illnesses she could think of. She said she felt good overall, no significant depression, just "super fucking ready to have this thing." I quoted her verbatim. Physical exam, vital signs, patient history.

I thanked Karen and watched the parade of a dozen pregnant women leave the classroom with elegant waddling gaits. While balling up my gloves I considered how the first exam was now under my belt, a phrase which I'd heard originally meant food eaten and then digested. So this was what it felt like. The first performance. Cue the curtains.

Chapter Eighteen

The closest-sized room in the hostel is enough. It has to be because I can't afford anything larger. I pay the woman 100 lempiras for the week and buy two baleadas for breakfast. My stomach still hasn't adjusted to Honduras, the special germs that fur all the food, and I eat like a gringo, like Daniel would or the baby—everything cooked until it softens and loses individual flavors. The beans, beef, and tortillas land square in my empty stomach.

Yesterday was a busy day in Tegucigalpa's streets. I watched a soldier kick a man in the face. I listened to chants. I chanted too and felt my voice disappear into the sound. Handmade signs made demands. Soldiers demanded the marchers stopped marching. They wore plastic face shields like those from Yakima's meatpacking plants, where I read newspapers the best I could over the conveyor, where I myself cut meat from bone. Tegucigalpa. Here, soldiers threw teargas canisters. The canisters said, *Made in U.S.A*. Protesters wore scarves and handkerchiefs over mouths and noses, they covered them with vinegar. They called the soldiers putas and asesinos; they threw rocks and pieces of concrete, spoiled fruit. I saw youths with no jobs fight youths paid to fight. A fight in the mirror. And when will the glass break? When will it melt back into sand? Both parties learn as they go. The soldiers aren't used to this. Protesters form their movement as they go. Manuel Zelaya stabbed a sword into the soil. He asked, Which side are you on? And now the streets answer his question.

Zelaya's opponents thought June 28th would solve the problem. Sure, take the president dressed in pajamas onto a plane and fly him to Costa Rica. The country would forget about him. They wanted an abortion but a movement was born.

What does all this mean anyway? It means the avenidas are humid and quiet. It means the mornings give each side a chance for strategy. Today I walk past my father's office, which I do not enter. I look only at the small Voice of America sign and continue toward the National Autonomous University of Honduras.

In the student center, red and white armbands are passed around which say *Queremos* a *Mel*. When I've put mine over the sleeve of my Obama shirt, someone yells: "There she is—la lectora! What will you read today?" I blush the color of the armband and tell them I have nothing to read. I'm passed a newspaper and a megaphone. "Please read," they say, "only one section…"

The newspaper isn't as bad as my father's broadcasts which mention only the violence and little of its meaning. Maybe no one knows. Pictures fill whole pages and I turn them toward the crowd of students as though it's a picture book. When I read to the workers, many were illiterate. Here, most are students. They live with their parents and read plenty of books. But they try to think as one mind and they've told me these readings help. Whatever. Lo que hay. They pay me. Enough for my room. Enough for my meals. They ask how it was working for Obama, and they ask why I came back. I tell them that's another story, and I continue reading the paper. My weight has returned to normal and I look younger than I feel.

Today the march goes to the Soto Cano Air Base, protesting their occupation of Honduran land. If Barack Obama had declared the removal of Manuel Zelaya a coup d'etat, the United States military would either have left or been forced to defend our president. Instead, Obama stayed silent and U.S. soldiers smoked joints and lay in their tents. Maybe the soldiers even aided the coup.

I had not been back to the base. We move slow at first—a big creaky beast that finds its pace. Many have been injured and some have lost friends. There is resolve but also fatigue. Chanting begins. *Si se puede. El pueblo unido, jamás será vencido. Lo llaman democracia y no lo es.*

More protesters join from a side street. These men are different from the students; they carry canvas backpacks and wear baggy clothes that remind me of prison uniforms. Scarves already cover their faces. Rather than joining the chants they yell between pauses. They fill gaps between marchers. They move toward the front.

On the horizon a tower rises with a red beacon light for incoming planes. I recognize the road we walk. I recognize the chainlink fence and razor wire. Heat reflects liquid shapes from the base's black concrete. The marchers pause in front of the main gate. Signs are raised. Fists are raised. Chanting grows louder. *Si se puede. El pueblo unido, jamás será vencido. Lo llaman democracia y no lo es.*

A group of joggers in blue shorts and gray shirts pass by. They pause and gather, pointing at the protesters. Some run back to their barracks for cameras over grassy walkways where palm trees have been planted between each building. They look the same. One soldier comes close to the fence and I can read USAF across his chest. He

squints into a camera and holds it a few inches out. His hair has recently been shaved and his scalp is pink. The soldier looks back at the other joggers who motion their hands forward and he steps nearer to the fence. He takes another photo and then holds the camera over his head for a video.

"What are you doing?" he yells to whoever hears. "Que haces? I want to tell my girlfriend what it's all about." His friends aren't satisfied and he moves nearer to the fence. My voice chants along with the others but I can't remove my eyes from this man. The soldier is laughing but timid. He is confused and young. His friends call him by a nickname I can't make out. With one extraordinarily large arm he holds the camera; the other arm is small and atrophied as though some activity requires extra strength—tennis or shooting maybe—or else he is just malformado. The camera turns directly toward me and reflects a burst of light. Protesters populate his lens and I see what he sees through eye contact with the camera.

"Go home," the crowd shouts at the soldier. "Go back to America."

The soldier tries to say something back and noise swallows his voice. He looks again through the viewfinder. Amused, he smiles and flexes his good arm.

In the distance I hear police sirens and see their lights. When I step forward I stumble over a stone. I stop to pick it up: it is round and flat. It fits my palm perfectly. The soldier turns toward the line of police—officers in riot gear escorting vans with loudspeakers on their roofs. To him this is some luck, the oportunidad to watch Hondurans fight Hondurans. Protesters pick up anything they can find and remove projectiles from their backpacks.

I take another look at the soldier and fling my stone toward him. With luck or skill, my throw strikes his camera and he drops it. The lens cracks. Black plastic sends shrapnel. The other soldiers laugh and he comes to the fence and starts to swear. "You fucking spics," he says. "That was an expensive camera." His fingers weave through the fence and rattle it. The line of protesters move toward the police. Teargas begins to fly. I pass by the soldier and blow him a kiss through the fence. "Olvida mi cara," I say. "Forget my face." Other stones hit the chainlink near him and he draws back. Other cameras are held by other soldiers. There is nothing special about him.
A million others all the same.

That night police arrest the protesters—they block off every path and alley. And rather than bringing us to the cárcel, they bring us to a baseball stadium. They turn on the brightest lights and interrogate each of us. Moths fly into the lights. I sit on a bench near second base. They hold interrogations behind white screens. When someone is beaten we see their silhouettes and their voices echo like umpires calling balls and strikes, or foul balls.

Two men take me behind the screen. One tells me I am a traitor. The other tells me I am a coward. "You are the cobardes," I say. "You have the batons." I slap one across the mouth and his lip swells. He nods at the other, who hits my stomach. Purple flowers bloom. "There's nothing for you to kill," I say. "Take your best swings." So they do. And they swing with form that would have embarrassed Gerald Young. I make a helmet with my arms and count each one, then I lose count.

It isn't until dawn when they release us. Morning light feels artificial. El sol glows burnt orange as I stalk through the streets; this time I avoid my father's radio station on the way back to the hostel, my one room. I buy a baleada but cannot eat. A drop of sangre runs red from my ear and I pinch the wound between two fingers. Each finger grows a matching bloodstain which fills the fingerprints. Blood cups my ear and drips onto the sour cream. Blood which gives life, blood which takes life. I wipe it away with my red handkerchief.

Chapter Nineteen

Doctor Wyman brought the tranducer to my stomach. The huahua had grown a lot since the last time I'd seen him on the television screen. Wyman pointed to the hands and the feet and the head and the legs which had uncurled into an actual body.

"Do you want to know the sex?" he asked.

I told him I already knew it was a boy.

"That's right," he said, and pointed to a distortion of gray light—the tiniest nub of a penis. "It's a chico."

"Why do men from Seattle try and speak Spanish?" I asked. "Will the boy do the same thing?"

"It might be in Seattle's water, City of Spanish. Here," he said, printing a copy of the sonogram. "It's nice to show other people. Babies are like all of us—they try to get comfortable and they fear change. We think of this as the real world, but that's how babies feel about the womb. Being born is a shock. When that light first hits them and the hospital air, everything's upside down."

Doctor Wyman held me in magnetic eye contact as he spoke. He touched my elbow and wiped jelly from my stomach. This roundness in the valley between my breasts and thighs couldn't be me. It looked like something sculpted, sand covering someone at the beach, a porcelain jarra whose water might spill. Daniel waited in the reception. He and Wyman talked for a moment and then he pulled the Subaru to the curb. My thoughts were slow as a sloth and I waved goodbye.

We traveled a small highway back from the hospital. I knew this road well, the same as my buses to the university and the campaign office. A building came into view—blue glass walls and trim green grass. Its sign read, *Homeland Security*. An eagle on the sign held a branch with thirteen leaves and thirteen olives. On the eagle's shield I saw a mountain and a river and twenty-two stars, fifteen more than Honduras's flag.

We now lived in an apartamento in a neighborhood called Wallingford in the basement of a family home. Lake Union and the Space Needle entered through the only window beyond green pillars of grass. Fortieth Avenue ran to our north. Fortieth Avenue crossed the highway east and in less than two miles entered the University of Washington campus. Time moved in reverse when I walked past college students waiting for busses, dressed in purple. The students read final pages of books and flipped note cards in their hands. They looked like me though they'd never be like me.

That day, Daniel and I followed the sidewalk toward Gas Works Park where parents pushed children in strollers. A girl held a kite that lifted her heels from the earth. Two blonde brothers threw a tennis ball. Daniel had to catch his own bus to the midwife school. Before he left, I asked what he spoke to Doctor Wyman about.

He said, "Wyman wanted to see how my classes are going. And he's putting on an event for his organization."

"He wants you to go back to the centro?"

"No, a fundraiser. He wants me to work there again as an EMT."

"I thought you weren't doing that anymore."

"I need the money—now that I'm in school I can't collect unemployment."

"Will you work with Paul's sister?"

"Her company is catering the event but they have lots of events."

And then he said, "Can we talk more when I get home?"

Daniel meant this not as a discussion. He kissed me on the cheek and boarded the bus. He would go and learn about pregnant women and return to the pregnant woman who lives in the basement apartment but does not have her name on the lease and who hasn't been introduced to the family above whose own children squeak like rats when they run over the floors.

On a concrete barrier at the edge of the park I sat and removed my sneakers. Lake Union splashed onto the bottoms of my swollen feet. The toes ached from cold and cold removed feeling. The brothers threw their tennis ball against a tree. Who could throw higher? The ball made hollow sounds against the trunk. It paused on a branch and the brothers waited for it to fall like an acorn, and how they wrestled to recover the ball from the earth. In Spanish an acorn is una bellota—a word similar to bella, beautiful. Bellotas are tiny things grown into trees.

Then the brothers started a game of baseball. The younger one pitched the tennis ball to the older one, who held a small bat. I watched their mother study them from a picnic table. The boy with the bat made a perfect swing and his brother chased after the fly ball. His young legs worked without his vision—how could he look down from the green sphere in the blue sky? The ball bounced once on the concrete near to me and the

boy came closer and closer in pursuit of the errant ball. Still he didn't look down. The boy's feet caught the edge of concrete and he fell forward leading with blonde hair and extended hands. Water splashed against me and the ball landed far into the lake. Holding up bleeding palms, he started to cry. Little waves lapped his shins. A woman screamed his name and yelled to her boy to get out of the water, get out of there now, are you all right, look at your hands. The boy didn't care about getting out or his bleeding hands. He only cared about his ball which followed gray water toward downtown skyscrapers. His mother pushed my arm and asked what the hell I was doing. I told her I was sitting. Well why were you sitting while my boy fell into the lake—I've a good mind to call a cop and have you arrested for not doing anything. Little waves lapped his shins. I told her it wasn't illegal to sit, and she said her sister was a lawyer and this could be deemed negligence. What's your name, she asked. I stood and walked in the opposite direction. Mud shot up between my toes. Her son cried and the other said he hit a home run and the woman did not yell after me. It was hard to imagine these children inside their mother. Bellotas grown into saplings. It was so unlikely.

At the far end of the park, a fence surrounded old industrial machinery. The machinery was the color of rust and its round silos reminded me of copper beer tanks. Compared to Seattle's skyscrapers this machinery was a museum exhibit, a memory of factories I knew: in Yakima, in Tegucigalpa, in factories of apples or coffee or meat or tires or t-shirts. Tubes connected the silos. The tubes were highways, or tubes inside me, which Daniel and Doctor Wyman said bring nutrients to my own bellota, the baby's photograph I now kept between passport pages.

An airplane landed in the water. It disturbed the clear reflection of the lake's espejo. With two pontoons like canoes, the airplane navigated toward a dock below the Aurora Bridge. Through the bridge's railing the Olympic Mountains shone white. What the hell was I doing? The boy's mother had asked me this. She asked, What's your name? Was it Anza? Was it Lucila Gamero? What did a name matter anyway? Names are words given to things that already exist. They can't communicate much.

I wanted to fly this airplane into the sky. I wanted to look down and see the city named Seattle and the mountains, the lakes and ocean, the highways—tubes like machine tubes, like the tubes inside me, and keep going until the earth became a round blue-green-white object and I could look down on all the places I'd been.

For most of the day I stayed in the apartment. Carpet tickled my feet and I touched the low ceiling with extended fingertips. The space had little of me and much of Daniel. Along a column in the kitchen area, pictures were slid into slots. Daniel played baseball. Daniel in a play. Daniel at his graduation. Daniel in his EMT uniform. Daniel skiing with Paul. There was also a picture from election night. I could see my high heels and the marchers in the street below. It was a little blurry. I turned each photograph around. Their white backing stared at me angrily and I turned them back. Then I covered the election night image with my sonogram.

On Daniel's computer I played Cucurrucucu to calm the baby and myself too—ay yay yay yay paloma—the high sharp syllables. Should I finally have sent my father an email? He already knew about the baby from Lupe. I opened the website to make an

account but it had been so long; calendars couldn't count the days. It asked for my name and I didn't know what to write. Thoughts of my father were chased away by the tennis ball floating inside my head, by the boy with the bleeding hands and his mother yelling while his brother gloated about the home run. Somewhere between the park and the ship docks, this tennis ball floated, wherever the corriente took it, like an abandoned raft with no spirit or agency, victim of wind and chance, a sphere in a lake on a blue Seattle day.

Pink light surrounded the silhouettes of downtown as I walked again to the park. A bird arced across the sky. Its wings curved like the hands of a clock. Lines of shit dropped from the bird and fell with exploded elegance onto the concrete barrier near the water. Sunset enflamed the lake. I removed my shoes and felt water against my feet. As the air cooled, the water warmed. No one was in the park. No one with a kite. No one with a tennis ball. I slid my jeans from my legs and my shirt from my torso. Wearing only underwear, I stepped along the rocks where the boy had stood. My body slipped into pink. When had I last swam? I submerged my head and kicked my legs behind me like a frog. Under the water I closed my eyes and spun. I didn't know if I faced the bottom of the lake or the sky, if I swam toward deeper water or back toward the park. Breath expanded in my lungs like a balloon.

Cold air greeted my face at the surface. Sun fell behind the mountain. I had swam a good distance. A piece of driftwood floated. There was a chip bag. I wasn't far from the seaplane. It bobbed at the dock between two sailboats. As I got closer, I tasted

petróleo in the water which made an oily rainbow in the departing light. Yellow was the brightest. Had I leaked the yellow? Had this come from me, colostrum from my pecho? I swam until I could touch the plane's propeller, which was not sharp. Paint covered one side in white, the other rusted silver. A flying machine. Between the floating wings I looked for the ball, like a particular turtle. Good luck. Buena suerte.

This body of water. A body dissolved by water. Water surrounding a body surrounding a body in her own water the womb. Red lights passed. They flashed. Intervals faster than a second. These lights were very bright and in the moment between flashes I saw nothing. The ship turned and there were the words: U.S. Coast Guard. The ship had a raft and a gun. Somebody spoke into his radio. He said something like, "Ten-four. What's your ten-twenty, Andrew?"

I swam behind the propeller. It cut my view into a diagonal. The outline of old machinery and the hill leading to our apartment now in two parts. Somewhere to the east the Cascade Mountains and, much further, where Lupe lived in Wenatchee.

Men speaking into radios. "Eighteen hundred hours is your ten-thirty-six." How stupid their codes. These men, these codes, these radios—irrigated by power—names and no understanding, voices without body, sound which moves faster through water.

My arms and legs felt both like concrete and rubber. I imagined recovering the tennis ball and bringing it to the family. But I couldn't find it anywhere. Had an airplane ran over it? Had a fish or a seagull eaten it, or choked trying to swallow? Daniel would be home soon and I knew he wouldn't understand. He'd say this was dangerous for the huahua. Maybe he was right.

The coast guard ship flashed red into the distance and I stroked water gently. Fat made me float but acid swam through weak muscles, músculos, mine. At the shore, rocks stung my feet, soft from water. I struggled into my clothes. They were already tight and wet made it worse. I twisted my ponytail over the bird shit and dry became liquid. The air felt like water; water like air. With shoes and socks in hand I curved my head and counted squares of sidewalk. Gray turned to black like the moment of rain.

My body now of water.

Close to the apartment, there was a knocking on our door—the first knock I'd heard against its wood. A tall red-haired woman brought her fist to the door in uniform strokes. I watched from behind a tree. The woman sought light from the eye in the door. She bent and set down a bottle. Her backside curled. She wrote something on a piece of paper which she leaned against that bottle. Then she walked past Daniel's car toward a white sedan. This woman expected to see only Daniel, not a wet Honduran hiding behind a plum tree.

Her bottle was champagne. The note said, Congratulations, and she signed her name. I brought the bottle onto the kitchen table, our only table, and then I stood under the shower's hot waterfall still wearing my clothes and waited for Daniel. The door unlocked, his keys dropped into a bowl. I heard him say something about the bottle and then I heard him become quiet. He knocked on the bathroom door, which released steam through a crack. His knock was quieter than Marjorie's but had the same rhythm.

"I brought home dinner," he said.

I asked, "Can we drink that too?"

"What do you mean?"

Daniel closed the door and steam filled the room with thick and white. I wrung my jeans and t-shirt and hung them over the shower curtain. It felt good to be dry and fibers from the towel covered my skin. I had forgotten anything besides wet.

"So you got us pizza," I said, dressed in another pair of jeans and a sweater.

The champagne was still on the table, the note somewhere else.

"Listen," he said. "Marjorie's congratulating me on starting the midwife program. I didn't invite her. It's hard on her with Paul in the hospital. She thinks it's her fault."

"Is that true?"

"No."

I asked, "So you think it's my fault?"

"All that matters is a coma he'll come out of soon. And I can't tell his sister how to feel."

"So you should drink her champagne to make her feel good?"

"The champagne wasn't my idea." His words fell like a dying whale. A dying whale who choked on a tennis ball. Were there whales in Lake Union? Could they travel through the locks? Daniel bit into his pizza and said, "This champagne wasn't my idea."

"And how about the bottle we shared? Was that Marjorie's idea too?"

"That one was my idea."

"Daniel, only your friend in the coma knows I exist—the woman who carries your son like luggage."

"People aren't luggage. Doctor Wyman knows about us, and he told the director of my school that we were married." He pressed his sock into the carpet where it met water and asked why the floor was wet.

"It's Seattle. It rains even in living rooms."

Daniel finished his crust and protested. Today was clear, no rain.

I said, "And when Paul wakes up what happens with us? Are you waiting for him to tell your family for you?"

"It made it more complicated, sure. I didn't know you wanted that."

"Now you know," I said. "Tell Marjorie. Tell your family. Unless you want your son to be only luggage, you have to tell them about Anza Guillardo."

"And what about the champagne?"

"Give it back. Bring it to the event, which you said you have to go to."

"I won't go if you don't want me to."

"I'm not stupid."

"Well, this apartment isn't free."

"No, it's not like your family's cabin, Daniel." I pronounced his name the Spanish way, Dan-yell, like a woman's name. The scars shifted as he pinched in his cheeks. While Daniel chewed on what I'd said, I chewed cold pizza incredibly slow and each ingredient floated inside my miniature Lake Union.

The due date was five weeks away and with a blue marker Daniel had drawn a big X on the calendar in our kitchen, blue meaning a boy. A different white baby for each month on the calendar. The gringo inside me.

Daniel made a little coo when he saw the sonogram. He didn't see it until he was cleaning the dishes with too much soap and soaking himself with suds, reminding me of Lupe back when I knew I'd return to Seattle only for a job or else I would never return to Seattle and certainly wouldn't live in a basement with a man like Daniel with his clothes becoming wet and mine becoming dry and the huahua kicking and the tennis ball floating and the father of my child now wiping his hands on his shirt and holding his thumbs against the sonogram and smiling his weird smile and placing it in front of the picture of him in a play because he said he still liked the election night picture and both of us couldn't help but look at the bottle of champagne which he told me he'd bring back to Marjorie and maybe I believed him but also it sounded strange—an evening with her and Doctor Wyman and I would be here.

My breasts ached. They ached every day since yellow colostrum flowed impatiently. I rubbed circles into flesh with the side of my fist and pushed my back against the mattress. The mattress pushed back. Daniel read aloud from a textbook in a soft monotone because he said it kept him awake better and I played Cucurrucucu and my two languages washed over me and swam over me and flooded me with their syllables.

Daniel dressed in a crisp blue shirt with a red cross on the hombro. He told me he would visit Paul before he worked. "Then the event lasts until ten," he said. "I'll steal a couple goldfish, say they needed medical attention."

I had never been to the aquarium. Once I saw the building from Pike Place Market and the ferries and islands and the piers and now I remembered the smell of salt

from ocean and a fish carcass one man threw into the hands of another while Japanese people cheered and took photographs with cameras from the future. Some fish enter a net and go to an aquarium and some enter a net and are killed.

A yoga mat felt to me like yoghurt and I unrolled it onto the floor. Its color was pink and it had a white silhouette of bamboo. Twice a week I'd begun going to prenatal classes and learning stretching poses: Gate, Bridge, Goddess, Pigeon. All the white women planned to name their children Ethan and Langely, and they painted their fingernails and dyed their hair—making extended ahhhh noises when they raised their hips and relaxed their shoulders and raised their arms and turned their necks. Yoga. It was the most gringo exercise, more gringo even than skiing, and it felt great. The techniques made strength and flexibility where pain slept. The movements made it easier to digest. My body became a connected object rather than a normal body covered by extra flesh, muscles smooth and liquid.

On the floor of our apartment, I stretched and made my own ahhhh noises. I played my father's radio program. The latest one covered Honduras' constitutional vote. While I raised my left arm, my father introduced the station. While I raised my right, he introduced himself. Water from my ears filtered his voice. Ruben Guillardo was the man with pain in his foot and only memories of wife and daughter. His tone was serious and shook a little, just as my thighs shook during a bridge pose.

"Today," my father said, "we discuss a special breaking news story. Honduran military forces have ousted President Manuel Zelaya and exiled him to Costa Rica hours

before a controversial constitutional referendum vote was set to begin. The Organization of American States met in an emergency session while the Obama administration expressed concerns over these events.

"Honduran lawmakers named the head of the Honduran congress to replace President Zelaya. After his swearing-in, the new president said that Mr. Zelaya's removal from office was not a coup.

"President Zelaya says Honduran troops forcibly removed him from his home in the dead of night and sent him to Costa Rica in his pajamas. The expulsion came on the day Mr. Zelaya chose for a constitutional referendum, including allowing him to run for a second term. The president pressed ahead with the vote in defiance of Honduras' Supreme Court, which declared the measure illegal. In a news conference at the Costa Rican airport, Zelaya said he's the victim of a coup d'etat."

The story folded into itself like a ball of newspaper. Our President in pajamas flown to the neighboring country we Hondurans loved least. My father's words did not judge the events. Was it a coup? Did the constitutional change really asking for a second term or was it other reforms? This fourth ballot box—la cuarta urna—would never be seen in Honduras. My father said nothing.

I lay on my back and focused on the tip of the Space Needle through the window as I balled fists and released them. A technique to relieve tension, the edge of anger, to leave myself and come back.

Ruben Guillardo ended the news program as he had for weeks—by saying his pregnant daughter Anza was missing. He hoped to hear from her soon.

What worth had my father's words? Later I would read articles from journalists who called the events in Tegucigalpa a coup d'etat, a golpe de estado. They said Honduran corporations had worked with the military, maybe the United States too. They said there was a rule in the United States—aid must be revoked from a countries where coups occur. This includes removing the U.S. military. President Obama announced that the Honduran president was removed from office, but he would not name it a coup. A coup is just a name. Names are words given to things that already exist. They can't communicate much. Zelaya was a name as Obama was a name as Guillardo or Rose were names. Military aid would continue. Soto Cano would run without interruption, making rebirth impossible. Things would always be the same.

My legs swam through the apartment and I returned to my mat where I raised my arms and lowered them. I opened my hips. I closed my eyes and focused on breathing, air through one nostril and out the other. My instructor said yoga transforms natural breath into breath control, like holding breath underwater, or holding breath as in waiting for something. She said these techniques would be used also for giving birth. Then she winked at me and translated, "the nacimiento." Mucous in my nose now blocked the air.

Upstairs the children ran. Their steps were fast and close together -------. They stopped for a moment. And then they began again. The parents stepped slow and serious, --,--,--,--. The ceiling bowed slightly and I heard scolding voices.

Maybe someone would come for me in my pajamas. Maybe I would be flown home to Honduras. I knew which airplane they could use. When Daniel returned from the aquarium he would find only my clothes and the sonogram, my indentation on the

yoga mat, my father's radio program about President Zelaya queued on his computer. Daniel would touch his scar and drop his books on the bed. He would unbutton his crisp blue shirt until he was only a skinny white skeleton with bleached teeth.

Chapter Twenty

There was a stage in an empty theater. A spotlight lit a small table with a jar. In one corner of the stage a tennis ball bounced. A man walked in time with the sound of the ball, which bounced each time at the same height. This man wore military boots and when he reached the jar he dropped a coin into it. Most seats were missing from the theater; rusted bolts showed where they used to be. The dog Chito was curled in the only remaining seat. He barked at the man onstage and the man walked away, boots pointed toward the curtains. Where was I? At the back of the theater, maybe leaning against the wall. I remembered more what I saw than what I felt.

Then another man walked across the stage. He was a man with a lame foot and when he dropped his coin into the jar lights came on and Chito barked again. My father. He wore high heels and walked away slower than the bouncing of the tennis ball.

Snowflakes fell onto the stage. White crystals cut from paper. Snowflakes also fell onto me. Their paper melted into real water over my nude skin.

Gerald Young walked onstage with a bat in his hand. He smiled and waited to be sure I was listening. "Te demonstro como hago pivotar el bate," he said. "I'll show you how I swing the bat." He stood next to the bouncing tennis ball and took a practice swing, pantomiming pleasure at the distance of his imagined home run. "No," he said, "first I will show a bunt." And he bunted the ball into the theater; it bounced at Chito, who caught it in his mouth. I started to shiver as the Honduran baseball player walked

toward the table and prepared to swing at the jar. He crossed himself with the father, son, and holy ghost. He adjusted his hands on the bat and pulled his arms back.

"Espérame," said a voice. It was Guadalupe. She rode a bicycle across the stage. When she reached the jar she placed another coin into it. "Almost there," she said. "Casi, casi." And then she rang her bell and pedaled away over paper snowflakes.

Gerald Young set his bat on the table and started to act as though he were crying. He did this for almost a minute, before he took his face from his hands and looked out at me. He said, "I'm just acting. Estoy intrepretando."

A woman with a large nose and a man's hat came into the spotlight. "If I, Lucila Gamero, wrote a play I would ask for more snowflakes," she said. "Snowflakes make for excellent stories. In Honduras we think they are ashes of angels who die in civil wars in el cielo. And, sir, your tears are false. Please point them somewhere else." The baseball player listened to the novelist as though she were his manager and he'd just been pointed toward the dugout. Lucila laughed and said that baseball is over after nine innings but stories last forever. She inspected each leg of the table. She knocked on the wood with her hand. She looked down into the jar. She took out a coin and placed it in front of her eye as though it were a monocle. "It was worth it," she said. "Very much worth it." A rope dropped and it lifted her toward the source of the snowflakes until I could no longer see her.

There was a stage in an empty theater. A spotlight lit a small table with a jar. Then I saw Daniel. He pushed a hospital bed which Chito now lied across. Daniel's scar was so large it crossed his face like a moon and covered his nose and mouth. He tried to

speak but I couldn't understand his words. Then, from a pile of snowflakes, my mother rose. Isabela wore slim simple clothes. The clothes were wet and darkened. My mother blew steam from a cup of coffee in her hand. She tried listening to Daniel. "Slow down," my mother said to him. "I can't understand you." Then she spoke to me. "He says there's a coffee plantation on the moon. They need Hondurans. They will fly to la luna in something called the Space Needle. The coffee comes straight back to Seattle."

Chito tried to bark from the hospital bed. His voice was muffled by the tennis ball in his throat. My mother told me to come onstage. The old bolts on the floor were like stumps in a tiny forest. A circle of light warmed me. Because of the light's intensity, it was hard to see out from the stage. Quarters and lempira coins filled the curved jar to its widest point. I tied hair away from my face, skin stretched beyond taut like a rubber band soon to snap. Now I wore pajamas. Zelaya's pajamas perhaps. I thought I was naked.

"What am I supposed to do?" I asked, somewhere between thoughts and words. Chito made a muffled growl. Whispers from the side of the stage. Wind through grass.

"Perform," someone said. "Perform for us."

Perform? I had no newspaper. What else could I perform? What else did my body know? Daniel turned the jar upside down over my hands. Coins filled them. The coins were heavy. I thought to swallow the metal circles. Their taste traveled from nose to mouth to throat. I did so until the jar was empty and my stomach full.

"Very good."

"Bien hecho."

"Buen provecho."

Daniel placed the jar back onto the table—upside down and teetering. I heard him roll the hospital bed away. My mother reclined onto the stage and covered herself over with paper snowflakes. I held my belly. The spotlight extinguished. Paper snowflakes fell to cover me also. Then they began to melt. Water over everything. A view from an aquarium.

Chapter Twenty One

Birth. It was the crown of the midwife experience. Joke intended. And who would be my first birth to observe? The mother was Karen. She agreed to my observation, and, again, told me it was only for the money. "Aren't you going to inspect my labia?" she laughed. "Or is the vocab quiz over?"

"It's over," I said and cinched my grip on her hand.

Her tattooed hummingbird flapped at her collarbone during fast shallow puffing exhalations. "Are you going to help me, or are you just going to stand there?"

The midwife stationed on a stool between Karen's legs took up her question. "Him? He's gonna stand there and watch. To him, this is still a miracle. To me, it's hard-ass work, and I'm gonna get you through it."

The midwife wore a red bandana across hair so short it couldn't have gotten in her eyes if the curls were flat-ironed. Her small, cauliflower ears pinched at the edge of the bandana. She winked and brought her voice into the sweet spot of commanding calm: direct but intimate, loud but restrained, syrupy but dry.

Dryness was my only task. Maintaining it. Toweling off Karen's face and arms as her contractions shortened. The uterine muscles shifted from third to fourth gear—I toweled Karen's thighs, mottled skin slathered over birdbones. There was a basket for used towels. A fresh supply. Curtains on either side. Head through the birth canal. Red white and blue and nothing patriotic about it. Blood and skin and baby's blue face. The

umbilical cord had enwrapped the chest; the midwife spun him free. She placed the child into Karen's arms. I toweled the baby dry until I was told to stop.

"What time do you have?" the midwife asked me.

I said, "twenty-three-hundred-hours and forty-two minutes."

"Eleven forty-two time of birth," she said.

I recorded this on the paperwork. Birth. A number. A recording. Karen wore mascara long smudged into her pores. "I hope you got your money's worth," she said. "Now the show's over." The midwife drew the purple curtain in front of me.

Karen's birth meant Anza's wasn't far behind. I had to up my towel skills. I didn't actually know if Doctor Wyman planned to deliver our child himself but I knew I'd see him at the fundraiser. Medical Care International had lost money from some British donor, and had to compensate. With what? With all-you-can-eat-sushi for two hundred bucks. With a conveyor at each table. Someone had built them from model railroad sets. Little coal cars of sushi. All they were missing were forested tunnels and pastoral towns with churches and clock towers.

Fish tanks glowed aquamarine onto the wood floor. The medic table was all the way in the back by a shy puffer fish hidden behind a tiny ring of coral.

Wyman saw the champagne before Marjorie did. He said, "That must be for your friend. I thought we agreed he wasn't coming back."

"I wouldn't worry about that," I said. "He might never work again."

“Probably better,” said Doctor Wyman. “He’s no good as a medic and it sounded like no good as a driver.”

I started to tell him about Paul’s accident; before I could finish, Marjorie came over. She’d heard the word coma and almost lost it right there.

“Good, you brought it,” Marjorie said. “Let’s have some after.”

“Why not now?” Dr. Wyman said. “Celebrations are nearly in order.”

Marjorie opened it and the cork shot against the puffer tank. She poured into three plastic cups.

“To Medical Care International,” I said.

Marjorie said, “To Daniel, the midwife.”

“To Anza,” said Dr. Wyman.

We drank the effervescent liquid. I scooped together my lips so the intake was slow. So long as I was drinking I wouldn’t have to speak. I wanted to pour champagne down all of our ears.

“Who is Anya?” Marjorie said.

“Anya is nobody. Anza is somebody.”

“Daniel’s wife of course,” said Doctor Wyman. His glasses hung over his neck from a new fabric cord in the colors of one indigenous tribe or another. “Thirty-six weeks and counting.”

He pressed his empty glass to the table. It wobbled. I noticed a crack on the rim from his grip. “Give my best to your friend Paul. Speedy recovery and all that.”

“Did you tell him Paul is my brother too?” Marjorie asked.

"No, he didn't," Wyman said. "Sometimes Daniel keeps things close to the chest. But I'm sorry about your brother. And sorry for volunteering your champagne away."

As the doctor went to see about setting up the event Marjorie pulled her arms in close to her body so tight the elbows nearly touched, her hands cupped together. She said: "What's her name then?"

If only I could have been that puffer fish, hidden behind that ring of coral. "Anza," I said. "Anza Guillardo."

"And Anza Guillardo is your wife?"

"There's no wife," I said. "But there is an Anza."

"Okay, and who is she?"

"A woman, a coworker."

"Then why did he say she was your wife?"

"It's something he said to help me get into midwife school."

"That's funny, he doesn't strike me much as a liar."

"Maybe he's an embellisher."

"And what are thirty-six weeks counting?"

"You and Paul have the strongest memories," I said, gesturing at nothing in particular. "It's impressive."

"Don't talk about my brother right now. What is thirty-six weeks?"

"The pregnancy. Thirty-six weeks pregnant. I didn't know how to tell you."

"Not this way," Marjorie said. "Not this fucking way. Not drinking the champagne I dropped for you at your apartment. Were you even gone then?"

"I was at class."

"Where does this woman live?"

"Same place that I do."

"In your apartment? And she's pregnant with your child?"

We should talk afterwards. This is an important event. Let's be professional."

She picked up the bottle and poured into Wyman's old cup. Then she pushed the cup over. Liquid fizzed a line across the table. It spilled in every direction, including onto my pants, my backpack, the first-aid kit.

She stomped away and I looked to see if Doctor Wyman watched. He did, casually, his glasses like two miniature aquariums over his eyes, and he gave a thumbs-up of some sort. Using a roll of painter's tape he started to mark cues on the stage. Guests began to show and comment on the little sushi trains—which had small pastries for appetizers—while I still wiped champagne from my pants, my backpack, the first-aid kit.

Marjorie said nothing for the rest of the event and after it was over she left, gruff, with a quick, "Congratulations on your marriage."

When I asked Doctor Wyman why the hell he'd said that to her, he told me it was best to get things out in the open. "You can't have secrets with pregnancy," he said. "It just doesn't work. I told you about Fatima didn't I? The woman with the miscarriages and the child with river blindness?"

I recalled his speech from the first event.

“Well she’s my wife now. Twenty-one years and not a bad day between us on the calendar. Although my in-laws haven’t enjoyed visiting as much as I expected. Not everything starts how you plan it. How’s midwife school?”

“Expensive.”

“So do you think you’d be in there if you were just some burned-out EMT, a dilettante looking for a career change?”

My legs were sticky and my hands too. “I guess we’ll never know. But Anza and I aren’t married.”

“And if you want to start paying for my services that’s fine. But so long as I’m doing it pro bono, my advice gets listened to.”

Light from behind the tanks marbled the floor. Fish ghosted across. We were all underwater with translucent hues and the last plunking sounds of a standup bass tuning before leaving.

“Then what do you think about a water birth?” I said. “I’ve read a lot about them. And Anza expressed interest.”

“It’s not usually what I do. But none of this is normal for me. If you’re sure about it, I could arrange for a tub.” Doctor Wyman pushed his glasses up along the steep ridge of his nose. “Listen, Anza’s living with you and pregnant with your child. If you’re not married you could be. In my opinion, you should be.”

“Just because it worked out with you and Fatima.”

“No, because I can tell you’re needlessly scared. What’s up with your generation? It’s like marriage is death or something.”

"It's not only up to me."

"So talk to her about it. Have you even tried? You can talk about a water birth but marriage is too much?"

Chapter Twenty Two

Sound came before light. A whisper, a scratching. Metal dropped onto the ground. Light came after. Moonlight or maybe a street lamp. A hunched shape and laughter through the nose. Why are you on the floor?—words swam through air. Did I imagine them or were they spoken? You must have fallen asleep.

Yes. Asleep. I said. I think. It was difficult to see, as through a camera's broken lens. Laughter from a nearby mouth. Not real laughter. An impression of laughter. Breath of something. Fruit? Fruit would be sweeter and his breath sour. The smells knocked against each other as do pool balls. Warm hands over cold. My body. The hands were rubbing. They were pinching. They were pulling flesh from the bones in his direction. His wet tongue. A tongue wetter than Chito's moving along my ears.

Yes. He spoke. "It's done. I did it. Just like I said I would."

Supported by my arms, I sat up. I breathed deeply as though I hadn't done so for hours. My forehead was empty and I felt a buzz between my eyes. "Okay," I said. "It wasn't the first time."

"Wrong," said Daniel. "My first and only time."

Into my eye I placed a finger to fix the camera lens. "You've worked before as a medic. What was different?"

Once more Daniel gave his impressions of laughter. "You must still be sleeping. Because of Doctor Wyman. And because of Paul's sister."

"Now she is just Paul's sister?" I asked.

"That's all Marjorie will ever be."

"And now she has a name again."

"I don't care if you call yourself by her name. What's in a name anyway? The important thing is what I told her."

I asked, "That you won't be working with her anymore?"

Daniel moved in front of me and spread his legs outside mine into a V. One of his hands touched my stomach. The other pulled on my neck until the spine straightened.

"Paul's sister knows about us. You'll meet my family."

What he said floated past me like fish in a river, swimming much too fast. I closed my eyes. I saw a stage, a table, and an upside-down jar under a spotlight. And the only voice I could hear was my father's. The Honduran president was removed, flown in his pajamas to Costa Rica. The rich coast. Those putas.

"I have my own noticias," I said. "News for you about a dream, and in the dream—"

"Shh," Daniel said in a voice like a cricket. "Dreams can wait. Plenty of time later for dreams."

"You have to listen to what happened," I said. "On this night I dreamt of my mother. I never dream of her. And on this night I heard my father speaking about what happened in Honduras."

Daniel came to his feet. He clapped his hands once and it was loud. An echo maybe. Wood moaned and someone walked above us. "If you want to tell me anything, tell me why the floor is still soaked. Did your water break and you didn't tell me?"

"No. And if my water was broken you would catch it in a jar."

Daniel clapped again. Loud. Louder. His legs weren't steady. He said, "I expected you to be happy. Instead you want to talk only about some dream. I'm going to have a shower before bed."

He unbuttoned his medic shirt until his white ribbed chest shone in whatever light shone through the window. I imagined the look on his face if I really were gone. His anger would become sadness as quick as it became anger as quick as a coin drops or at least a snowflake. Holding his hands at the top of the bathroom doorframe, Daniel asked: "Is there anything else you want to say?"

I closed my eyes and focused on the buzz between them. After all the yoga, my body still felt sore, sore from violence far away in Honduras.

"Lake Union," I said.

"What about it?"

"Lake Union made the carpet wet."

Daniel rubbed the bones of his chest. Then he scratched his scar with a thumb, harder than I'd seen, his teeth biting into lips. "I thought we could talk about what's important," he said. "Guess I was wrong."

The shower turned on. Sound made quiet from the sounds of my body. The buzzing stilled. *Wrong*. There is no perfect Spanish translation. Equivocado is an adjective. But the verb is often impersonal. Se equivocó. It was wrong. Wrongness occurred. Not: I was wrong. Oh well. Que será será. Daniel wasn't thinking this. He was covering his pale body, white with white hairs, in soap even whiter. Daniel was wrong. Wrong in every way. Maybe I was wrong too.

The United States was an illusion—a place that exists only as long as a visa. I was wrong to think I could live here forever. I should have been in Honduras, where at least my voice would be heard.

Chapter Twenty Three

Anza wasn't relieved that I'd given up our secret. Her reaction was frustration. The frustration of a woman kept in a basement. The frustration of a strong woman weakened by expanded proportions and fluctuating hormone levels. I couldn't blame her. But where could I go? I buried myself in work. There were tests to study for. Births to observe. There was a week straight of mornings when I left early, Anza asleep, and nights when I returned to Anza preparing for bed. I tried to talk. She didn't want to. I tried to touch her. She recoiled. It took all my efforts to finally get her into the car with the promise of Salvadoran food. Anza said the restaurant actually sold Honduran food, although Americans don't get excited for Honduran food. What I hadn't mentioned was the layover at my mother's house—time for the mapmaker to meet the map.

Anza protested that her legs were tired. I told her I'd carry her if necessary. She didn't call my bluff and we passed the same stone lions from election day and met my mother in the living room as Puget Sound seamed into the horizon where white clouds distant as sailboats traveled with the same Aeolian force in whichever zigzag would set them against the piers and condos and trees and aquariums and houses that abutted Seattle's waterfront.

"Well look who washed ashore," my mother said—a stool underneath her, a brush in her hand, a canvas angled at fifteen degrees toward the window.

"Mom," I said. "This is Anza."

"Hello there, Anza," said my mother.

"Very nice to meet you." Anza's arms covered her belly but it was no longer a belly you could cover.

My mother set her brush down on the easel ledge. Red streaks painted her bangs and she cracked her knuckles in a painful-looking way. "So are you one of Daniel's patients?"

"No, Mom. And they won't give me patients for a long time."

Anza said, "We worked together, Ms. Rose. Daniel and I helped to get President Obama elected."

"And a fine job the two of you did," said my mother.

I helped seat Anza on the couch and swiveled my mother's stool toward the center of the room. The two women looked at me in their own ways. "Those aren't the election results I want to talk with you about," I said.

"No," Anza interjected. "I'm from Honduras. And our own President has been removed from office. Your son is very concerned for the fate of my country."

My mother gazed down at her canvas. It rendered a supercontinent, not Pangaea exactly but continents smushed together like a huge cut-up pancake. South America nested into North America. "Well that's no good," my mother said. "No one can survive without a head, even if it's a head of state."

"When did that happen?" I asked Anza.

"Before you came home from seeing Marjorie—drunk."

My mother twirled her fingers in pleasure. "It sounds familiar."

"I worked a fundraising event," I said. "Doctor Wyman drank most of the wine. He'll deliver our baby." Were there any more powerful words? I said it again to fill my mother's silence. "Our baby. He's the important result from election night."

My mother was slow to her feet. She placed arthritic hands onto Anza's roundness, stretch marks in a cotton shirt. My mother touching a mother-to-be, my mother whose husband divorced her, and still Sandy Rose had more maternalism than I could hope for with all my studying and observation. My mother touching Anza. How their beauty mingled. The meeting of disparate bodies, the eruption of Mount Saint Helens, the election and rejection of a President, the speaking aloud of words, milky clouds in the sound, the pitch, the movement of a ball, a camera, an eye blinking, water moving over one's head, the beating of two hearts.

"He loves to kick," said Anza. "Maybe he'll be a futbolista rather than a baseball player. But now he sleeps. He sleeps when I am awake and awakens when I sleep."

"Would you like to see pictures of Daniel as a baby?" my mother asked Anza.

"We'll be late to the restaurant," I offered.

"Absolutely," Anza said. "The baleadas can wait."

And we went to my old bedroom. The single bed squeaked under our weight, a nasal sound I had tried to muffle when masturbating. A poster from the '94 U.S. Women's Soccer Team still hung guiltily on the wall. The women's long legs and lean bodies hugged by polyester uniforms. White headbands and knee-high socks. Mia Hamm with her go-fuck-yourself eyes. In another poster, Ken Griffey Junior was paired with his father, Ken Griffey Senior—KGJ wore a nineties Mariners uniform, his father

Cincinnati Reds. This was one season before the two played together in the Kingdome. The first father-son duo in the major leagues. A short-lived affair. Together, these posters cross-sectioned my teenage psyche, along with *The Complete Works of Shakespeare*, a dusty volume next to the photo album my mother flipped through and narrated. She started chronologically. Naturally.

"See, there's his little peanut."

"There he is dressed as a tiger—he drew the whiskers himself."

"Bath time. Daniel really loved bubble bath. He used to make the cutest pirate's mustache only he'd rub it all over his face and then start crying when it got in his eyes."

"Here's the one where I dipped him in the paint bucket and made a print with his bum. Look, there's purple and blue, red didn't turn out quite as nice."

"Here's Grandma and Grandpa in the cabin. Daniel in his snowsuit like a little star. Grandpa put Daniel on skis before he could even walk."

"See Daniel's throwing a baseball to Paul. Poor Paul."

"And here he's playing a tree in his first school play."

My mother, though often fazed by the sun setting or a phone book slapping our porch, treated this visit as ordinary. As though the surprise didn't register. I had imagined the two circles of my life crashing into each other rather than sliding neatly into a venn diagram. Nonetheless, here we were: accepting a mason jar of tea and waving goodbye, Volunteer Park in the rearview on our way to the restaurant.

And yet the night returned to silence. Forget a thousand-yard stare, Anza stared a thousand miles away. A conservative estimate. There was no one across from her at the table, maybe no one inside her either. No plane in the sky on the other side of window. Only Zelaya's plane. What did I know? A little empathy doesn't get you far when you're a dumb gringo, which she took to calling me until I listened to her father's program. So I learned what I could. Some claimed a military coup. Others cited executive abuses. How would I know the difference? CNN wouldn't bother spinning the wheel. Just as I closed my eyes, cold space slid under my arm. The voice of Anza's father in the living room, faded into the trill and whirr of headphones. Voice of America by Ruben Guillardo. Anza didn't know I heard the gnashing of her teeth. Two circles in space—touching, separating, reattaching. Two colors like gels over stage lights. Continents discontinenting. Recontinenting. At five in the morning I would visit the hospital to witness another birth.

They honored my request to see a water birth. That might take some extra towels, I thought. The midwife set the large tub to 98.6 degrees. She wore a fresh bandana and prepped everything as I watched, hung over with sleep and catching frenetic snatches of television news in the lobby. A discussion of Obama. A discussion of sports. A new movie about a dragon. We were on the second floor of Harborview hospital. Paul's room was three floors above. A physician's assistant wheeled the mother into the room. Yona had long blonde hair and severe bangs. Russian or Ukranian flecked her English and she gripped the hand of her plump husband. He wore some kind of gray neckerchief

and after stabilizing his wife into the pool and folding her robe he stood next to me. She, naked, water like a glass case, an exhibit, and the rest of us patrons. The midwife touched the belly with a waterproof Doppler. Yona extended her arms and interlocked them with the shoulders of the midwife, legs spread and butt sliding back, nearly into a child's pose which the yoga teacher had shown Anza. The husband clasped my shoulder and neither of us did anything. We just watched. Immersed in the partner-intensive labor, the midwife asked nothing of me. She spit sideways phrases about what she did and why. That was it. The contractions sped up—two circles closing in. Liquid on the floor. Showtime for the towels, me using my foot as a mop. The husband said, "push" in some wonky way like he'd adopted an accent himself. "Yes, push, good job." And before the sun was too high in the sky the child backstroked through rose-colored water, blood steeping, held in Yona's arms. The umbilical cord floated: cyanotic water snake. I wrote my impressions of the water birth for the midwife and she folded them into a back jeans pocket.

The husband—and now father—offered a pink bubble gum cigar and I chewed its dry sugar soft as I walked through hallway's fluorescence listening to a slight delay between each television, my jaw sore. I'd been clenching since the first contraction.

Inside the stairwell I looked down toward the parking garage and up toward Paul. Teeth-like stairs in either direction—home to Anza grieving the loss of her president or a visit to what remained of my friend.

I chose Paul, assuming Anza was still asleep. And when I arrived I saw the backs of Marjorie and Cheryl, two spines bowed, flanking Paul and holding his hands. The

Turkish doctor stood at the foot of the bed, clipboard in hand and stroking his mustache. I watched from across the hallway; I listened. Paul had come out of his coma. He wasn't speaking and the doctor told them it would be a while until he'd do so. His vision would be slow to return. Enteral feedings would be required. The oxygen mask covered Paul's nose and mouth. Skin whiter than white. Facial hair grew red in a patchy grid between his scars. Demarcations between states and countries. A curtain in the hallway availed me: I took in the conversation and their tears. I wasn't about to go in there. Not with Marjorie's parting blow of "Congratulations on your marriage." I'd let them have their moment. What could I have added to it anyway? Paul dressed in Harborview pajamas. Maybe the same pattern as President Zelaya's pajamas. Paul with his oxygen. Paul with a catheter. His bones recalcifying. Seaglass shorelines overhead. Drink your milk, friend. The slow return to life. Eyes milky. Crawling out from under the truck.

His skis, relics, shifted in my trunk when I turned the Subaru. Snapped toothpicks. They clanked and scraped their edges and broken bindings.

The children who lived above our apartment were out on the porch. They held lunchboxes like briefcases. Their heads were trained down as though learning to read porch slats. Their car was warming up, tailpipe smoke emitted in congested exhalations. Mother kissed father and father kissed mother. The children went with father. How much longer was their school year, I wondered, their nine-month school cycle? Spring made its way toward summer. Dew steamed on the lawn. Mine was year-round. No rest for the enceinte, the pregnant, the embarazada.

The boy waved through his car window wearing a Mariners cap. Friday was opening day. A four-game series against the Anaheim Angels. My father would be there: camera trained on the action and lens cleaned and dried with a microfiber cloth.

Chapter Twenty Four

Blue stars stab the firmament over a plank of Boeing wing. A fingernail moon peeks through my window. My baby has been asleep for some time and I can't say I miss his fussiness. Our progress is marked on a digital map with a yellow airplane pointed south and a red shoelace strung all the way back to Seattle. We are 30,000 feet above the Pacific Ocean somewhere west of Costa Rica. Our yellow airplane is humungous on the map and its size matches the significance I feel, my heart beating so noisily I expect it to wake the baby and, in turn, the rest of the slumbering cabin. At the rear of the plane the flight attendants rustle. They sleep and wake with professional ease. They prepare their materials, whether drinks, a meal, or what-have-you. One carries out brown globes of coffee and gently offers it starting at the front of the plane and working back toward me.

Other passengers stir and press their overhead lights in jealousy of the stars. They accept steaming styrofoam cups.

"Café, sir?" says a flight attendant whose lipstick is freshly applied and her scarf retied into a bow. "It's from Honduras, best in the world. Less acidic with overtones of almond."

I rub a palm into my eyes as though she's a mirage.

"It may perk you up," she says. "And will you need anything for the huahua?"

"No, I'm fine. I will feed him in a little while."

And, speak of the devil, he wakes with such an infant ferocity that I jolt the tray table with his head. My baby's full-throated cry is an alarm clock for the plane.

Overhead lights come on one after another until their spotty illumination makes artificial daytime. I rock him back and forth. Shh shh shh. I cup my palm over his eyes in case the light bothers him. I check his diaper. I offer my finger and he loops his entire hand over it.

The flight attendant carries a basket of papers and pens and begins handing them out. They are immigration forms and she says we'll present them along with our passports to customs. On them, one must declare what they're doing in the República de Honduras and for how long. There is only a line to respond. Because of political unrest the normal ninety-day tourist visas have been limited to a week, with renewal only for urgent business/negocios urgentes. Anyway, the semester break at the midwife school lasts only another two weeks. I write down my name and my son's too. Nationality: American. Purpose of visit: Family Business. This sounds a bit Mario Puzo but in a single line what else do they expect? I couldn't explain my intentions even if a customs officer sat me down and asked nicely. "You see, Señor, it is my intention to bring the child to his mother's home country. She hasn't seen him since birth. She left the two of us in Seattle, the City of Abandonment. And why am I here? Because I want her to kiss his forehead and come back with us to the United States."

So I stick with *Family Business*. Besides, what do I have to lose that I haven't lost already? In Seattle, I study other pregnant women in some clinical penance, then pick up my boy from a babysitter or from my own mother. The child's thirst for breast milk borders on mania so I've purchased milk from lactating women. Formula won't do. It could have been different. I know this when I hold him to my chest and he suckles

bitterly from worn rubber nipples. The rich taste of Anza's colostrum is still on my lips. Maybe I was the child and for this reason our child knows no mother.

Our tires touch ground on one of the world's shortest runways. The flight attendant wishes us luck. She clips a pair of magnetic wings to my baby's monkey pajamas and says, "Maybe he'll be a pilota one day." I shove everything back where it goes. The cascading mess returns to the diaper bag and into my backpack the stained journal and papers. At the front of the plane I expand a stroller and strap my baby in tight. He is on the precipice of tears with the raised cheekbones and open mouth of an overtired child. We stroll through the airport. It is a dingy building still asleep at four in the morning. My legs quiver and muscles misfire. We make it through customs without incident. They need the tourist dollars; beggars can't be choosers. I feel the same. I am cowed. I am ready to apologize. I am waiting for a taxi and bartering on price and telling the driver to extinguish his cigarette and then Tegucigalpa's fog opens up to carretera highways and dipping hills and homes built precariously onto them and street signs for avenidas and calles and mercados and merchants pushing carts and bicyclists and motorbikes and diesel smells and street food being scraped across hot surfaces with spatulas and Anza could be anywhere and a hand carved sign says Hotel Primavera and the drawn city occupies a v-shaped valley between green mountains and a painted condor flies overhead with brown fingerling wings and an upturned smile paints his beak and I can't stop watching this hotel sign from the curb because my depthless gaze has followed me from the plane and my eyes burn and my hands shake and the altitude is high as the Snoqualmie ski resorts and the sweet thin air crinkles like cellophane and my baby has

fallen from the precipice and starts to cry with a slow-start-and-increased-speed I've grown used to, like an engine sputtering and then roaring to life, and I tell him I'll give him the bottle and I will bring him to his bed and we will share in our headphones his favorite Spanish song called Cucurrucucu which his mother downloaded to my computer those months ago in the apartment where our life together should have started.

Chapter Twenty Five

Anza's hospital bag. I packed it with everything she could possibly need. Nipple cream. Nursing bra. Breast pads to absorb leakage. Camera. Contact list (Lupe, her father). Sanitary pads. Her passport. Dressing gown. T-shirt. A Lucila Gamero novel, a rotation of newspapers. Water bottle. Peanuts. Raisins. Licorice. Folic acid. Ear plugs. Toiletries. Towels. A change of clothes. Baby clothes, with a Mariners design—my father's treat. I had inquired about hospital bags. Why mothers brought what they brought. I asked husbands about anything they'd forgotten. I consulted Doctor Wyman. I wanted all to be there. These bulging bags contained the mother's world. Ready for a trip. If I could just pack it well enough. Order could be imparted. It just had to be the right order. The right costumes and props.

Chapter Twenty Six

Daniel and I entered through a giant painted Ichiro Suzuki. The door ended somewhere near his ankle. We met a concrete tunnel. The tunnel met sharp light. Hondurans dream of playing baseball in the United States—grass green as ocean and wind flapping the flag. Foul lines chalked with the accuracy of lasers. A stadium to make the Romans jealous—Safeco Field—with downtown on one side and the ocean on the other, seagulls diving through afternoon breezes like playful airplanes. Daniel led me by the arm as we descended empty stairs behind first base.

"This is where your father works?" I asked.

"It's not usually this quiet," he said.

"Doesn't he have to prepare for the game tonight?"

"He wants to meet you. So do I."

"You've already met me."

Daniel tightened his hands around my flesh and I used the railing for support in the center of the stairs. My body was slow. I sloshed. Liquid inside me. Líquido adentro. I didn't want to look away from the stadium. If only the child could see. Maybe he already did—a wide-angle lens hidden behind my eyes. They called Seattle the Emerald City. And this stadium was a jewel, a jewel in la corona.

"Have you been to any games?" Daniel's father asked. "He said you were a fan?"

"No, never," I said.

"Well, this is the camera I use. Here's the hinge down here. Here's the viewfinder if you want to look through it. You just have to imagine someone's on the field besides the mower."

Ray Rose wore a gray sweater whose collar grazed his abnormally small ears. Perhaps still sunburnt from the trip to Arizona, he itched skin flecks from his ruby nose and I noticed a loud silence between him and Daniel. I didn't know what to say. I told him I would love to come sometime to see my favorite player.

"Ichiro's real popular with the Japanese," he said.

"She's from Honduras, not Japan," Daniel said.

"I only meant lots of foreigners love him. You knew what I meant, didn't you?"

"I like your condo very much," I said. "The bed is quite comfortable."

"Is it?"

My vision shot through the camera: seats and seagulls and the flag flapping and the scoreboard and the ocean and the grass and the sky's whitish blue—all made a kaleidoscope, un caleidoscopio—which language copied which?—and I remembered the games on television during college, the video of Daniel and Paul at the playoff game against the Yankees, Paul from the cabin, Paul from the coma, and behind me Daniel and his father doing their best to say whatever they needed to about me with son upset at father for not loving mother well enough and father upset at son for not sharing the woman whose huevo met his esperma and grew into the tiny white man inside me who one day could sunburn his own nose and see as many Mariners games as he wanted—

mother and father different from each other, better apart, happier, the two lenses in the camera which make a clear image by focusing in opposite directions.

The man cut the grass in perfectly straight lines. He rode his cart through a gate in the outfield fence. For a moment the three of us were alone in the stadium.

"Let me give you both tickets," said Ray. "It's the least I can do. Over in left field so I can keep my camera on you. I'd like to get you a gift too. Something with your favorite team printed over the butt. For the little slugger."

Effusive, this was the word. Both Sandy and Ray were effusive. Daniel had kept me a secret for so long, brought me to each of their homes, and months in the cabin, and now each of them were happy to meet me. Ray stood in front of me and bowed his hips forward like he really did think I was Japanese, but then he stretched his arms around me for a hug.

"I never knew my mother," Ray said. "I looked online but gave up when I saw a hundred women with her name. I didn't want to tell them all how their long-abandoned son wants to meet up for a beer. Might mess with their minds a bit."

Ray ground his teeth between sentences. He had thicker lips than Daniel and his face was more square, the bones straight as the lines the mower traveled. He also looked younger than my own father, although I figured him to be seven years older. I wondered if people aged faster in Honduras—Ray's hair healthy silver rather than the sickly gray of my father's sideburns.

Insistent that we'd come to a game, Ray said "How about tonight? An interleague game against the Astros."

"I have no plans," I said, and I wondered if I had any plans for the rest of my life. "Does Gerald Young still play for the Astros?" I asked.

Ray shook his head. "I don't know who that is."

Daniel told his father we would come if I felt up to it. Did he give this guarded acceptance as an excuse?

Ray zipped a rain cover over his camera and waved goodbye. Blue day bent. We slowly walked the stairs, the tunnel, and out through Ichiro's ankle.

Chapter Twenty Seven

I parked in the driveway outside Paul's old house. Resting on a secluded hill, it wasn't far from Chinatown and the Central District, where scents of dim sum and collard greens converged. Now it was his home again. Marjorie's car nestled in the gravel. Oak leaves splattered the windshield, skeletons of petiole and filamenting veins. It used to be here I waited for Paul to sneak out before shooting away down the hill.

She answered the door, hands on hula hips. Her teeth bit hard into lips. She asked me what I was doing. I told her I wanted to visit Paul. She said he wasn't ready to see anyone besides family.

Chin pressed forward to emphasize my scar, I asked: "How do you know that? I know about being in a hospital not able to say anything."

"From what I can tell," Marjorie said, "you've done enough not saying."

"Let me see Paul. I'm sorry the accident happened but it's good he's awake."

Marjorie released her lips from her teeth. She tongued an incisor as though seeking a poppy seed. Pillows below her eyes said more than either of us could. "Actually he's sleeping now. He needs his rest."

"I won't be loud. If he stays asleep, no big deal."

"You didn't want to bring your pregnant girlfriend with you? Or was it wife?"

"Anza. No, she's at the apartment. She needs her rest too."

We walked through the hallway into the living room where they'd built a curtain rod in an oval above the hospital-style bed. Paul's baseball portrait rested on the mantle.

In another picture he wore his medic uniform and leaned against a Humvee with a medical cross and dry hills in the distance. Paul made gurgling noises and we separated the curtain. His eyes stared at the ceiling. The lines on his face made a red-and-white lattice.

"He's been like that for two days. Even though the view goes clear to the Sound," Marjorie said, a freckled finger extended toward the window.

"How does he eat?" I asked. The IV bag had clear saline.

"We feed him," she said. "I started blending banana into the grape juice. He likes that okay."

"Can I do it?"

"Daniel," said Marjorie. "What did he know about the two of you?"

"Let me just feed him. This is about Paul."

"No," she said. "It's about you."

I grabbed a plastic cup of pulpy juice. There was a sippy lid and I screwed it over the top. His neck was in a brace. Plaster encased his limbs in a number of places. His fingernails had yellowed, butter left out a few days. I couldn't tell how well his eyes focused. My hand shook a little as I brought the cup near his lips and I stabilized the wrist with my other hand. The gurgling noises got louder and purple slid through straw.

"They don't even know what his recovery will look like," Marjorie said, standing on the other side of the curtain, a silhouette of raindrops.

After a time, Paul closed his lips. Juice spilled down his chin and stained the red bandana loosely tied around his throat.

“Paul was supposed to get better by being with you,” Marjorie said. “Does he look better?”

“I’ll help you,” I said. “But I can’t change anything.”

“Call first next time,” Marjorie said, following me to the door.

Chapter Twenty Eight

A poster hangs from two tacks. Mountains are chipped into the faces of white men. The caption reads: Mount Rushmore National Memorial. "Te ayudo?" the store owner asks, a hippy with a high voice. I ask if he's been to Mount Rushmore and he says no, but he liked the poster. The store's sleeping bags are giant caterpillars. There are racks of tents and stoves and machetes and bug repellent. Almost everything is written in English. I ask him to find me a tarp and some good rope. He slaps dust from the foam he cuts me for a sleeping pad. He asks if I'm camping alone. I drop a knife with a leather sheath onto the counter. The man takes my lempiras, though just as many dollars fill his register. He tries to make change in quarters but I ask for centavos. "Is there a telephone nearby?" I ask, and he points to the corner. Everything fits into a used military duffel bag. The first call is to a taxi. I say I need to go to the reservoir; they don't know where I mean. The second call is to my father's station. If my timing is right, he should be on the air. It rings and rings and finally a voice answers. I tell the producer I am Anza, Ruben's daughter. He says my father is worried. He says both fathers are worried. Put me on the air, I say. They need to hear my voice.

Today there is no wind. The water is a straight line to the edge of concrete. The dam, already it looks old. It was made as poorly as most things. I imagine the dam exploding, water which drains and leaves behind mud. Mud which becomes soil again. Soil which grows coffee again. Soil which my mother fertilizes. She would grow a

coffee tree with leaves larger than newspapers and bright red beans like cherries, only without pits. Her coffee wouldn't be sent to the United States, it would go to the moon. It would be drank in the pueblo at the green field between edificios where children play baseball and in the factory someone reads Lucila Gamero and Gabriel Garcia Marquez, no authors who wrote in English. No translations. And when hurricanes come, no one would work. Everyone would sit together and listen. Maybe they'd listen to Anza Guillardo's story. I've heard of her, someone says. She grew up here. I heard she had a baby.

A rowboat is upside down in shallow water. The wood is colorless although its blue soga loops over a nail. With the boat turned right I row across. Balloons of air slap the wood from below.

On a flat space overlooking the reservoir I unroll the foam pad. I tie rope between two trees and hang my tarp over it. Heavy rocks protect my mother's cross. I arrange my things. There isn't much. My ear still aches from the police baton. My stomach still aches, empty. I swallow a handful of almendras. The mouth of the forest is quiet. The road is far away. So I fold my clothes onto the pad. Naked, I walk to the bank. I splash my arms and face. Every day I am more skinny. My stomach is almost flat again. It is a warm day and the water warmer than air. I float on my back and liquid swims over my eyes, it passes into my mouth. Something passes below. Cool reaches my back. Balloons. The body is made from water, made in water, and to water it returns. Down where the factory was, down where mother was. A hand seeks me. Strongest grip pulls water through holes.

Chapter Twenty Nine

From high above the stadium, fans were fictions. Dirt flecked the lens. The flag waved toward Puget Sound and back toward the Cascades. In the downtown distance, a brick clock tower. Anza moved to her seat with glacial steps. She insisted on going first, she could do it herself. Sweat was on her knuckles. Fat pouched under the sharp bone of her chin, newborn flesh, too young even for a mole.

"Mira," Anza said from our seats. A player hit a fly ball into the sky, the open mouth of the stadium's retractable roof. The ball fell into the left fielder's glove.

"I'm glad to bring you here," I said. "Both of you."

Anza stared forward at the baseball game. We were alone, together. My own body a husk whose purpose was achieved months ago. I watched the game and she panned the crowd; I panned the crowd and she watched the game.

My father perched in right field swiveling his camera from shot to shot. Between innings, swaths of fans on the giant television screen raised their arms, danced, waved signs, and looked for the camera in every wrong direction. There we were. A zoom-in shot. Daniel dressed in hooded sweatshirt and a ballcap; Anza in an Ichiro t-shirt, its angle sloped from high tubular breasts over the huahua ridgeline.

"Check out the jumbotron," I said.

Anza waved—slow, stately—in the manner of a first lady, or an ambassador. Her hands were not varicose but thick-veined. Sweat navigated them like river currents. The camera left us and she folded hands over belly. I waited for her to clap when the teams

scored but since the game was a pitcher's duel neither team advanced a runner further than second base.

When I spoke to her again she said her ears were sensitive, they were flooded.

During the seventh inning stretch, when concessioners started closing and fans jogged for last drinks, I called over a lemonade. They played "Take Me Out to the Ballgame" and Anza did one of her yoga poses, fingers interlocked behind and chest open. I couldn't tell if her posture was backwardly inclined or the whole stadium. Anza took the lemonade and sipped yellow. Bent at the back and hips, she gripped the flat metal armrest and worked down toward her seat. In some purgatory between sitting and standing, Anza swayed. The seventh inning stretch ended and the seats filled.

"Please," she said, topsoil eyes big as baseballs.

"Are you starting to feel something?" I asked. "Anything at all?"

Her silence was yes. Her jeans were wet, concrete darkened. Could it be lemonade? She held no water bottle. I said we needed to get out and the row emptied. My arm supported Anza so we would not stumble. We waited for an elevator, my car keys jingling. Kids were supposed to smile at that. Anza said to stop.

Doctor Wyman hollered at me to fill the tub to ninety-four degrees, keep it consistent. Water bounced over water. Anza's contractions began. Faraway points at first, they grew close. I timed them on my wristwatch, recorded them in the notebook.

Towel boy did his thing. I wiped Anza's forehead dry, beneath her fleshy chin, tubes of naked arms. She accepted my absorption, focused on her task. She listened to Wyman and curled fingers over his fists, pushed into them, made waves.

I wanted to be further along in my training, older and wiser and more inured to births, able to say simple things to make Anza's face relax and ease her mind. Yet even in her exertion, Anza looked ready. Each breath roiled inside her—long and slow, then fast and shallow, the same music at different tempos.

The wife of Doctor Wyman came along too. Fatima wore jeans and a fleece, red beads in braided black hair. A nice collared shirt poked out beneath her fleece and I wondered if we'd interrupted a date. Anza didn't mind this woman who sat there reading a paperback but I found it odd.

"Are you the husband?" Fatima asked me, unalarmed by the water birth.

"Daniel's training to be a midwife," Wyman said. "The one I told you about."

Then I wondered if my father filmed us leaving our seats, the commotion impacting the game, or if it would remain incidental in the large-scale scene. No one had called my phone. It was just the four of us in that room, and soon to be five.

Rifling through Anza's hospital bag, I found her water. She sipped a little, but not nearly enough to replace her lost liquids. Sweat filled my towel and I went for another. She bit into its cottony flesh and made a muffled yell. The towel soaked, I went for another. On my wristwatch, minutes passed, then an hour, and another. Time had nothing to do with it. We were at the now-demolished campaign office talking about Obama, we were in Yakima, Snoqualmie, Volunteer Park, Safeco Field, somewhere on the surface of the moon. Pretty warm and wet for the moon, I figured, and grabbed a final towel.

Anza pushed and pushed and a tuft of head hair emerged between her legs. Curls matted the top of his head. Hair became flesh. The baby slid south through Anza. Skin stretched pink, wide. Wyman coached her on breathing—a yoga instructor in his own right. He moved with her contractions, timed his words between them. I invented villages where he'd done this before. Fatima, the one who could speak to this, turned pages mechanically.

With the huahua's head free, her delivery sped up. Shoulders. An abdomen. Bones half from Anza and half from me formed his tiny frame. American bones and Honduran bones. Blood from both of us. The tub turned hibiscus. Flesh touched water.

He swam—face and ears and his entire body, a stealthy seal tethered to the umbilicus. His form was incredible. Wyman passed him to Anza. Nutrients flowed and our baby took his first breath, skin cyanotic with mucous and fur. With that breath, he inhaled his citizenship. Anza's passport slept in her bag and the huahua nuzzled against her chest. Both cried. So did I, tears navigating grooves in my face.

The doctor pulled the drain and a spiral of water escaped. Anza looked small in the draining tub. I cut the cord. She gave Wyman the huahua—we counted fingers, we counted toes. I checked for scars; besides a swollen bellybutton, I found none. Wyman clapped me on the back and did the same to the baby. He said, "Mazel tov." May you stand under a good constellation.

Fatima placed a bookmark and brought a wheelchair to the tub edge. I wrapped a pink robe around the new mother. Most mothers don't like to go five seconds without holding their child, though Anza pulled from my touch and told me to hold him. So I did.

She dried her body and stared at the bathtub's stains. The huahua positioned himself in my arms with small, almost mechanical movements. Skin slick as a ski slope and a little bit brown, he stopped crying, found silence. The Mariners game had gone into extra innings. In the twelfth inning they won, headline reading: "Better Late Than Never."

Chapter Thirty

New sounds played in Daniel's car. The muffler rubbed metal parts whose name I didn't know. Asleep in my arms, the child made little gasps. His voice had red wrinkles. A buzz between my ears grew into static.

We traveled on the smaller highway. The child was so light he wasn't even there; his Mariners pajamas weighed more. There were cranes to the west and I smelled water. Seattle's skyline came into view from the top of a hill. It looked like a picture or a map—distant, and rain between us.

The child had a birth certificate. Already he had a social security number. Maybe a barcode on him. I held this seven pound body who swam for weeks inside me. My estómago and uterus would dry up. He an American and I would never be.

Daniel banked around a curve and I could see the Homeland Security office: green grass, blue glass, the eagle and shield and stars. Neither of us usually spoke until the building was gone. This time he spoke. Daniel said he'd called to see if this birth counted for his degree. They told him no. "Anyway," he said, "How's the huahua?"

I told him the baby was fine.

Then he offered to help with the restless nights. He wanted to invite his parents to the apartment; he wanted to invite my father also.

"Turn in there," I said.

"Is the baby getting sick?"

"The mother is sick."

Daniel said, “There are burp rags if you need.”

He lifted the bag to my feet; I lifted the child to his arms. The voice of red wrinkles. Concrete was hard under my sneakers and grass soft. I wanted to throw up into the grass, but had nothing left inside to vomit. I carried the bag, heavier than the child. Daniel rocked the small person in his arms. Even from this short distance, I felt alone. It started to rain—not because of what I was doing, but because this was Seattle. I once looked at the city as a faraway place on a map. Now I’d have to do so again.

“What are you doing?” Daniel yelled to me. “Where are you going?”

Daniel knew the answers. He wanted different ones. The child was his.

The Homeland Security doors were tall and double. A man behind glass asked what I wanted. “A ticket to Honduras,” I said. He said this wasn’t an airport. I handed him my passport and showed him the visa, nine months expired.

He looked at my passport and then looked at me. “Are you pregnant?” he said.

“No,” I said. “I’m just fat.”

And I held out my wrists—swollen, enlarged—ready for the kiss of metal. I was ready for Honduras, my country without a president, a political body with no head.

Chapter Thirty One

"Take a seat please, toma un asiento. You speak Spanish, no? A little? That's okay. Honduras is a wonderful place to learn. Don't listen to que dicen los cabrones about our accents. Very clear, see? Suave como el piel de mi nieto. That is, my grandson. Seguro he will speak Spanish and English like Anza. I will not broadcast for a few minutes so relax. It's just me and my producer here anyway. See through the glass his head like a coconut—wave to him, little huahua. My producer hates children. It's okay because abuelo loves them.

"This huahua has Anzana's cheeks and her smile. I wish she were here to see him, but stubborn como un torro. Just like her mother. Isabel. Mi esposa. One day I read poems at la fábrica, Pablo Neruda, and ella me dijo 'These are maybe good poems to read but to hear you speak them is shit.' Pablo Neruda! 'Read us about baseball,' she said. 'Read us anything else. No one will pay you for poesia.' Abuelo was always more sensitive. Her body was stronger from all the work. In the army my foot was broken and they let me only read announcements. That's why I walk like the letter S. And what could I do but become a lector? Fue mi destino. My fate. It was a hard job. You read for an hour without water. Workers won't pay if they don't like. They say they are too poor. Maybe they are too poor. Maybe they think poesia is shit. When you pass your hat around it comes back to you empty. Ask Anza. It's not enough money with a child.

"Tegucigalpa is not Nueva York or Seattle, but still different from the countryside. More people, more jobs, escuelas. For Anza I thought our city was better.

Children of campesinos always are campesinos. To work the land is to be poor, to lose your land one day. You can lose everything. Anza told you about Isabel, mi esposa. No se porque she married a lector. She would not come with us to Tegucigalpa. And only for one day each month would she come to see Anza. Anza's favorite days. 'Madre esta aqui. Esta la madre.' Never goodbye. The government said to los trabajadores that the new empresa would flood the valley. She didn't listen. She couldn't even swim.

"What are we men to do? Anza will make you crazy. Maybe already you are crazy. You come to Honduras now, with protests in the calles, all of this about President Zelaya. I haven't married again. Estoy solo. My producer me dice that I'm lonely but the micrófono is company. The audience in their living rooms. I read noticias mundiales, world news. I am not only here in Tegucigalpa. I am in the United States like you. I don't leave this barrio but I tell the huahua stories of the whole world. If you can stay please stay, but we must broadcast. Put those headphones on the huahua so abuelo won't sound too loud. See, the headphones are his casquito, his helmet."

Ruben speaks like a radioman and I always let him speak until he finishes. My huahua and I listen as he delivers the news. In his voice I hear Anza; in his face I see her. His cheeks are softer but the pregnancy softened hers. He who made her; she who made him with me. I close my eyes and know this man better, the sound of many broadcasts, his voice over the telephone. Ruben speaks of international news, national news, and then local news, as though focusing everything in the world toward this very room. I listen to every Spanish word even if I don't understand. After all the news, he begins to

speak slower. “Anza Guillardo,” I hear him say. She has been missing for some time. “Ni una llamada, ni una carta, nada. Si alguien tiene noticias por favor llama el estudio. Está tu Padre y el Padre de tu hijo.”

Silence on the broadcast. A red haloing light over the door. Waiting for her voice, for word of her. Ruben says “Buenas Noches” and the light goes out. My huahua still wears his headphones and his arms reach toward the ceiling like a turtle’s limbs. The producer offers Comayagua coffee and I shake it away—Honduran food has done enough to my stomach.

For five days my huahua and I show up for the morning broadcast. We eat with Ruben and then return for the evening broadcast. We buy formula from a department store with a broken escalator. Every woman is Anza. I touch strangers; I show them her picture. I whisper that we will find her soon. I send emails to my parents, check the start dates for my midwife classes. Not much time before we’re supposed to return. Then, on the sixth day, we hear Anza’s voice. She calls during her father’s broadcast. Anza asks the producer to be put on the air. A microphone swings in front of my face. It has been since the campaign speech.

“Anza,” I say.

“Anzana,” says Ruben.

“Trshurur,” says the baby.

“Buenos Días, Padres.”

“Anza,” I say again. “Why don’t you come and see us?”

"Daniel, it is dangerous to travel here with a child. How long will your visa last?"

The producer looks touched and perturbed. He taps a finger against his watch.

"It's a tourist visa. We need to leave by Thursday."

"Then I will call again after it expires," she says.

Ruben asks where she's staying.

"I will tell you when I call again," she says. "Stay tuned."

On Friday my visa is expired and big news about the ousted President. Manuel Zelaya has returned to the country and is safely housed inside the Brazilian Embassy. There are protests on each side—Zelaya's supporters and Zelaya's enemies. Ruben interviews a man from the current government, who assures listeners that Zelaya will not return to his post. He smokes a cigarette that smells of mint and I bring the huahua behind the glass. Ruben shakes hands and reads baseball and soccer scores. The phone rings and I answer before the producer can.

"Where is Lago Isabela?" I later ask in the taxi.

"Por el otro lado." Ruben points beyond the mountains. They are greenish-brown and steep, mist pockets over each ridgeline. The huahua does fine on the drive, although my stomach is a sulfurous hot springs. Too many baleadas and even bottled water has been suspect.

"Do you visit her often?" I suppose I could mean either Anza or his wife, and Ruben takes his time in answering.

"It has been a while," he said. "You will see it is a long drive."

The taxi driver asks for extra money and I pay him in dollars. We are in the taxi for an hour, two hours. Mist becomes low clouds. Elevation clogs my ears. Water smells are everywhere though I can't see beyond the next bend. The driver holds one hand to the wheel and fiddles with the antenna using his free hand. He complains about the radio in Honduras. Ruben laughs and agrees.

The taxi driver doesn't know where to pull over. This reservoir isn't a park used for recreation; it looks like a mud-banked caldera. Ruben says to use the shoulder. The taxi driver points to the running meter and opens a magazine.

We cross the road, huahua in my arms, a cane in Ruben's. The banks are too steep to climb but he shows us a gravel path to the water. Twisted trees with small, green leaves stamped into the ground rim the reservoir. On this blustery afternoon, wind animates whatever it catches. Edges of water. Hair. Baby clothes. Across the bald expanse, something in the trees. Between two higueras, as Ruben calls the twisted timber, fabric stretches. Like a sail it moves this way, that way—father, son, and grandfather making sense of fabric-between-trees. Closer to the water, a little sign is plunged into mud. It says *Nada*. The handwriting I know. Sharp n and soft oval a's.

"Why nada?" I ask Ruben. "Why nothing?"

"No," he says. "She doesn't meant nada for nothing. It also means *swim*."

Maybe this will be the huahua's first memory. He will remember his father walking him to the taxi and handing him to the driver and saying por favor no fumar cigarillos, that we'll return soon. Maybe the huahua wonders why neither father nor grandfather stay with him in the taxi. We have reasons to swim after Anza.

Chapter Thirty Two

They stand a long time. I wonder if the two men have never swam before. The body can become perdido in a body of water, sure, though you won't know without entering. My father knows my mother's cross. When I was still a teenager he brought us here. Always the fresh-painted boat on the banks. We never meet the fisherman. I remember the vidrio surface as my father rowed us toward mother's tree—the white cross a microphone down to her.

Like a pirate, I watch the men through a brass telescope. Daniel hands the child to my father and removes his clothes. Neatly he folds them and places a rock over. Skinny pale white scarred handsome. My father passes the child back to Daniel, who rocks the child in a slow Pan dance, wearing only underwear. A button-up shirt unbuttons. My father's gray chest hair is the under wing of an halcón. He uses a second rock to anchor his clothes. If they knew about the troubles with my tarp they would choose heavier rocks. At the entrance to the water, my father looks again for the rowboat. Only a shred of blue rope remains tied to the nail.

How long do they hesitate? How many times do they place hands to their mouths and shout my name? Anza. Anzita. Anzana. All this open space and nowhere for an echo. I count minutes. I count seconds. Here they come, I whisper to my mother. Now they are wet. Now they swim. Now they shrink like tortugas.

Do you see your grandson? He is not with them. See how your husband paddles with arms like a dog and sputtering chicken legs? Does old Ruben remember the

factory? Does he remember his Isabela? Does Daniel remember another factory? Has he told the child? Through this flooded museum they swim.

This body of water. The men beyond the middle. Bellybutton, ombligo, equator. They begin to slow. I close the brass telescope. I drag the boat down from camp. With swimming eyes, father and grandfather watch me. The doctor said a child's vision forms slow. Shapes are vague as underwater. Then they sharpen and clarify until you recognize faces, bodies. I wonder if the child will recognize me. I hear those names again. Anza. Anzita. Anzana. Water is full of dirt. What's in a name? That which we call a Rose. Mouthfuls of water as I pass.

Letters swim under my boat. They want to caress. They want to bite. Grandson and father and grandson and mother and grandmother. All swim together. I slide oar through water and arrive at the shore. I ascend. The taxi driver gives me the child when I ask. Don't I look like his mother? When I say drive to Tegucigalpa, he asks how the men will get home. They will swim. I say they are enemies of Zelaya. I give my last lempiras and the driver agrees.

On the car radio there is a story about the President. A crowd gathers at the Brazilian embassy and says he will speak. I tell the driver to drive us there. In Honduras, they say leather will one day break, in the thicker or the thinner side. But either way it will one day break.

People stand on cars. They sit on each other's shoulders. Zelaya begins to speak from the top of a staircase. The child sees the president's white cowboy hat, the white

teeth, the mustache. I continue to move closer, where the crowd is the thickest. I hold the child out before me, hands beneath his armpits. On the edge of tears and laughter, he shakes. Today is not a warm day. My fingers fold over his ribs. Gray clouds drop droplets so small they might be Zelaya's spit. This is his baptism.

Zelaya says it is not an easy thing to do. He says it is very difficult. He says he did not know how hard it would be. As I continue to get closer, I understand he means not returning home but governing a country. His words speak directly to me. He speaks my story back to me. He has crossed a border in the night. When his bodyguard comes to restrain us, Zelaya says it's all right and hands the bodyguard his hat. I see the line of his hat against sweaty velvet hair.

The president asks, Who is this young chico?

He holds the microphone to my mouth. And I say he has no name.

When do you plan to name him? A chico can't grow without one.

The crowd chants for us to name the child. Call him Mel. Call him Zelaya.

Why not name him for his father? Zelaya says.

His father is American, I say. But the child needs a Honduran name. So he can return to America and know part of him will never belong.

Zelaya winks at the two of us, the crowd. Or maybe he will stay in Honduras, he says. So part of him will never belong here.

In the crowd, red is everywhere. Bandanas wave. Signs shake. They came to hear the president speak, the president who is not a president, rather than a mother who is not a mother. And with a nod of Zelaya's head, his bodyguard passes me the hat. Take

it, he says. Toma lo. So I do. I take the president's hat—inside its sweaty cave I place the child.

I look into the crowd for someone I recognize. I look to be recognized.

Hands touch me while I walk. Hands that are familiar, hands that are strange. I will be she. I will be her. I will be mother, madre, me. They call our names. They say them aloud. I hear them.