

COMPLIANCE

Amie Zimmerman



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COMPLIANCE

AMIE ZIMMERMAN



#104

FOR MY FAMILY, WHO LIVED THROUGH AND DIDN'T LIVE THROUGH.



“STILL I KEPT WAITING TO *SEE* JESUS.”

—Langston Hughes, *Salvation*

“...I FACED MYSELF THAT DAY WITH THE NONPLUSED
APPREHENSION OF SOMEONE WHO HAS COME ACROSS A VAMPIRE
AND HAS NO CRUCIFIX AT HAND.”

—Joan Didion, *On Self-Respect*

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HIP

Writing from the film of memory has the urgency of fall transplanting put off another year, roots more entwined, bark firmer, new sweet buds more lush, an ache knowing it will be harder to dig up, more dangerous, the tree less likely to flourish. Now rather than later. The feeling of knowing what storms are coming, boats lashed to their anchors, ready to bash each other to bits rather than cut the lines & drift to the unknown. Choosing sure wreckage, known. What is happening is my neighbor is building a house so tall it blocks the sunrise until nine am in winter. What is happening is my rescue cat is so traumatized she will sit only in my lap. What is happening is my son has begun smoking weed with his friends. What is happening is the hosta's leaves are wilting for the season & will leave a hairy tuber the size of a basketball, needing to be divided. What is happening is all of these things will leave a chronological mark but I will not trust it, as I do not trust other of my memories. I will say I lived in the Middle East & then I will say I traveled through the Middle East. I will say my parents were in a cult & then I will say they were good Christian believers. I will say my grandfather assaulted me & then I will say my grandfather knew what he was doing. I will say "No War for Oil" & then I will say "Fill Up Please." I will say refugees where we lived & I will say I do not know. I will say I know & I will say I do not know & I will say my body knows & my fingers know how to hold a man & my heels know how to run & I do not know, flatness of the table under my back, & I will say I know, ice cream over the edge, this language & my tongue will not release but my hand still holds the other hand & I do not know, piles of scrap metal, & I will say I loved animals & had aquariums & cages & bowls & I do not know, threaded

gold through filmy pink, where they went & my sorrow means death I am sure but I do not know, saved smashed bow from wrapped holiday present, & I do not know why I do not know, soft skin inside the arm cast, & I will say tequila & Frankie Gonzales behind the halfpipe & I will say fourteen & then I will say twelve & I will know that the age was not right & I know that the ages are often not right & I do not know, sound of tires before the embankment, & I will say my wedding at nineteen but it was really at twenty & still too young to drink & I know, raindrops on hot pavement, this & then my son at twenty-five & then forgive me but I stop knowing so much & I try to place where & when & the size of him & what he said & I know so much, Cheeto cheese fingers inside me dry, but I don't even remember what antibiotic he is allergic to, & how we discovered this & I know, my thumb to make a moat, I went to therapy when he was three months old & I do not know, bare legs on my friend's front porch, & I know trauma takes hold of memory & I will say my trauma started at three months old & that's why my body took control of my memory & I will say that's where the anger is & I will say that's where so much disappeared & I do not know, the angle of the stairs to the basement, & I know, slam the door & lock it, it is there still somewhere & I know, cousin Eli crying, I will remember what his first word was & I will say it will come back even if I didn't write it down & I know, eggs & ketchup & toast mashed in a cup, it may not ever & I will say I know, electric candles in the windows, how to believe myself & I know, spell everything right, I don't believe myself & I know, sitting on the stepstool in the kitchen, I despise this weakness & I do not know, motors underneath floors, & I will say to my body that it's okay it's okay & it will take time & I know, white laces in white shoes, I got back my quadricep the other day & maybe I will get back my masseter & I know they meant to give away their love & I will say they spread hope if only to themselves & I will say they were so wrong & I know they did not know they were wrong & I will say a child both knows & does not know when their parents do harm to

others & I know my parents did not know & did not see & knew & did not know of the harm done to me & saw & did not see in the way our damaged memories find pockets in our bodies, for example in my father's knee & hip, the one he had replaced.

FLASH FLOOD (PART TWO)

The ratio of slope is measured by the length of rise (cotton candy, marigold, ceramics, your neighbor's weaving loom) over the length of run (vanta black, the tide, gas tanks, coyotes). It is sunset divided by sunrise, not the other way around, plundered by the shape of the clouds overhead, bravery & armor in no moments being interchangeable. Famous career slumps recovered: Mike Tyson, Paula Abdul, Betty White, Mickey Rourke, Rob Lowe, Drew Barrymore, Paul Reubens. Most of these slumps were caused by distasteful airing in public of Unfortunate Personal Decisions along the lines of botched plastic surgery, having sex with the wrong person at the wrong time, violently attacking others, raping women, growing old, growing fat, the usual. Warm rain in the middle of the street, gathered to ankle height, surface clear, rushing past my feet, jolt of falling back into your body, jolt of falling while standing upright, jolt of water moving past without seeing water moving past, a certainty of motion, a certainty of bodily stasis, I'm in, I'm rolled up & ready, the mountainside is falling. The house was flat & wide with no basement, no attic, a large garden with a circular path I would ride around & around on my bike, squishing the fruit we never harvested, plums shiny & busted like snail shells in the path, beyond that, a basketball court. Not regulation. But poured & poled & ringed & sometimes netted. Beyond that, the hillside, the foot of the Rockies that wound like an eel from great heights to my basketball court. After the flood, the landslide. After the landslide, the sun. After the sun, my cheek to the clay platelets rising, the dust of my breath in soft drifts, red ants & see-through scorpions trundling, my thin brown arms outstretched, holding back the mountain.

WHEEL

What if objects came to life, as in the movie Rubber, to murder, to carry out the intent behind thoughts & id unchecked, when something is hated it is destroyed by personified will? The concept of spiritual warfare is not unique to modern evangelical Christian theology. Similar to witchcraft, it signifies an ability to imbue physical impact through religious or spiritual ritual. Imagined prayer of Jack Chick: "Give me fuel, give me fire, give me that which I desire."* Create in me the ability to turn, O Lord, to rotate on an axis, to tumble like a bingo cage, to l& on something lucky, to make good time, to support a lifetime tread warranty, to go somewhere worth arriving, to help distribute only clear grease in bearings, to acknowledge the hollowness of being a vessel, to be grateful for being filled with nothing, to spin quietly & efficiently the miles that make the stories, to wait, while my walls dry & crack, to transport, without question, your will, no more than two tons at a time, to be useful knowing I am one of many & will be replaced as needed. To lust after a man's wife is the same as taking the man's wife, to think murder in one's head is the same as murder by one's hand, not to the man/wife/murdered person, but to the internal puncture wound of the tire affected. All is lost once the nail is removed. It sheathed itself in the slow settling of a mother hen on her egg.

* *Fuel*, Metallica

STAR

1.

In the night sky, in the southern hemisphere, there are different stars. This phenomenon had never occurred to me before the hike. The sense of displacement, of not knowing for sure where we were, felt like time travel. It felt ancient. I felt brave. It felt important to go look at things I had never seen before, never mind the thousands of others already having walked that path, they were new to me & I changed.

Sid was accused of killing Nancy in a stupor after a fight. He died, shortly after, of an overdose.

2.

If I'd gone prepared, I would have been able to cipher some of the shapes, I spent a disproportionate amount of time attempting to find Orion, trying to find my known shape, like overlapping differing transparencies on a projector, attempting to match the points of outline, of story. It's confusing. Was it a scorpion that killed him, ego as central motif? Or desire, sent by a rival, by Diana's concerned sibling? He's dead. That's known. The stars memorialize heroes. Nobility of dead heroes. Nobility of passion, of willingness to kill & to die. I am wondering about zealots.

a bottle of grass flavored soda a bottle of dirt flavored soda a bottle of popcorn flavored soda a bottle of sweat flavored soda a bottle of green apple flavored soda a bottle of denim flavored soda a bottle of egg flavored soda a bottle of satellite flavored soda a bottle of hot sauce flavored soda a bottle of smoke flavored soda a bottle of rice flavored soda a bottle of fog flavored soda a bottle of blood flavored soda a bottle of bridge flavored soda a bottle of ink flavored soda a bottle of soda

3.

In the Bible, zealots play both roles with the books' writers: the admired, the misguided. Admiration for the fierceness of commitment, but even the most committed of prophets, John, eating bugs & wearing scratchy clothes in the desert, is not called a zealot. He spoke to Heaven; he knew Jesus; he leapt in the womb as a fetus in proximity to the Messiah, attuned to a special spiritual message; a conduit, willing as anyone; singled out for a particular role by forces no one else could see; but not a zealot. Simon though—uprising against Rome for the salvation of Jerusalem—Simon believed. Simon wanted freedom for his soul & freedom for his land. Because of this belief, the mixing of the corporeal with the spiritual, he is the zealot of the twelve disciples.

Helpless fantasy in which the arms are tied with rope latticed from bicep to wrist. Fantasy of the wrist drawn down & held. Enhanced fantasy of the eyes shut.

4.

It is known that some followed Jesus because they thought his message to be a veiled call to arms against Rome: He was going to be deliverance from a corrupt system. We wait as hundreds of years become thousands, for the salvation, impatient; we take it into our hands & fashion the truth to conform to our experience of the decade, the year, the moment in front of us. How to explain the mystery of injustice, of invasion. The zealot unafraid to mix politics, the look of froth on the mouth, red-faced spitting for justice, as if one ever receives what one deserves: my story as it peels back, what has been translated for me in the text, the translation I was handed. Who am I to claim to know what I deserve? Observe without overlaying my transparency to connect the unknown.

shave your head with a number four guard shave your head with a number three guard shave your head with a number two guard shave your head with no guard with no guard leave the guard behind

5.

Anyone can look at the stars & draw the shapes they see; it's the translation into a believable story that matters: the voice in the wilderness crying out, quenching like rain on dry ground. I've always been afraid to ask what makes a zealot. In the Bible, the writers say it is dogma (b). They write dogmatically (a) about the fault in dogma (b). In writing dogma (a), it is the dogma (b) to blame, dogma (a) dictating that dogma (a) is the way to discard dogma (b). Discard the flesh, pick up the spirit, do not concern yourself with context. Context is a distraction, not a contradiction. This is both confusing & ironic.

a baby nursing inspires a letdown in milk by vibrating its jaw instinctually—milk is released from upper deeper ducts in the breast in a domino effect the first flooding the next overlapping down to nipples—letdown can be halted by pressing the palm hard against the nipple against the breast

6.

Taken out of context, anything can become biblical truth. In Simon's time, women attended the same religious ceremonies as men. Though seated in a different gallery of the temple, they called out to their educated brethren to explain the text being read aloud in languages they did not understand. For this they were chastised, for wanting to know the text, for not being educated, for not waiting until they got home to ask what was being taught. For being disruptive. Women should be silent in church.

I am the zealot of something

7.

This from who it is that has the power to translate. This from who places the transparency, who draws the stars, who names the constellations, who forces the hand, who creates the zealots.

I call out. I hear my own response.

8.

I call out. I hear my own response.

TABLE

I wake at a table because this is when I come to: image of palms flat on the surface of a table, hoisting the body up, swiftly, in protest, indignation, justice. Back to the courtroom in *To Kill A Mockingbird*, standing up to say *This will not stand*. How strong & sturdy tables are, & reliable, balance of four corners, nod to the compass, feng-shui-compatible in mobility, base of a thousand-year-old pyramid. We serve food, sit down to break bread, & a pleasant table can put one at ease; finding relief in overeating becomes warm water, an infinity pool at a celebrity's house in Malibu; we watch the water dribble over the edge & do not notice anything amiss in the tabletop glass edge of the horizon, homework, pattern cutting, makeshift baby changing station, display unit for remote controls. The fold-down table with one prop leg in our old converted school bus, the one we drove across country, parked in El Paso, & lived in on Base, used for food, mainly spaghetti & chocolate frosting if photos are of any use, the messier the better. I think about a hot school bus in an open sand-lot in the desert. I need a table to have more than one leg. My first table purchase off Craigslist, mid-century homemade resin geode table, the kind with gold sparkles flecked in the mix & split open crystals & threads of heat & pressure & water to make known the integrity of color, creamy waves of rust & purple, lines of what can withstand. Oil passes through. Water passes through. We swear on Bibles at tables & read from Bibles at tables & we pass through & rocks start bigger than our buses & crack down over time, animals break on them, their hooves split open & we break each other's heads on them & know this is where to build our houses, to drill for oil, around the pieces that have been split & split & broken, with hooves & skulls, hands on promises.

PICKLE

Don't be bigger than your clothes. Don't break glass or know someone who breaks glass. Don't unintentionally drive faster than the speed limit or California roll through stop signs. Don't try to plant tomato plants in the same spot every year, even if you've amended & added fish bone meal in a great location next to the brick chimney with radiant heat through the growing season. It won't work. Don't wish for different parents. Or world peace. They are equally impossible. Don't take a long time attempting to count out correct change. Don't use incandescent-bulbs, fluorescent bulbs, LED bulbs, bleach, toilet bowl cleaner, soft scrub, paper towels, disposable anything. Don't be prone to lightning strikes or no one will stand near you. In nearness, feel hunger. In hunger, desire to control hunger. In hunger, controlling the natural disasters of the body's response to nearness. In desire to control, always the state of failure. Envious of the tight control of women whom people are worried about, envious of their recovery to a healthy size or their not recovery to a continued still fragility, the external statement that all is not well, the ability to resist asking for help while having the need for help so visible. I don't want to have to say it. Hanging out at a friend's house in sixth grade before a Weight Watchers meeting with my mother, I call her to check in about when to come home & she asks about what I'm eating. No dill pickles (no calories!) at my friend's house, only sweet pickles (calories!). Most likely I wouldn't be down the quarter pound I needed in order to stay on track. Always the hustle of the poor, always the attempt to squeeze more out of a program & rack up a two-for-one. Diet bread means you can have two pieces for one exchange. Confuse what would be satisfying in theory for what is

simply more of the thing. The body, captive, in revolt. I don't know how to eat & be safe at the same time. Neither does my rescue cat. We both feel panic when food shows up. I eat too much because I am always seeking to register pain. What mystery is there in the frail unknown? I want to be thin & smoke cigarettes & not care about the half bottle of wine for dinner & say dismissive things like, *Tarkovsky was always a little too long-winded for me.*

RADIO

I have lived in a time where the spark of sound carries burning lilac straight into windows & under bed covers to the flashlight lit red fetal hands cupped around dreams of running legs & gunning motors & trains forever chugging, tracks of heaven, longing, singeing calves on mufflers, tongues looking for clover honey, finding bees. I have lived in a house with storage space under the stairs, bean bag & corded red-lips landline phone, AM/FM bandwidth radio cassette player, hitting record & play at the same time when the top ten songs came on. The rounded corner of the black plastic box pressing hard against my pubic bone, body arching forward, I have lived in moments where I held my breath, listened to Def Leppard, told my lungs to fuck off as they raked their cups along the bars in protest, wait, press harder, lift more, it is the same orgasm I have each time, I'll sing it for you. I have lived in a kitchen with my dad, listening to Rush Limbaugh, giggling when a man calls a woman a *feminazi*, in front of a man, while I am a woman, for a man & with a man & to a man, while I desire a man, & ask a man to love me & to a man to have worth or be worthy to a man & have a man who tells a woman that a man has desire to be a man & a woman has desire for a man & it is only a man who is a man. It isn't as if I am a man. I am a woman. I receive that definition. I have lived in the Old Time Gospel Hour & the Old Time Revival Hour & the Old Time of Nostalgia for the Present Time & the Hour of Witching Time & the Giving of the Gifts & the Asking of the Holy Spirit. The hours I have lived seem heavy & brown with tobacco, the kind you put in water, the kind that works to kill the aphids that turn leaves in on themselves, the kind that makes you weigh one kind of life against another.

SHOE

Tiny mud house on the horizon, sun behind, swerves, looms, the give of the steering wheel making more dramatic motions than the vehicle itself. His foot barely on the gas, we laugh, my father & me, driving network of roads in open desert, ravine to the west, apartments, mountains. My feet at his shins, I can see the dashboard, my hands at the top of the wheel, sand-dunes, mud house. We are happy, this joke we share, breaking the rules.

& the endless blue sky, an eye open, sides of vertical canyons to shimmy down with dust & loose gravel, brittle scrub, pear cactus, lizards, some with tails, a few without, those successful in escape.

The pane of glass cloudy or clean, or not there, just the space for it. Air conditioners chugging where walls connect, the house where walls do not connect, a mud house, the place in the wide open. Roads paved for blocks of homes, ending in blank nodes, the male ends, no homes built, only the open sky, the aqueduct ravine, the apartments to the west, the mountains to the west of the apartments, the burning air.

The mud house not torn down, ghost subdivision not built, only the grid, the occasional cul de sac sprouting, a lily pod, smooth, bare. To wander in a place before the stamp of men, or the flag planted & temporarily abandoned, to wonder if there would be homes, the wind throwing sand against them, a shovel digging, big granular heaps, anxious covering or uncovering, at this pace, not knowing if the desert is trying to move this amount to there or to remove whatever displeasing evidence it sees.

Sand as water, parting in the stream around the rock, wearing it down, turning it into sand carried to the delta, to the edges of continental plates, deposited, waiting for the sun or the earth to move water again. This place has been desert, close but not too close to the Rio Grande. This place, in a smaller sense, is free territory to me, the edge of the open sky, the ravine, the apartments across the ravine, boundaried but not occupied, occupied but not acknowledged, me, situated in this place that does not belong to me, free.

One day, brown beer bottles in a halo along a curb, only the pavement, the curb, a sidewalk, & dunes, brush, weeds, ant hills, a single jelly shoe, not my size, Tootsie Pop wrapper, no Native American shooting the star, only boring cowboy with his boring rope & hat, but the glass from the bottles, flashing on the few broken, my lack of feeling, the bottles breaking, glass uplift, glass spatter, brown glass singing, winking its open eye at me, the open eye of the open space, a mud wall not connecting anymore.

An edge of brown, so many deathly edges when I took the bottles to break them creating a lake of glass that waited & had its own tides I asked if a lake had tides or a river had tides & never got an answer about either of them & after the glass I used my matches on a dry twig laughing at me said I'll show you & burned it up & then it burned harder on the one next to it & then there was brown grass that started to smoke & I backed away across the low dune but I was watching the fire & not the glass & I turned to run & it was my love of the desert that showed me how to embrace brown glass it came to hold me it opened my skin & inserted its body into mine the open palms & knees where my own tide rises up to meet me with the fires behind & around I join the heat by laying on my back & you can't see me from above when I lift my palms & knees to the sky I blend right in.

Rules are broken, this secret we share, the we. Mother's father swallows me whole in his mouth that reaches first my shins. Goya's Saturn returns. I squirm in mouths, bury the granular desert, I can see the mud house & why its walls do not connect, the leather chair, the green carpet, small hands on large pink flesh, rocking in a bunker, in a bunk bed, in a different desert, an open eye, the wide-open eye to the open space closing in.

PILLOW

I never considered myself a breeder. A whale is a whale is a whale with broken wrists, let's not pretend to know what is being said, the fog blinds, the tide covers ears, it could be a gull, it could, but is most likely someone ripping pages from their copy of *The Notebook* & literally eating them. Paper squeaks against teeth when being wetted. A whale is a grey whale is a pod of grey whales not moving off the coast, staying where they are, turning at the surface, wind chimes, tide as wind, tide as wide wind moving toward the warm, then warmed, moving toward the cold, the whales turning in the warm water sinking as it cools, warm bodies keeping it warm for several more seconds, the passage of molecules around the surface of elliptical bodies in constant shift, jittering hundredths of degrees, creating more motion. Always the motion interior. Interior motion of the carpal ligament, piston encased, as much needed for stillness as for motion, for what happens at failure? Failure indicating either a flaw in design or in materials, enough pressure or temperature fluctuation then fluid pools where it shouldn't, blown knees, the roots gripping a half inch higher up the hill than they were before, communal living, animals left behind in the wake. Swelling the encasement, a ligament can no longer move, failure of the right-handed to be right-brained, where are your problem-solving skills now? Turn in the bed again. The cramps come & go, doing the good work of the body in delivery. Pillow under head, behind the neck, along the back, under the left elbow & wrist, under the crooked left knee, under the left ankle. The point, like with good running shoes, is to be supported so that the consciousness is not drawn to any one particular spot of irritation. Support as non-existent. A good shoe. An

experienced server at a nice restaurant. You are standing underneath a warm waterfall. There is no one else there. The water is streaming over your body. Where it touches, it unbinds the hunch, unstitches the muscles from their carrying positions. The crown, top of the head first, weight drops down, then the forehead & over the ears, both sink down, letting go. Lines in the forehead smooth, the eyebrows & corners of the eyes soften. Water over the bridge of the nose & down to the smiling muscles of the cheeks, the deep furrows of the mouth, jaw loose, slack tongue. The occipital, connective muscles from bottom of skull to top of spine, release the throat, the fibers of the shoulders, round rotators to the armpit, let the arms hang. Breathe into the ribs & separate them down, release the belly, let it sag, unhook the sacrum. Water over belly, water over hips, soften the anus, inner & outer thighs, backs of knees, unflex the toes. The body is not a weapon here, the body rolls, the body gets out of its own way. The body's holes, all opening, saliva, saline, blood, shit, mucus, the body rolling. Tissue fails, gives way, not flawed, the design counting on the repair, depending on the amount of ocean water in the room to know if this is wading through to higher ground or just bleeding out, warm follows cool & then back to warm, where are your problem-solving skills now? Shale becomes saturated, moves at once, all beneath is gone, or, in more peaceful times, a hillside of L-shaped trees, you know how this ends, both ways, with the house, the bed, the cloth, the water, with it all buried, turning.

STONE

The Pacific Northwest will be broken apart, crushed by the Cascadia Subduction Zone earthquake. Pressure built under the Juan de Fuca plate, released about every 300 years, now officially overdue. My house is not on bedrock. There is bedrock available here but at high elevations where past seismic activity has lifted & exposed the pressurized stone. The path of the Columbia River, previously flooded by glacial melt & volcanic flow. Miles & miles of lava & ash, water runoff dense with silt from Canada, from when we were a PanContinent. I'm not talking flash flood. I'm talking forever: volcanoes that form when earth is pulled apart, volcanoes that form when earth collides, boulders scraping along, depositing lakes & the beginnings of ecosystems encased in little bacteria with little cilia legs flapping like Egyptian paddle boats. We're on shaky territory. Clay riverbed prone to liquefaction. The Great Gold Miner in the Sky shakes us like a gold pan: smaller particles settle through bigger sand & gravel, displace groundwater below. Water rises to the surface. We are mucky. We are Artax in the Swamp of Nothing, our cell phones don't work. Our sense of time, in geologic terms, is shortsighted. We are our own universe, the center, the radiant bits, our orbits, inhabitants, & the atmosphere. We save garbage ties in case. How do I lend the proper amount of significance to a life ending—to many lives ending or even shifting in terrible ways—within the context of the greater community of this country & globally, our inflated sense of importance, our need for right now? I want it to matter that I am afraid of this earthquake. It feels like I am begging for significance from a glacier. It feels like I am asking for more egg nog. My culture is a young culture. By this I mean the United States as it appears

now is overdue for a revolution. My Marxist friend told me that most cultures have a violent uprising at least every 250 years, which feels like a long time to wait for the dramatic arc to take its course. The question I am confronted with: Am I the sort to commit violence in pursuit of protecting human life, according to my value system?

my short elastic waistband shorts were sunshine yellow with white piping, fluffy yarn bows tied in my pigtails, a picture of a fetus on poster board

after converting Muslims to Christians in small villages, we leave

skirts in school are longer than one's fingertips, measured, on the occasion of chapel day. *I do not think so.*

My memory not in geologic memory, but in the folds of my blood, measured in the awakening of blood, I am a giver & receiver. I have yet to punch someone in the face but I want to learn to shoot a gun. This is my science, in the time between now & starting over.

BRACES

My mouth crowded my teeth. By this I mean I've always loved to chew. By this I mean, when I am in pain, I bite down. I have enough room in my mouth for my teeth as long as new ones don't grow, the new ones that grew had to be removed, in the clotting process I smoked cigarettes & drank milkshakes & gave head, all the no-no's, & got dry sockets. Which had to be packed with clove oil & disapproval. A palate expander can also create more tolerance, new activities being desirable, fewer overlapping teeth, more chances to win things like scholarships based on citizenship & the splits. The expander is cranked open periodically with a key to the metal hole in the roof of the mouth. Medieval. Not lasered. Still the procedure thirty years later. The cells of my cervix had been attempting to mutate for a while, felt the need for expansion, pushed the envelope of acceptable. Result readers always a little skittish, rolling over the middles, getting to the ends. *Come back come back come back*. Sometimes I'd come back, sometimes not. Like with scurvy, the roots of my teeth became loose. My small brown purse, fake suede & leather, gold clasp, folded strap between my side molars, grinding down, the plastic faux leather coating flaking away, white corded nylon underneath, grinding my wiggling teeth when it got really bad. They still don't like to do procedures on women of child-bearing age that might hinder your child-bearing prospects. Even other women, the administrators, standing to the left, at the elbow, handing over the instruments, handing over while masked, handing over in benign comfort, handing over the ideas, the traces, the plans, the support, the security, the bank accounts, the test results, playing the game, allowing the expansion of the mouth. Even other women do what they have to,

helping other women to not have cancer, straps, electric grounding loop patches to complete the circuit, avoiding electrocution, slicing away puckered tissue marked out in vinegar, margins, a hot knife melting through brick. Straight teeth, clean smile.

BED

If it is a dream, in the dream, panic. Picking up, setting down, picking up again, paces, standing, vibrating, sitting, a waking sleep of exhaustion within a dream, no waking to satisfaction, groggy sleep wiped out of blessed eyes. No sleep, no blessings, no eyes. At our houses, maps, people fleeing, the unseen plowing into brief bodies, screams, car jams, discussion around waiting it out. The enemy is everywhere. Every day walking past my neighbor's fig tree, not knowing it is a fig tree, not plucking the ripening then rotting fruit. They fall, become a mess to step around. In the dream, a five-sided house is recommended as the most efficient design, the question of efficiency transposed for me, by me, away from belonging, safety, into the core reasonableness, a justification for attachment. House as anchor, house as bunker, an introduction of mud onto floor space, the tracking of mud indoors as symbol, rocking in bunk beds, a ship on the road on wheels, rocking. In a compact space, a tree begins to grow inward, slowly, halted. The Korean silver fir curves its small short needles up away from direct sun, exposing luminous blue silver bristles underneath, what is admired is an attempt to shield. If I look out of my window long enough I will see death. In the dream, a plan to leave, a living on the road, not toward a safety, but ahead of danger, heading into danger, the number of us creating safety or beatification as shield. Our ship is pulled by thousands of sled dogs ahead of us. They die. We cut many harnesses. In extra dry land, our wake is marked by tracks & lumps of beatific fur. We stand on the bow, salute, crossing the next border in terrible, succinct gratitude.

PHOTOGRAPH

Once I saw a grainy photograph of a lumpy spine of something that looked constructed nestled into the top of a mountain range. I was told it was Ararat & that this was where Noah's Ark was thought to have landed when the Flood receded, doves, olive branches, the salvation of mankind & animals from wickedness & how much more wicked could it possibly get than how it feels now in these hooded & masked times, these modern times of do what thou wilt, no shame or covering, no thought to the pushing of a man to the outer limits of what a man is built to take in the overload of testosterone that guides & clogs & becomes the very breathing air itself. Waiting for the earth to decide what it wants on its eggs. When I hear we were arrested while stopping to take photos I know it was because we thought it was cute to dress me up, chaste, black & white, smiling, acknowledged holy ground, a 1970's version of a selfie, folded in prayer, in back pockets & keys & handcuffs shuffling over unexpected snowy mountain passes that slow us down & give us flat tires, smeared eyeliner, children's toys to shut me up, batons & shiny hats, some uniform & jurisdiction of whatever desert scrub I could name, name now but not then, I could roll through that country now & name it name it what I know of dust settling after the mix-up.

ASH

It is probable that blood is evidence of violence. Or, if blood is evident, violence occurred. Or maybe, violence exists where there is blood. Is a volcano violent? Eruptions have been described as violent. The act of violence inherently containing intent, though it feels like a stretch to consider a natural force as having intention. The process found interesting, the process of intent, in increments, to inflict small amounts of damage, damage over time leading to destruction, the idea that the object of intent has been piecemeal damaged beyond repair, beyond a salvageable condition, so that it no longer exists. Does it still exist if it is no longer in its original form? The force of intent of the scrapper, crushing the car in the salvage yard into a more easily transportable cube, translates the drivable form into an undrivable form, but still not quantifiably useless. It has not been dismantled into non-existence. The metal will carry on, that is the intent. In 1980, Mount Saint Helens released a pyroclastic flow, hot ash & debris, a wall of burning air, leveling hundreds of square miles, forests & animals did not burn, they were destroyed. Glaciers melted into lahars, rivers of mud cutting paths into valleys where new lakes would form. Ash over everything for miles, carried by wind. Ash on individual needles in the Sitka spruce, ash sticking to spider webs outside the screen door, ash in tire furrows like snow in the roads, stalling cars, clogging exhaust systems, ash as zero visibility, ash in lungs, the garden, the river, the eyelashes, violent translation in material from mountain to valley. Ash had been the tile roof of the cabin, the water bucket, the clothesline, the down pillow. It was fur, sap, moss, eggs, branches, dirt, hoof, scales, clay, it was blood &

broken bone, healed, stitched together in the natural order of things, rendered, dismantled, sifting into small children's open mouths, lifted tongues, mistaking flakes of one for the other.

James Dobson urges not to allow the parent with rage, the parent who has lost control in the past, the one who enjoys the administering: do not break the child's spirit, learn when to stop, when the compliant spirit has yielded to authority, the incremental process of small pain breaking down defiance, be the source of the pain as well as the comfort. A lie, the soap, the belt, a paddle, a paddle with holes, the spoon, the switch, the hand, never the hand, the hand anyway, never the fist, the fist anyway, tears but only some tears, tears to signal true sorrow, of real grief from wrongdoing, not in whining or protest, repentance is key, strike until there is surrender, remember the intent, the sweetness of a yielding spirit. Offer more pain when sadness drifts without purpose. A soft mind, settling after a drift. The drift of soft ash, settling over everything.

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