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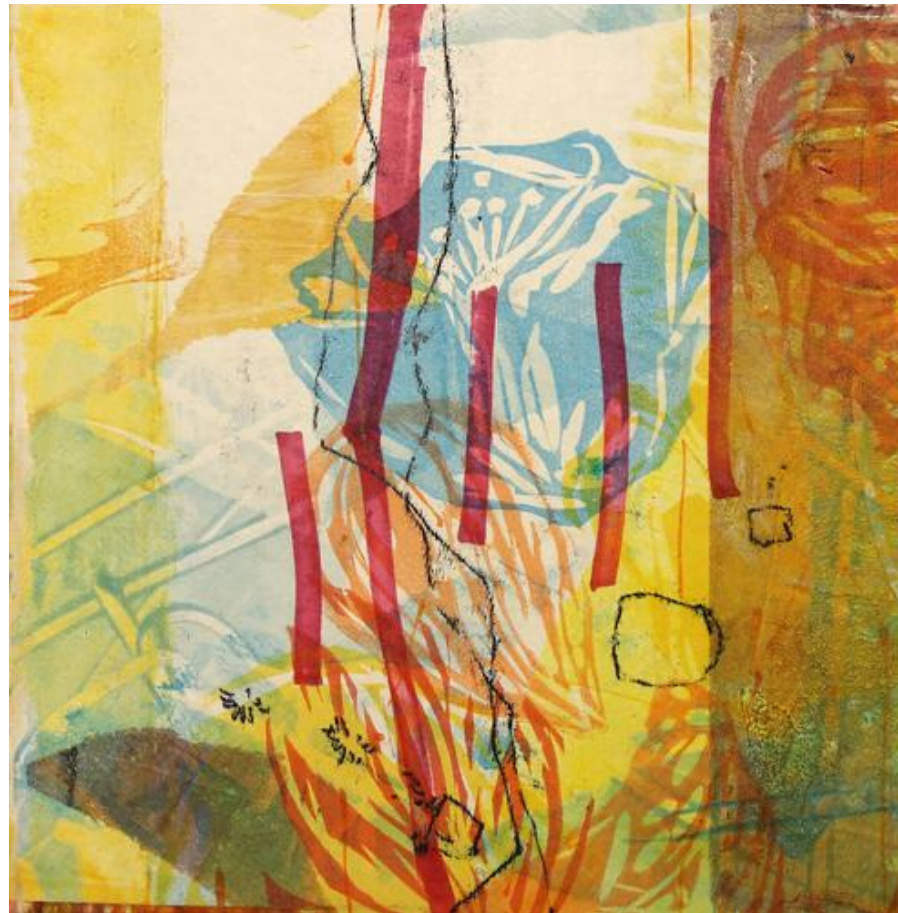
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"The Language of Memory" by Ren Adams; <http://www.renadamsart.com/>

About the images and video on this page: "*Poppy Receding* investigates the sincere absurdity of processing loss with decorative memorials, themselves transitory tokens of grief. Based in a fiercely personal, yet oddly abstract pain, the series considers the story-infused space of mourning—colorful, obsessive layers behave like memory extracts. Each mark suggests a rapidly-fading inscription.

"Conflating the mysterious Mojave Desert deaths of her sister Cindy Adams (1972) and musician Gram Parsons (1973), Adams asks what it means to 'know' someone through location-tied story—to 'understand' events via clues, just as she 'knew' both individuals through family narrative. What does it mean to assuage loss with monuments, letters and stories? Do gifts for the dead resolve our perplexity?

"To engage this, Adams uses transparent layers to suggest memory, story cycles, and the deluge of tokens posthumously offered to Cindy and Gram. She deconstructs and reframes the language of the Mojave Desert, the visual vocabulary of memorial shrines, and iconography from Cindy and Gram's clothing, whirling them into a sensitive system of overlaid shapes. The desert they loved represents and consumes them.

"Each intimate piece earnestly embraces our candy-colored attempts to mediate the space of grief with flowers, cards, and condolences—the physical trappings of a cultural process of mourning, often our only recourse in grappling with the unexplained. *Poppy Receding* is itself a fragile, momentary monument to the passage of imprints, the trace of Cindy and Gram, and to *our* moment, an undeniable passage of its own." —Ren Adams

In the Eroded, Lost

Editor's Note: I came across the above visual multimedia piece around the time of a relative's passing. That period of delving into the past brought about a host of mixed memories and feelings that like the imagery in the video, consisted of flashes in my mind that would be in momentary focus and then fade. "In the Eroded, Lost" captures the silent struggle in the quest for clarity of memory, appearing as though one is trying to adjust an antenna to get better reception on an old television set.

It stressed to me the power of perspective in life and loss, particularly in navigating shared connections and stories from all different familial vantage points. The video, in my mind, seemed to speak of light and shadow, smooth roads and collisions, emotional healing and erosion, signs to guide the way, forsaken deserts of discord, and the flickering fragments of recollections meant to be salvaged. When I showed it to a loved one, they saw similar elements, but also, in two shadows meeting, the suggestion of what they felt were two hands reaching toward one another. What I find so striking about this piece is its capacity to elicit deep-seated response. What will you see? What will you feel?

Also, it bears mentioning that I did not know then that two out of the three stories in this issue's section would have a symbolic relationship to some of the imagery and the artist's (Adams') theme of "processing loss." I won't give too much away, but after reading the stories, you may be driven to rewatch.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=-Ae6VuNrvPM>

Fiction

Welcome to Our Fiction Section!

Featured Stories:

"Hard Lessons" by Michael Anthony

"Man-Eater Of The Kumaon Hills" by Terin Tashi Miller

"The Hunt" by Michael Tidemann

Hard Lessons

by Michael Anthony

A lot of people think life in the south moves slower than a snail. But sometimes, it'll snap at you fast as a bullwhip and leave a stinging welt that lingers long after the echo of the crack fades away. Cousin Florence's shock

would arrive the following day. But later that afternoon, mine would be learning I had not been Momma's first pregnancy—only the first after she married and the first to survive.

With both Momma and Cousin Florence being only children and growing up but a half-dozen miles from one another, they were more like sisters than cousins, always there for each other through everything. That was why Papa urged Momma to visit her cousin and the new baby down in Monroe, Louisiana. Despite all that happened in our lives, Papa never forgot how close Momma and her Cousin Florence were.

"I'll be fine," Papa said. "You and Katie have a good time. Tell Flo I send my regards." Papa punctuated his farewell with a mischievous wink.

After a stop at Bramley's General Store for some oranges and to top off the gas tank, Momma navigated the two lane towards the state line.

"Momma, what was Cousin Florence like when she lived in Glendora?"

"She was, and still is, my best friend. We were inseparable, especially in summer when we were together nearly every day. I could tell her anything—and, I swear there were times she knew what I was thinking even before I did. Woman is a godsend."

"What kind of things did you tell Cousin Florence? Secrets?"

Momma cut me a quick glance and I couldn't tell if it was meant to end that conversation or take measure of me for asking such an impolite question.

"Let's just say that Florence knows things about me that no one else does."

"Momma, that's not fair. You can't just hang something out there like that and not expect me to wanna know more."

"When you're old enough," she replied.

"Gonna be fourteen come January."

Momma fixed her eyes on the road and seemed to be formulating a proper response. Maybe it was the mention of my age, or the increasing presence of that boy, Biloxi, around our home? Whatever it was, Momma opened up like a rose in bloom, telling me about how she and Cousin Florence guided

each other through adolescence and dating, how they tried to steer clear of "those kinds of boys," and, how, when things did go wrong, provided each other comfort.

When I asked about "those kinds of boys," Momma pulled off the road onto a small grassy patch alongside a split rail fence, put the car in park, and faced me head on.

"Now that you had your first period, you need to be very careful around certain boys," Momma warned.

"I wouldn't do anything bad," I protested, my cheeks blushing red.

"Katie, what you think and what you do can be very different. I should know."

"Why do you say that?" I asked.

"One careless moment can cause a lifetime of grief."

"Huh?"

Momma confessed to the unanticipated consequence of her momentary dalliance with Tommy McDaniel. Her admission left me shut-mouthed flabbergasted.

"How old were you?" I asked, after finding the words that had abandoned me.

"Not but a couple years more than you are now," Momma replied.

"Does...Papa...know?"

"He does. But, it is not something we discuss and I expect you to honor the confidence."

Still disbelieving what I just heard, I muttered. "I will."

Then, she made me promise not to repeat her mistake.

Even though it had been a long day's ride from our home in Mississippi to Cousin Florence's farmhouse out on Shorty Payne Road in Monroe, my new knowledge made sleep difficult to achieve and even harder to maintain. All

those pure images I held of Momma now wore an earthy patina. Obviously, she was not the innocent girl Papa had swept off her feet with his deft dancing and mastery of the simple compliment.

Yet, at the same time, I bore a newfound respect for Olivia Willene Ciboulette, who family and friends call Livie and I call Momma. I suspect her admission about that fateful summer night with one of the McDaniel twins was harder for her to share than for me to hear. It certainly changed our relationship. While we will always be mother and daughter, we were now closer to confidants confessing past indiscretions, secret infatuations, and private satisfactions to someone we knew would hold that trust forever and unbroken.

I studied Momma's face as she stared out the bedroom window unaware I was already awake. The morning sun shimmered in her eyes and gilded her scrubbed cheek. Her hair was a soft nest of auburn that sparkled with flecks of gold when she breathed. Seeing her lying there, I wondered what that first baby might have looked like had it lived more than a few months inside her.

The bed creaked when Momma turned and we exchanged silent smiles. The crackle of sizzling bacon broke that warm stillness and the sweet aroma of maple syrup beckoned us to a languid Louisiana dawn. The sky above the tree line was soft pink and there wasn't a breeze anywhere in the entire parish. Wisps of morning fog hung in the trees like tattered bed sheets.

Cousin Florence's husband, Eldon, had already gone off to town in search of parts for his truck, leaving Momma, Florence, her daughter Aldina and me to spend the morning cleaning, washing and caring for the new baby, Chandler. While Momma and her cousin sat over a second cup of coffee, I meandered down to a small creek that ran along the back of the property. I only had to lift two rocks before finding the biggest crawfish ever. Quick too, it zipped through that tepid water and hid under another boulder.

"What about a little tour of the parish?" Cousin Florence suggested when I returned. "You drive, Livie and I'll do the guiding."

"Sounds good," Momma replied.

We headed out for State Road 165—Momma in the driver seat, Cousin Florence holding baby Chandler up front, and me in the back with little

Aldina. Cousin Florence pointed out their church, the First Baptist Congregation of Monroe. “We don’t go as much as we should,” she said with a hint of embarrassment. Then, it was on to Pierre Louizoux’s Garden Market, past Shively’s—the best catfish restaurant within a dozen miles so the sign said, the railroad depot, and similar places of moderate interest.

Just about noon, Momma announced she was hungry and would like to treat everyone for lunch. “Know any good hamburger joints, Flo?”

Her cousin set us on a zigzag course of lefts and rights that landed us at a roadside drive-in called LaVerne’s. “Can’t find a better hamburger in all of Ouachita Parish,” Cousin Florence crowed.

Momma steered the car into the gravel parking lot pockmarked with low spots where puddles had evaporated, leaving concentric rings of dried mud in their place.

“Pull up there,” Cousin Florence pointed to an immense hickory tree, “we can park in the shade. They have car hops here.”

“Great. Wanna eat out here?” Momma said as her eyes caught mine in the rearview mirror.

“Can we?”

“Sure thing.” Momma turned to her cousin, “This is on me. A little payback for the kindness of putting Katie and me up.”

“Oh, Livie, please. You’re family.”

“All the same. My treat.”

Momma ordered hamburgers, French fries, and cokes for everyone—except of course, baby Chandler. The rather plump, red-headed woman who took our order grinned and strolled across the parking lot towards the kitchen door.

She returned almost instantly with our drinks on a tray she clipped to Momma’s half-open window. “Be right back with your burgers.”

It wasn’t but another ten minutes before she brought out the food. She attached that tray to the front passenger window. Cousin Florence was

right—it was the best hamburger I had tasted. Aldina fidgeted with her food, picking at the bun like a sparrow, barely nibbling at the meat patty while I dipped those golden fries into a small paper cup of horseradish catsup. Boy, was it good.

Momma and her cousin were enjoying their food just as much as I when a rusty old pickup truck with more dents and creases than I could count pulled alongside. The front fenders were not only crumpled, but different colors, as if taken from other trucks, which likely they were. The engine knocked like a woodpecker as it shut down.

Two women sat inside the truck. The driver's white-blonde hair was pulled into a slack ponytail. A stubby cigarette dangled from her lip, billowing blue smoke out the window. A younger woman with brunette hair that hadn't seen a comb in at least a week, maybe two, sat across from her. I figured flying down the road with open windows caused her hair to explode in just about every direction. She was smoking as well.

I watched the driver snap her ring finger hard against the bent paper tube of the cigarette, scattering ashes in the dead air between her truck and our car. Though back home in Glendora we had our fair share of farming wives who know their way around a tractor or rototiller better than a good many men in town, there was something curiously crude about these two.

When they spoke, which they did non-stop in that backwoods Louisiana drawl, their words sounded more like those heard at The Shack where my pal Biloxi's dad played coronet. Can't say I heard any cursing or the like, but they did carry on. The carhop neared the truck and asked what they would be having.

"Coupla burgers, rare, onion rings, extra ketchup, and don't forget the salt!" the driver barked.

"Something to drink with that?"

"Nah," the woman laughed, holding up a half-empty bottle of beer. Then, she deliberately blew smoke towards the waitress who spun on the heels of her white shoes and headed for the restaurant.

Cousin Florence turned to Momma and rolled her eyes, commenting silently on the demeanor of the two beside us.

“You know them?” Momma whispered, barely moving her lips.

“Better said I know *of* them,” Cousin Florence replied under her breath.

Then Momma responded with that very small but meaningful word, “Oh.” More was packed in that one syllable than if Momma had recited the entire Declaration of Independence. She echoed Cousin Florence’s disdain.

“Let’s just say you won’t run into them at worship services,” Cousin Florence whispered to Momma who nodded and then sipped her drink.

Over the next several minutes, I learned from very hushed conversation the two were sisters—Majeane and Muriel Broussard. Folks in this end of the parish did not hold them in very high regard, and on any given evening, there could be found a number of gentlemen callers at their run-down place out on White’s Ferry Road just south of the Tupawek Bayou.

There I was, trying to absorb two distinct conversations: a loud raucous one in the pickup next to us and the hushed one inside our car. Both were entertaining and informative. With words flowing from one to the other and then echoing back, it sounded like overlapping radio stations on a muggy August night. It was difficult to follow one, let alone both.

“Honey,” the beer-drinking blonde Majeane bellowed, “he’s a natural. Ain’t nothing going to hold him back.”

Muriel snorted her reply, “He don’t look all that strong, but he surely does last.”

“Them skinny farm boys sure know how to plow deep, huh?” Majeane cackled at her own crude remark, as did her sister Muriel. They stopped only long enough to swig on their bottles and drag the back of their hands across their mouths.

“Florence,” Momma said, trying to steer the conversation in another direction, “I can’t wait for you to visit us in Glendora. You will come and bring the children as well.” Momma left no room for negotiation.

“Maybe after we harvest the bean crop,” Cousin Florence said. “Then we can all get away.”

Another bottle of beer popped open inside the pickup. “Did he really say that?” Majeau shouted to her sister.

“Yep,” Muriel guffawed. “Soon as he can get the wife to take the kids to visit family up in Bastrop, he’ll spend the whole week.”

“Guess I won’t be seeing much of you two when that happens,” Majeau joked.

“Not if I’m lucky you won’t,” Muriel replied before swilling another mouthful of beer.

“Do you believe that?” Momma remarked quietly to no one in particular.

“Coming from them, yes,” Cousin Florence said under her breath.

Momma leaned over to her cousin and whispered so low even I could barely hear her, “What kind of man would find either of them attractive?”

“A lonely one,” Cousin Florence giggled.

“Maybe a lonely blind one,” Momma added before she and Cousin Florence broke into laughter, which they tried to muffle so as to not draw attention from the pickup.

Clearly involved in their own chatter, the sisters didn’t hear a word from our car. In a momentary pause between Momma and Cousin Florence’s exchanges, I heard Muriel brag, “Eldon said if it weren’t for that new baby boy o’ his, he’d be gone.”

The words took my breath away. My eyes darted from Cousin Florence to Momma and then back to Cousin Florence. I prayed they hadn’t heard it. But, in my heart I knew it was hopeless because the echo of her daddy’s name caused little Aldina to freeze with a French fry midway to her mouth.

Cousin Florence stiffened in her seat as though hit by a washtub of ice water. So did Momma. A hurtful laughter escaped the pickup truck window. Our car was now a vacuum in which no one moved—no one spoke—and, no one so much as breathed. Even baby Chandler seemed to stop fussing. I wanted to cry—for Cousin Florence, for Momma, for Aldina.

“Katie?” Momma asked hurriedly. “You finished?”

“Yes Momma,” I lied, knowing she was less interested in the truth than easing her cousin’s pain.

“Okay, let’s go.” There was an urgency in her shaky voice, which faded as Momma gunned the engine trying to drown out any other cruel words flying from that pickup. Two sharp taps on the horn signaled we were ready to leave. In what seemed like the slowest possible walk, that waitress sashayed over and asked if there would be anything else to which Momma replied, “No, may I have the check please?”

“Sure, here you go. I’ll come back for it after I clear these trays,” she smiled, unaware of the storm roiling inside our car.

“No, please. Here. Keep the change. Thank you,” Momma forced out as she transferred the tray from Cousin Florence’s side to the waitress. “We must be leaving!”

The carhop looked at the extra money Momma had put on the tray and smiled. “Thank You! Come back again, real soon.” She stood there balancing those two trays with the precision of a circus juggler.

Momma checked the mirror. “Ready?”

Cousin Florence’s shoulders quaked. Momma put the Oldsmobile in drive and spun those tires across the gravel. The back end of the car swung wide as it shot from the parking lot onto the roadway. Stones arced into the air, landing some twenty feet away.

“Down 165, right?” Momma confirmed with her cousin who could only nod. The wind coming through the windows overtook almost all sound, but I could faintly pick up sniffing coming from up front. Couldn’t tell whether it was Momma, Cousin Florence or both. Each looked distressed. The speeding car was now a mausoleum, cold despite the Louisiana heat and somber despite the presence of children, two women who normally laughed when together, and me.

I don’t know how long it took to get back to Cousin Florence’s place because I was busy trying to comprehend how instantly life had changed for her, just like it had for me the previous day. One moment the sun is shining in a cloudless sky—and the next, you’re standing smack in the middle of a hellacious tornado, trying to hang on while the entire world spins out of control. Cousin Florence’s humiliation was so real it seemed as though it

was occupying a seat in our car. I saw how awful Momma felt for someone who was like a sister to her and wondered what this horrible twister would leave in its wake after upending Cousin Florence's life.

Back at the Roubineaux farmhouse, Momma asked me to stay with Aldina while she helped Cousin Florence with baby Chandler. I surmised they would be discussing the Broussard sisters' shocking disclosure so I took Aldina's hand and led her outside onto the porch where we found two rockers and proceeded to sway to and fro, me pushing hers and mine.

Cousin Florence's muffled sobs eclipsed the distant *kee-kee-kee* of a marsh hawk calling its mate. Aldina looked at me and I sensed she too heard her momma's heartbreak but didn't know how to fix it. She and I went down to the stream where the crawdaddies hid and concentrated on catching some without getting our fingers nipped. After a fair amount of splashing and giggling, we ambled back to the house where Momma stood on the top step, our suitcase next to her.

"Katie, Cousin Florence isn't feeling well. We're going to be leaving sooner than planned."

"When, Momma?"

"Now."

I stepped towards Momma. Her eyes were red, her face flushed. "Will she be all right?" I asked.

Momma nodded, stroked my hair, curling her hand under my chin. Momma embraced Aldina and me, then kissed the top of my head before going inside that white clapboard house now shrouded in sadness.

Cousin Florence tried her best, giving Momma and me hugs and kisses on the cheek. "Thank you both for coming. I'm so sorry you won't be staying longer. Truly sorry."

"Me too," Momma whispered in her cousin's ear.

"I'm sorry Katie," Cousin Florence sighed, her voice cracking midway, "I wanted you to have such a good time here."

"I did. I really did. Thank you," I smiled through tears.

“Come on Katie. Cousin Florence needs to rest up a bit.”

As I was placing the suitcase in the trunk of our car, I saw Momma in the doorway with her cousin. “You’re not going to do anything crazy with that shotgun are you?” she asked.

Cousin Florence shook her head and embraced Momma one more time. “Don’t worry Livie, just gonna make my point,” she said with a defiant edge to her voice.

I prayed she was telling the truth.

In minutes, we were at the far end of Shorty Payne Road, ready to head north on Highway 165. Before long we crossed into Arkansas and eventually saw the sign for Mississippi. I was sad that we had left on such a sour note. But I was glad we were nearing our home where a loving father and a decent husband awaited us. I knew I would give Papa the biggest hug when we got there. I guessed Momma would too.

“I’m sorry Katie,” Momma said, without taking her tear-rimmed eyes off the road.

“Wasn’t your fault, Momma,” I replied, trying to comfort her like she had done for me a hundred times over.

“Makes me so...so angry.” If Momma gripped that steering wheel any tighter, I swore she would have bent it in half.

“What’s making you angry, Momma? Cousin Florence taking ill?” I knew full well the true reason her cousin crashed harder than a kite losing its wind, but I went along with it.

“Katie,” Momma said while resting her hand on my knee, “what happened back there shouldn’t happen to anyone, especially someone as trusting as Flo. From the day that man came through Glendora on furlough from the Army, I felt something was shifty about him. But good ole’ trustin’ Flo joked I was just jealous ‘cause he was more interested in her than me. Well, I wasn’t. And, I’m sorry you had to witness it. As a favor to me, don’t mention this to anyone. Promise?”

“Yes, Momma.”

“I’ll tell your Pa,” she volunteered.

“What’s going to happen now?” I asked. “To Cousin Florence I mean.”

“Don’t really know, but it isn’t going to be pleasant. Lord, those poor babies.”

Still groggy from his nap, Papa was surprised to see us home so soon. Later that evening, I stood in the hallway where I overheard Momma telling him the whole story. Papa’s sole reply was, “Livie, they got to straighten this out for themselves, but if Flo needs a place to stay or anything, we’ll help her best we can.”

“Thank you Cy, thank you.” Then, there were no more words, only the faint sounds of soft kisses.

Three months after that dramatic afternoon out along the banks of Bayou de Saird, Cousin Florence and her children spent several days with us in Glendora. I learned that Eldon moved out the very same night Cousin Florence confronted him with that shotgun nestled in the crook of her arm. He went to live with Muriel Broussard.

While staying with us, Cousin Florence and Momma would huddle around the kitchen table, sipping cup after cup of black coffee and talking late into the night—the only illumination coming from the bare light bulb above the sink. One night, when the rain kept me awake, I heard whispering coming from the dimly lit kitchen. I tiptoed past the stairs and listened from the shadows.

“Katie’s fine,” Momma told her cousin. “Girl’s more resilient than I thought.” After a pause, Momma added, “She knows.”

“About Eldon and the Broussards?” Cousin Florence asked.

“That—and the thing with Tommy McDaniel.”

“Oh, Lord,” Cousin Florence gasped. “How’d she take it?”

“Better than expected,” Momma said with what sounded like a bit of pride.

“Well, she is a Meacham and they grow strong women.”

“Yes we are,” Momma replied. “So, what are you going to do now?”

“Gotta sell the farm ‘cause the bank don’t want to hear ‘bout my troubles. They only want their mortgage money and I’m already far behind. ”

“Then what?” Mom pressed.

“I got a letter from Cousin TJ in Savannah. Aunt Rosetta’s failin’ and he can’t afford to hire help while he runs the repair shop. No money to put her in a home either. Was thinkin’ I might head over. Help TJ and get a new start for me and the kids.”

“You always knew how to make the best of a basket of broken eggs,” Momma said, trying to humor her cousin.

“Livie, I got enough to make omelets for the whole parish and still have leftovers.”

The bank eventually took the farm and Cousin Florence did move to Georgia.

Momma wrote to her cousin every Sunday after church. And just about every Friday, there was a letter in our mailbox postmarked, *Savannah, GA*. She wrote the city was like paradise compared to Monroe, saying, *I love the genteel atmosphere and the children are finally sleeping better*. With each new letter, Cousin Florence sounded stronger and, as Momma said, "Like her old self again."

On her next visit to Glendora, Cousin Florence told us Eldon had been killed in an accident. “Seems he was in a pickup truck with Majejan when it lost a front wheel at the railroad crossing. ‘Fore they could get out of the way, one of them ALM freight trains ran ‘em down. Dragged ‘em a good half mile ‘fore it could stop.”

“Majejan?” Momma asked, “I thought he took up with the other one—Muriel.”

“He did,” Cousin Florence continued, “but she caught him in bed with Majejan. Talk is that Muriel was so crazy jealous she rigged the truck. From what I heard, she ain’t been seen since. In spite of all the pain that man caused me and his children, I never once wished him dead. Poor fool made his children fatherless. God rest his troubled soul.”

Momma reached across the table and eased her hand over Cousin Florence's.

Some hard lessons were learned during those tumultuous several months that pulled at us and tore open truths of our lives like the wicked winds of a tornado. Having weathered the storm, we all became closer, wiser, and stronger. Those humid days down in Louisiana helped to influence the woman I'd become, and for Cousin Florence, they unexpectedly forced her to realize the self-reliant woman she truly was.

Bio: Michael Anthony is a writer and artist living in New Jersey. He graduated Fairleigh Dickinson University and has published fiction, poetry, and illustrations in multiple literary venues including *L'Éphémère Review*, *Second Hand Stories* podcast and *Route 7 Review*. The American Labor Museum exhibited Michael's photojournalism essay on the waning of Paterson New Jersey's textile industry.



"Pearblossom Highway" by Ren Adams; <http://www.renadamart.com/>

Man-Eater Of The Kumaon Hills

by Terin Tashi Miller

"No I didn't," Tim Osborne said, laughing, as he always did when he was embarrassed, at the girl's servant who had just yelled at him in front of everyone—especially the girl—for "wetting his bed."

"I was sweating," Tim said. "I sweat a lot last night."

It was true, he had sweat a lot last night. He had sweat a lot every night since arriving at the compound of two-person cabins far out in the Kumaon Hills, in the heart of the jungle where Jim Corbett used to hunt man-eating tigers, near the national park that now bore Corbett's name and was a preserve for protecting the rare white tigers that had always lived there.

His father had brought the family to the compound for a month-long vacation from New Delhi. His father wanted to get away to get some work done. But it was the rainy season, which was why the cabins were available, and the jungle had turned so hot and humid that mold grew on Tim's father's notebooks.

Still, it was an adventure for Tim to be in the jungle. His father taught him to spot the leeches that looked like thick black hairs stretching on the path between the cabins, seeking blood. He had taught him how to burn them off the walls of the cabins with the waxed-wood, sulfur-tipped Kisan log matches, and how to get them off skin without pulling them, by dropping salt on them and dissolving them, to prevent the open wounds pulling them left behind and exposing the wound to infection and festering in the hot, humid air. His father had taught him even a scratch in that jungle could be deadly.

It was no wonder Tim had soaked the bed with his sweat. He'd been up much of the night with his brother in the cabin they shared away from their parents, and away from their parents' friends who'd brought the aya, the babysitter for their youngest child and their youngest child's older sister. The sister, the girl, was Tim's age, and wore her hair constantly in tight braids on either side of her head and wore salwar kameez with the white scarf starched and folded in front like a school girl, which was what she was. Still, she was sympathetic, and Tim found her attractive. At 13, Tim was starting to find a lot of girls his age attractive. In his mind, the events of the prior evening were to blame for the damp sheets and the derailment of his intention to appear as though he'd braved the jungle environment in front of the girl.

The night had started typically, with yet another curry of rice and lentil dhal served by the friends' cook. It was a few days after the friends and their children and aya had arrived. They had arrived from a trip to Vienna, and brought with them tins of sausages, pates and mustards, which Tim and his brother had eaten as if rescued from a shipwreck after having had to survive

on the friends' cook's repertoire of lentil dhal and basmati rice, and basmati rice and lamb curry. The cook, and Tim's father's driver, had driven with the family to the cabins from New Delhi.

That night, in the cabin with his brother, lit by the camp lantern that hissed after his father pumped it and lit it, and smelled of burning kerosene, Tim had let his brother be a hero. First, his older brother spotted a large, gray-and-black furry mop on top of one of the overhead beams above the boys' twin charpai, or woven-rope Indian beds.

"Is that a tarantula?" Tim's brother asked.

"Oh, my God! I think so," Tim answered.

His brother got a large piece of wood like a 2-by-4 and smacked at the mop until it came down with a "Plop" onto the floor at the foot of his brother's charpai. Tim had held his sheet over his head in case the tarantula had lost its footing and fallen onto him the way the "friendly freddies," the green gecko lizards, often lost their footing in pursuit of mosquitoes and fell unceremoniously onto floors and beds.

After catching the dead tarantula on the wood and then tossing it out the cabin's front door into the night and the jungle, Tim's brother was proud and Tim was too. Then, as Tim relaxed and pulled the sheet away from his head, preparing to fall asleep, his brother asked: "What does a scorpion look like?"

Tim, assuming his brother was up to his usual disturbing pranks, said, "Kind of like a tiny lobster, I guess."

"With claws like a lobster? Pinchers?"

"I think so. Why?"

"Because I think that's one crawling up your bedpost at the foot of your bed."

Tim couldn't help leaning forward to look in the direction his brother indicated. He had not expected to really see one.

“Oh, my God!” he screamed, afraid this time to pull the covers up and lose sight of the scorpion. His brother smacked at it at the foot of the charpai until it was still and flat on the floor at the foot of his bed.

He managed to sleep that night, but when he awoke all his sheets—the sheet over the thin cotton mattress and the sheet he held over himself—were soaked through.

It wasn't until 30 years later, after his brother had passed away, Tim realized he had wet the bed, and why. It was then he realized why he'd been angry, violent, bent on revenge, short-fused, risk-taking, had trouble sleeping deeply and was nearly uncontrollable as a teenager.

Before the restless night at the jungle cabin, he had spent the last four months awake every night during air raids, gone to school with sandbags around the entrances, and teachers insisting the children must attend class to show the enemy they could not be bent to its will.

He had seen what happened to the dirt square formed by the stalls of shops around it, where he and Indian friends used to steal candy, popcorn and sodas from the cart of sodas in the square, cutting across the square to hide in a friend's apartment. One day, the square was cut with a zig-zag trench, for public use during air raids.

He had seen fighter jets in dogfights over the roof of his house in daring daylight raids. And he had snuck out to visit the troops and batteries on the outskirts of the city, India's capital, with friends—one of whom did not come back with him.

His father had thought the jungle would be a good place to take his sons to forget about the war. When he spoke of it once to his father, his father said: “You can't possibly remember that! You were just a young kid!”

But Tim knew his father remembered much about his own childhood, especially from the age he'd been when his father left him. His father had been a bastard from the age of 10, and had been only nine years older—six years older than Tim was at the cabin in the jungle—when he shipped out to the Atlantic Ocean to hunt for U-Boats in World War II.

And Tim remembered how his father had told him about, and taken him to, the jungle preserve named after Jim Corbett. His father knew, from his own

experience, there are few better places to overcome fears than in a place where you cannot escape them, where you can corner them and realize you are stronger than them. Corbett fought to preserve the tigers he only hunted to protect villagers. Tim's father brought his family to the jungle to know the man-eater was gone. The war was over. And they had all survived.

Bio: Terin Tashi Miller spent many of his formative years in India, the child of anthropologist parents. Since then, he has lived and worked in a variety of countries in Europe and Asia. His writing has appeared in guide books, international magazines including *Time* and *Geografica Revista*, and newspapers including *The Wall Street Journal*, *The Dallas Morning News* and *The Los Angeles Times*. He began his writing career as a part-time reporter for *Time* magazine, then worked for The Associated Press in India and North Dakota and AP-Dow Jones News Services in Spain and New York, and as a reporter for *The Wall Street Journal*, *Fort Worth Star-Telegram*, *The Milwaukee Sentinel*, *Amarillo Daily News* and the Hilton Head Island Packet.

He is the author of four novels: *The Other Country*, *Down the Low Road*, *Kashi* and *Sympathy for the Devil*, and numerous short stories, the first of which to be published in the 21st century was "Worlds Apart," in *The Write Place at the Write Time*. Born in St. Louis, Mo., and raised in Madison, Wis. and several provinces in India, he currently lives in New Jersey.

The Hunt

by Michael Tidemann

"Four years ago today." The ancient grandfather clock ticked sonorously over Emily's fading words. Now it was Norman's turn to pick up the same conversation they had had three years already on this date—how their daughter Marie had died in an unexpected accident on an icy South Dakota road. Her subcompact had flown through a stop sign and flipped sixteen times. A passing farmer found the car and her in a frozen field, the last moments of life draining out of her as she whispered, "Daddy...no." That's what the farmer told the deputy who was there even before the ambulance—both too late.

"I wonder what Marie meant by that... 'Daddy...no.'" Emily's glassy eyes glassed Norman. "Her last words were to you. How she must have loved you..." A momentary shadow crossed her face.

Norman turned his coffee cup in his hand. "I don't think she suffered...for

very long, anyway,” was the only solace he could offer.

“She was thirty-one.” Emily took a breath so deep it seemed a miracle she could even hold it, then let it out slowly as though it were the last breath she would ever take. “Thank God we have three other children.”

Oh yes. Michael, Miranda, and Matthew. Norman had almost forgotten about them. And how could he? They were wonderful, remarkable young people. Yet the loss of Marie was a huge crater in his heart—a hole he would never fill. She had most definitely been his favorite—even though a parent isn’t supposed to have a favorite. But she was—still.

“Oh, I forgot to mention. Pastor Yackle called yesterday and asked if you could fill in for him this Sunday.”

“That’s pretty short notice.”

“This is only Tuesday. So it’s five days from now. You’ve done it on shorter notice. Besides, he said he already has his sermon written. The rest you’ve done hundreds of times before.”

Hundreds of times. From when he had preached his first sermon as a student pastor in Wisconsin, all the way until he gave his last sermon in a quaint rural church in South Dakota forty years later.

“So do you think you’ll do it for him?”

“I’d rather not.”

“Why? You always have before.”

“I’d rather not.”

“You’d better call him then. I think he was expecting you to. After all, you’ve been willing to every time he’s asked before.”

“Could you call him for me?”

Emily’s jaw shifted just a little at his request. “I *suppose*.”

Norman's gaze slipped toward the west picture window of their A-frame. Huge snowflakes sifted slowly, enemy paratroopers invading his heart. Four years. Four years today. "Any idea what we'll have for dinner tonight?"

Emily studied him as though he were an intricate puzzle she had been trying to solve for years. "I was thinking of going to town and getting a pot roast. There isn't much else in the refrigerator."

"What about the freezer?"

"You helped me clean that out last week, remember? We threw most of it out."

"The roads might be getting pretty bad right now. The county plow doesn't come by until late afternoon, you know."

"I know..." Emily peered out at the same snowflakes Norman was gazing at. "I spose I could heat up some soup."

"I heard a rooster in the grove when I was out shoveling the walk this morning."

"Pheasant would be nice. I could make some wild rice and peas. There's a little of that cheesecake left too."

"Sounds delicious. Well, I'll grab my 20-gauge and see if I can't hunt us up some dinner."

Norman and Emily lived on forty acres of western Wisconsin forest sliced by Brule Creek, a meandering stream passing out of the St. Croix hills to the west and slipping past another range of hills on the south side of their property. With a road to the north, national forest surrounded them on three sides, giving them all the privacy they could want.

Not long after Marie had died, they bought the land and started sketching out plans for their dream home, something they'd been planning for twenty years. Over the course of those long years, things never seemed to work out. Since a minister was always subject to being on call—and often the vicissitudes of a fickle parish—they had never lived in one place long

enough to find the acreage they wanted. Then, just after Norman retired, they started looking for a place to build in earnest. That was about the time Marie was killed in the accident—drugs or alcohol and probably both were likely involved, the deputy sheriff told them.

They had had trouble with Marie ever since she started high school—skipping classes, smoking, drinking. And then it was the marijuana and staying out all night with boys. When Emily found a bottle with over forty blotters of LSD in it, they laid down the law. Stop the smoking and drinking and drugs or move out.

So Marie moved out.

"I just can't understand it," Emily said afterward. "She was always such a good girl. And then when she was eleven or twelve..."

"I know," Norman replied. "I know..."

Now he was walking up a deer trail along Brule Creek, the same sort of crystalline powder that made perfect skiing—cross-country or downhill. It was so fluffy that he didn't even feel the cold as he trudged through it. A geige sent a rooster up not ten feet in front of him, fluttering in an arc then soaring, a perfect target. Norman just then remembered the 20 gauge in his hands. He'd had a good eight or ten seconds to take the shot, and now it was too late. What was wrong with him? The rooster was now somewhere along Brule Creek, maybe a couple hundred yards away. He chambered in a shell and continued up the trail.

It was about his third parish the first time it happened. Emily was at choir practice and he was left with making supper and giving the children their baths and scooting them off to bed. Marie was taking an awful long time so he opened the bathroom door and there she stood in the bathtub, shampooing her hair, pink rear to him. Norman stood aghast as he stared at his eight-year-old daughter and thought how perfect she was—long, lean legs flowing to her dimpled derriere.

The rooster lifted, even slower than last time, stiffened by the hardening cold. The wind was picking up and the snow was getting heavier, turning

from fluff to icy pellets that felt like bullets. He lifted his shotgun and followed the rooster as it reached the top of the arc of his flight, then soared to the other side of the Brule.

He did his fatherly duties, giving the kids their baths every Thursday night. By the time Marie turned ten she would call to him through the bathroom door and he went willingly, following her sweet voice slipping from girlhood on one side of the door to young womanhood on the other. Within a year, things between them had moved much further.

Marie's attitude toward her mother started to change. Whenever her mother asked her to do something, Marie would either forget or totally ignore her until Emily, exasperated, would walk up to her and uncharacteristically shout to make her pay attention. Marie would run to her father and pile in his lap as he sat in his favorite recliner, watching a football game or some documentary. "Daddy, don't let her make me do it," Marie would say, nuzzling her lips up against his neck as though Emily were just some old hag interfering in their life together. And every time Norman would take Marie's side, even to the point where Emily would grab her car keys and storm off for hours while Marie sat in her father's lap until she drifted off to sleep and he carried her to bed.

One Thursday night just before Marie's fourteenth birthday—about the time she started noticing boys—Norman tried the bathroom door and it was locked. "Marie? Do you want me to come in?" he asked once the other kids were out of earshot.

"No," she said firmly.

Marie was a real handful after that. She started dating boys—none the sort of which either Norman or Emily approved. She started smoking cigarettes and drinking and doing drugs. And then her parents gave her their ultimatum, a bluff she easily called. She barely made it through one year of college then drifted off to California and oblivion.

A shell of her former self, when she turned 31 she returned to South Dakota. She was in and out of treatment three times in rapid succession before the accident. The sheriff's deputy said Marie had blown through the stop sign going at least eighty—maybe a hundred. Her car had flipped

sixteen times. No skid marks. The driver's door had popped open and Marie was thrown from her car that landed on her—probably the second flip—and ended up in a tree line a hundred and ninety feet away, a dent the size and shape of Marie's skull on the right front corner of the roof. When Norman asked if she had died right away the coroner said it was more likely she had lain there quite some time before she froze to death since the blood coating her body had formed a brittle, bright red sheen by the time she was found.

Early in his ministry, while he was still in Wisconsin, Emil Jensen came to him, beside himself.

"The farm has been in my family for five generations. And now I'm about to lose it."

Norman patted Emil's shoulder. "It can't be that bad, can it? There must be some way you can make the payment."

Emil wrung his seed cap in his hands. "I have no money. No crop. And my annual payment was due last week." When Emily told Norman how much the payment was, all Norman could do was shake his head.

"Well you have a lot of skills as a farmer. You should be able to find work in town."

"You don't understand. To a farmer, his land is his life. Take his land away, and he might just as well be dead. I've been driving around with my shotgun in my trunk for several weeks now. Maybe I'd better just go ahead and do it."

"And burn in Hell forever?" Norman thundered. "Don't you know suicide is the unforgivable sin? What would your family think? Do you want to leave them with that burden?"

Emil's tears ran in creeks down his sun-weathered face. "I don't know what else to do."

"The farm is merely something material and will eventually no longer exist. Your soul is eternal. Do you want to spend eternity in Hell?"

Emil's jaw shuddered in sobs. "No."

"Save your soul and let the farm go. Find a good job in town and buy a nice house and take care of your family." Norman smiled. "And start coming to church every Sunday."

"All right." Emil grimaced through his tears. "So what do I do with my shotgun?"

"Give it to me for safekeeping. I'll put it under lock and key and you needn't worry about it."

"Okay. Okay," Emil repeated, looking off through the rectory window as though he could see his farm that would soon no longer be his.

So Emil gave him the shotgun. After a while, when Emil had found a job as a welder and bought a comfortable home in town, Norman asked Emil if he wanted his 20 gauge back. Emil said no, it would only remind him of his grief. The shotgun was a small payment for Norman's saving his life.

"What a terrible accident," Emily had said to Norman after he'd spoken the last words over his daughter's graveside service.

Yes, *accident*, Norman told himself and continued to tell himself even as the rooster fluttered before him, a perfect shot, rising to the apex of flight, then hanging there, still, then drifting slowly to reed-flanked Brule Creek fifty yards away.

Emily was searching for spices when the shotgun popped not far away. Her arm paused in mid-reach toward the shelves at the sound. There was a familiar disconcerting feeling spreading over her. It was something like the feeling she had before her daughter's accident four years ago. Something like the feelings she would get on Thursday nights so many years ago returning home when the other children were asleep, apparently already having been tucked in for some time, the twin bed next to Miranda's in the girls' bedroom still unoccupied with its occupant's nightgown lain neatly on the bed, waiting, as Marie was only just getting out of the bath. Something

like those feelings, and yet, distinctly different. It wasn't what she'd felt for her daughter. No.

She thought about the devoted wife she'd been through everything based on the assumption about what kind of man he was—the version he was for many, was the version she'd accepted for herself. Acceptance, even on the nights she left when sided against to drive nowhere with no place for her rage to go. Suddenly, she snapped back to the moment and retreated from the shelves without the spices. She left the ingredients scattered across the counter and went to the fridge. In the space of a moment, without a fully formed reason in her mind, the domestic occupations of being his cook and maid had become ridiculous to her. Armed with a fork, she went for the last of the cheesecake in the fridge. She'd planned on splitting the thing, giving him the larger of the halves. Sitting back to relish it in its entirety, it was somehow sweeter in the long silence that followed as the snow fell outside and no boot marred its pristine surface.

Bio: Michael Tidemann is an adjunct college English instructor in Estherville, IA. His nonfiction has appeared in *Overdrive*, *The San Diego Union-Tribune*, and *Writer's Journal*. His fiction has appeared in *Black Hills Monthly Magazine*, *The Longneck*, *Struggle*, and *The Write Place at the Write Time*.

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