

CHIRON RETURN

by

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ABSTRACT OF THE THESIS

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In astrology, the planet Chiron represents the seemingly incurable wound. In the general sense, Chiron represents nothing less than the grand wound of human existence, of incarnate being itself. In a more specific sense, Chiron represents one's own particular and persistent suffering. In other words, the chronic vulnerabilities shaped by one's own unique biography, especially as connected to the mother, or more precisely, as connected to a profound wounding related to the loss of the mother.

Chiron has a fifty year orbit, meaning that on one's fiftieth birthday Chiron returns to the place in the sky it occupied at the time of one's birth. For most, the Chiron return will be a once in a lifetime event. The Chiron return is thus the perfect opportunity to revisit the origins of the seemingly incurable wound as related to the loss of the mother.

Chiron Return is a memoir organized around the rape and murder of a mother. The Chiron Return of the daughter, as she approaches her fiftieth birthday, prompts a return to the scene of the crime, both metaphorical and literal, as she seeks to understand more fully the circumstances surrounding the death of her mother.

A Rainy Night
November 1991
Seattle, Washington

Rain – soft and insistent – seeps through the cracked windows of the apartment, forming a layer of condensation at once opaque and luminous against the backdrop of a darkening sky. Stars have yet to appear – or maybe they have, and I just cannot see them.

I'm sitting at the table in the dining room, studying for an anatomy and physiology test when the phone rings. Nils is in the kitchen preparing dinner, a vegetable stir-fry. Neither of us wants to go into the living room to answer the phone, but it won't stop ringing. *It's probably my mom*, I think. She's been so lonely lately.

A few months ago, she moved to The Dalles – a two hour drive from Salem where she had been living, along with most of our family. I know she misses the family – her sons, her mom and dad, her sister, her nephews. I know on her day off, she drives home – to her mom and dad's house where her mom cooks her a breakfast of eggs, potatoes, bacon and toast, as if she were a teenager shuffling into the kitchen at noon on a Saturday, still in her pajamas.

Even though I'm sure it's my mom calling to ease her loneliness, I don't want to answer the phone – don't want to interrupt my concentration. And so Nils answers.

Nils: *Hello, this is Nils.*

Oh My God.

Me: *What? What is it? What's happened?*

I get up and go sit next to Nils on the oversized chair covered in a purple paisley-print cloth. I try to make eye contact with him, but his eyes keep darting back and forth scanning the center of the room, looking at nothing. *It's my cousin, I think. He's committed suicide.*

When Josh was five, his dad died in a car accident. It was early morning on the winding roads of the Van Duzer Forest Corridor, a scenic twelve mile drive through the Pacific Coast Mountain Range. His dad was driving the family to Newport for a long weekend at the Oregon coast when the drunk driver of an oncoming car crossed over the dividing line. Josh's dad tried to swerve out of the way but the oncoming car careened into the driver's side, killing Josh's dad upon impact. Josh and his mom walked away with minor cuts and bruises.

When Josh was ten, his mom died in a car accident. On the five year anniversary of her husband's death, she decided to drive herself and Josh to California – to escape a bottomless grief made worse by a climate of persistent rain and overcast skies. She had been packing and crying all day. It was dark when she finally backed the two-door sedan out of the driveway and started driving due south.

Four hours into the drive, she fell asleep and swerved off the road. The car broke through the guard rail, tumbling down the hillside landing upright on all four wheels. Josh, who

had been buckled-in, remained in his seat. His mom, who had not, was thrown from the car and died upon impact. Josh climbed out the broken window. Not far from the car, he found his mom lying dead in the dirt, blood running down her face. He climbed up the hillside, stood in the dark on the side of the road and waited for the lights of a car to shine upon him.

Back in Salem, Josh moved in with an aunt and uncle and their firstborn, newborn son. Displaced, traumatized and emotionally shut-down from the moment he arrived on their doorstep, Josh lived for years in a withdrawn state of unresolved grief and anger. As he grew into adolescence, I became fearful he would take his own life. On this rainy night in November, I'm sure it's my uncle calling to tell me my cousin has committed suicide.

Nils turns toward me. His face white and slack. He hands me the phone.

It's your uncle.

It is my uncle.
He's called to tell me my mother has been murdered.

I hand the phone back to Nils. He places it on the table next to the oversized chair. Outside the rain continues to fall, a thousand tiny droplets of water slowly descending down the window panes rendered black by a moonless night.

Silence

May 2010

Johannesburg, South Africa

People Opposing Women Abuse set up an experiment at an apartment complex in Johannesburg.

It's dark outside. And quiet. The air balmy, low sixties, warm enough for open windows.

It's a weeknight, well past the dinner hour and folks have settled in for the evening.

Inside one of the apartments, a man begins playing a drum set. Bass drum, cymbals, snare – amplified and echoing throughout the complex. Soon after the drumming begins, a neighbor knocks on the door. He's come to complain about the noise. He's wearing a white t-shirt and carrying a piece of paper. After a cursory hello, he hands the drummer the piece of paper.

On the paper, the neighbor has written:

The neighbors and residents across the wall are complaining about the drumming noise.

The drummer apologizes.

The neighbor says:

*Ja, but, you know. You're living in a community here.
You can't be doing this in the middle of a complex.*

The neighbor leaves. The drumming resumes. Shortly thereafter, two different t-shirt clad neighbors knock on the door.

They say:

*It's such a noise. It's really...
We can hear every single beat.*

The drummer apologizes.

Same apartment.
Different night.
Air still balmy.
Windows still open.

An audio recording of a staged domestic dispute plays from a laptop computer. Amplified through studio speakers, the sound of the dispute ricochets throughout the complex.

Although it's hard to decipher exactly what's being said, it's clear that a man is yelling at a woman. His voice loud and mean. It's also clear a woman is being beaten. Her voice screaming in pain. Screaming for him to stop. This night, however, no one comes to the door to complain about the noise.

Outside the door, a cat appears, flattens its ears in fear and scurries by.

The dispute escalates. Sounds of broken glass, objects being thrown, a woman being beaten. Still, no one comes to the door. The beating continues. Still, no one comes to the door.

The beating stops.
Outside, the air balmy.
The night, still and quiet.

The Spectacular Columbia River Gorge

My mother was killed while living in The Dalles, a small town nestled along the spectacular Columbia River Gorge, an eighty mile-long river canyon that winds through the Cascade Mountains along the Oregon/Washington border. The Gorge is renowned for its abundance of waterfalls, some over six hundred feet tall, and for the winds that whip through its corridors creating turbulent conditions perfect for windsurfing on white-tipped waters whose blue-green depth plunges downward up to four thousand feet. To me, however, the Gorge is known as the place of my mother's murder.

Chiron

The seventh circle of Dante's *Inferno* contains three rings – all of which house the violent. Within the inner ring reside blasphemers, sodomites and usurers. The middle ring, suicides and spendthrifts. The outer ring, reserved for those who have committed acts of violence against persons and property.

In this outer ring, the violators – murderers and tyrants – are submerged in a river of boiling blood and white-hot fire; each sinner submerged to a level commensurate with their sins –

Attila the Hun and Alexandra the Great both immersed up to their eyebrows.

And my mother's murderer?
How submerged is he?
Does boiling blood swirl around his knees?
His waist?
His chest?

The centaurs, commanded by Chiron, patrol the river, shooting arrows into anyone who tries to escape. My mother's murderer tries to escape by floating downstream until he thinks he is out of sight – not knowing Chiron has been trotting in tandem along the river bank, bow and arrow poised.

For my mother's murderer,
There is no escape.
Once submerged in boiling blood,
Death becomes his only means of relief.

No One

November 1991

The Dalles, Oregon

The worst isn't that my mother is dead.
Everybody dies.

The worst isn't that my mother was raped.
Every two minutes, somewhere in the U.S., a woman is raped.

The worst isn't even that my mother was murdered.
In 1991, over 25,000 people in the U.S. were murdered.

The worst is that she fought and struggled and cried for help and no one came to her
rescue.
No one.

Lucky
 May 1981
 Syracuse, New York

Spring – the season of hope. Of warm, gentle sunshine and happiness. But for Alice Sebold, it is the season of rape. The season where hell forces its way through soft, fertile earth, nearly destroying hope in the process.

Alice, eighteen, is raped in Syracuse, in a park near Syracuse University, in a tunnel once used as an entry to an amphitheater, now dark and dingy and filled with debris. Alice doesn't know it at the time she is being raped, but a girl has recently been murdered and dismembered in the very same tunnel – her pink hair tie, faded and dirty, lost and left behind amongst the dead leaves and broken glass.

"I'll kill you, if you scream," the rapist says to Alice. Alice believes him. He has a knife. Still, she tries to escape, begs for her life. He replies with more violence – he kicks her, pulls her hair, beats her with his fists, sits on her, pounds her head on the brick path.

Alice slips into a state of unconsciousness, comes to, resigns herself to death –
 And then, Alice becomes one with her rapist. *You do what you have to*, Alice thinks to herself.

I think of my mother. She did what she thought she had to do. She fought and fought and fought and didn't stop fighting. In return, she too was beaten into a state of unconsciousness. My mother, however, never woke up. "It was her own fault," her

murderer said. “She shouldn’t have fought me. If she hadn’t made such a fuss, I wouldn’t have had to kill her.”

“Take off your clothes,” the rapist says. Alice does. The rapist tears at her breast, thrusts his fist back and forth into her vagina, his penis limp and clammy. “Give me a blow job,” he says. She does. It tastes like “dirty rubber or burnt hair.” He pees on her. Gets hard. Plunges himself inside her – rapes her, sodomizes her until she bleeds.

Some hours later, while meeting with the police, Alice is told the story of the girl who had recently been murdered and dismembered in the very same tunnel where she had just been brutally raped.

You’re lucky, the police say to her. By comparison, you’re very, very lucky.

A Picturesque Victorian House

November 1991

The Dalles, Oregon

At the time of her death, my mother was a forty-seven year old hard-working single woman who had been transferred to The Dalles to help open a new Bi-Mart, an employee-owned discount department store where she spent the majority of her waking hours. In the weeks leading up to her death, fueled mostly by coffee, candy and cigarettes, she regularly worked twelve hour days in preparation for the store's timely grand opening.

While in The Dalles, my mother lived in a picturesque Victorian house on a quiet street near the outskirts of town. The house, once a grand single-family home, had succumbed to changing demographics and economic hardships resulting in its conversion to apartments. My mother's apartment was a small one-bedroom on the second floor with a turret window in the living room overlooking a street lined with mature Maple trees whose leaves, on the night of her murder, were a resplendent sun-burst yellow.

A month or so before my mother moved to The Dalles, a young woman had been raped in the parking area behind the picturesque Victorian house. The young woman, barely in her twenties, had just gotten out of her car and was shutting the door when a young man of similar age grabbed her from behind. While holding a knife to her throat, he raped her. It was dark. She was silent. The knife nicked her neck. The rapist escaped with her purse.

The next day she packed her belongings and moved into an apartment at the opposite end of town. She never told anyone what happened – until the night she saw the news report about the woman who had been murdered in her old apartment, the apartment with the turret window overlooking a street lined with mature Maple trees.

Mazzy Star

January 1992

Seattle, Washington

The songs of *Mazzy Star* provide a pensive and melancholic backdrop for the dreary winter months following my mother's death. I've been playing their CD *She Hangs Brightly* every day for weeks now, often on repeat – two, three, four times in a row. Their quasi-psychedelic ruminations allowing me to lose myself in the enormity of the cosmically unanswerable:

Why?

It's yet another moonless, rainy night in Seattle. Raindrops – the kind that languorously slide down window panes – have been falling for hours, days, weeks. I'm sitting in the living room, on the oversized chair covered in a purple paisley-print cloth – the same chair on which I sat when I learned my mother had been killed. Nils is standing in the living room, looking out the window – a bay window facing a modest downtown skyline whose bright lights struggle to shine through the mist.

I sit looking at Nils as he stands looking out the window.
 "Give You My Lovin" plays, filling the silent spaces between us.

*Man says it's rainin', rainin' outside
 I'll be out there in a little while,
 Cause you see rain reminds me of you*

I shift my gaze to Nils's reflection in the window.
 I can see that he is crying.
 The song plays on.

*Oh babe I only want to make you
 Glad*

Nils and I have been trying to make each other glad for a long time now.

But why does it have to end now? Why now? Why so soon after my mother has been killed?

Another Rainy Day

April 1992

Seattle, Washington

We've just come in from recess, dripping water and tracking mud across the foyer.

It's been drizzling all day – a way of life here in Seattle.

The kids, sweet and boisterous, ages three to six, take off their damp shoes, hang up their wet coats, enter the classroom and sit cross-legged in a circle on the rug.

The teacher, me, sad and silent, age 27, keeps my damp shoes on, my wet coat too, enters the supply room adjacent to the classroom, sits cross-legged on the bare floor, leans back against the copy machine and begins to cry – a quiet cry of slow rolling tears and rounded shoulders.

I can't do it anymore. I can't go into the classroom with those kids – those smiling, happy kids, sitting in a circle, waiting for me to lead them in song, something fun and frivolous. Something that makes us silly with laughter. Something we all know my heart, but never tire of singing because it makes us feel so fucking good to sing it.

Down by the bay
Where the watermelons grow
Back to my home
I dare not go
For if I do
My mother will say
Did you ever see a moose
Kissing a goose?
Down by the bay

I can't do it anymore. I can't keep pretending to be happy, carefree, lighthearted. I can't keep smiling, laughing, singing Raffi songs like nothing happened. I can't keep acting like my mother has not been murdered.

Down by the bay
Where the watermelons grow
Back to my home
I dare not go
For if I do
My mother will say
Did you ever see some llamas
Eating pajamas?
Down by the bay

Kundera is right – the lightness of being is truly unbearable.

I feel so heavy. So wet and so heavy. I just want to go home.

Baby Beluga in the deep blue sea
Swim so wild and you swim so free
Heaven above and the sea below
And a little white whale on the go

Baby Beluga, baby Beluga, is the water warm?
Is your mama home with you so happy?

No, the water in my deep blue sea is not warm, my mama is not home, I am not happy.

I'm tired Raffi. So sad and so tired. I just want to go home. Please just let me go home.

Yoga

December 2012

Philadelphia, Pennsylvania

Just when I resolve to earnestly begin work on this book, I decide to embark upon a thirty day Bikram Yoga challenge – thirty days of a twenty-six posture, ninety minute routine done in an enclosed room heated to one hundred and five degrees with forty percent humidity. Ninety minutes of extreme heat and physical contortion every day for thirty days.

As soon as I commit to this challenge, I begin to scold myself –

if you can commit to a yoga practice for ninety minutes a day for thirty days, why can't you commit to sitting in the chair and writing for ninety minutes a day for thirty days?

For N. Flynn, it was easier to take photographs than to write.

Where does one begin when writing about a mother who shot herself?

And you were the one to discover her dead body.

For J. Winterson, it was easier to write a fictional account of her life than a factual one.

Where does one begin when writing about a mother who was inhumanely evangelical?

A mother who locked you in a coal bin. A mother who did not want you.

For J. Elroy, it was easier to write crime novels than true crime.

Where does one begin when writing about a mother who was murdered when you were ten?

An unsolved crime that has shaped your life – often times for the worst.

For M. Karr it was easier to guzzle whiskey than to write.

Where does one begin when writing about a mother deemed irrevocable “nervous”?

A mother who disappeared into a madhouse when you were still a small child?

For me, in this moment, it is easier to do a thirty day yoga challenge than to write about my life.

Where does one begin when writing about a mother who was raped, beaten and stabbed to death?

Where to begin a story so embedded in my being that to tell it requires a dismantling of the self.

Car Date

September 1979

Leesville, Louisiana

This is what I remember....

He was popular. A letterman. A senior. Tall and thin, a bit on the lanky side, but cute, with wavy brown hair that fell just above his shoulders. He, Dwayne, was a townie. I was an Army kid. The townie kids knew that we Army kids, whose dads were stationed at the nearby Ft. Polk Army Base, came and went in a flash – like a case of Coke on a hot summer day. But instead of valuing us as a refreshing change in their small town lives, they seemed to resent the ease with which we came and went. So I was surprised when Dwayne approached me at my school locker, addressed me by name, and asked me out on a Friday night date. He was eighteen with a driver's license. I was fifteen and easily impressed.

The night of the date – my first car date, I wore a white button down shirt, a navy blue vest and a matching blue and white polka-dot tie. Woody Allen's *Annie Hall* had been released in 1977 and the fashion of Diane Keaton as Annie Hall was just making its way south in 1979. As I stood in front of the full-length mirror in my bedroom, admiring my big city look, I longed for a pair of khaki pants like the ones Annie wore. Instead, I wore my widest bell-bottom jeans.

I brushed my hair – again – and sprayed it in place with some aerosol hair spray. My hair – strawberry-blond, long and feathered – was modeled after the glamorous Farrah

Fawcett, whose photo, torn from the pages of *Teen Beat* magazine, was taped onto the wall next to the mirror.

Ready for my date with Dwayne, I went outside and stood on the tiny concrete porch of our Army-issued house – one side of a single-story, non-descript duplex at the end of a cul-de-sac. I stood there alone as the early evening sunlight began to shift-downward into dusk and the neighborhood moms began calling their kids in for the night. I glanced down at my Timex; Dwayne was twenty minutes late.

I began to wonder if the date was a cruel joke – if popular local boys always asked out new-to-town Army girls just so they could stand them up and laugh about it later. Just as I was about to go inside, a silver Oldsmobile, headlights on, turned the corner into the cul-de-sac. Dwayne had arrived.

This is what I remember...

A silver Oldsmobile, his mom's
Plush velvet burgundy seats, bucket
An eight track player, Van Halen
Dwayne's cologne, *Polo* by Ralph Lauren

Dusk had turned into night
The air warm, the windows down
We smiled, said hello
Drove in silence

To the drive-through liquor store
A six pack of Schultz on the seat between us
Me wishing it wasn't there
Wishing I could sit closer, just a little bit

We drive around town, going nowhere
 Van Halen gives way to Kiss
 Gives way to Styx
 Another drive-through liquor store – another six pack of Schultz

Dwayne drives too fast on a winding road
 He swerves – *tries* to hit a dog walking along the shoulder
 I look at him through blurred vision
 I am afraid of what I see

It's too late to say no
 The sky outside is black
 I don't know where we are
 I don't know where we're going

Dwayne keeps driving
 Keeps offering me more Schultz
 Drink up, he says
 Dwayne drives, I drink

This is what I remember....

I'm lying supine on the back seat of the Oldsmobile. Dwayne is laying on top me. His face, slack and wet, just inches from mine. I don't know when or how we got into the back seat. I don't know what we're doing there. I feel hot, am having a hard time breathing, seeing, understanding. I look out the rear window, see only a shiny black void reflected back. Dwayne shifts his weight, pushes himself up, reaches over the front seat, opens the glove box, grabs a handful of napkins from Dairy Queen, drops them on my bare stomach. Here, he says, wipe yourself. Dwayne fastens his pants, his belt, climbs over the front seat, turns on the car, begins to drive. Sounds like gravel, I think, before falling asleep.

This is what I remember...

My body wrapped around and in between legs of a dining room chair. My pants unzipped. Above me the underside of our dining room table, a shade of dark walnut. The room dark. The house quiet. On the floor next to my nose, a Cheerio.

Dead Bodies

February 1992

Seattle, Washington

I never saw my mother's dead body
I had the chance – at the funeral home before the service
But I was too afraid of what I would see

My mother died a violent death
And I was afraid I would see a look of fear on her face –
Afraid I would see terror locked in the fine lines around her eyes

But mostly, I was afraid I would see in her eyes a yearning to know:
Why didn't somebody come to my rescue? Didn't anyone hear my cries for help?

The thought of viewing a cadaver –
The sheer physicality of it –
The putrid smell, waxy pallor, bloody guts
And the air – cold enough to turn breathing lungs blue

At the same time, I am intrigued by the idea of dissecting a cadaver –
Of peeling back the layers of skin and fat, muscle and tendon, organ and artery
Of burrowing into bone marrow and pondering the relationship between body and
consciousness

*If matter can be neither created nor destroyed, can the same be said of
consciousness?* Both continuing to live in spite of death
Transforming and reconfiguring into what, we shall never know

It's been three months since my mother was killed
Six months since I started massage school
I now have the chance to view a cadaver
But now, I am too afraid

Afraid I will find my mother curled inside the bloody cavern of an empty ribcage
Afraid I will dive in after her –
And never return

As the massage instructor asks for a show of interest,
 My classmates eagerly raise their hands, while I sit still
 Teetering on the edge of tears

No one asks why I'm not raising my hand –
 For this act of privacy, I am grateful
 For if anyone were to glance in my direction
 I would start to cry
 And no one would know why
 And I would not tell them

I know a funeral director who says
 That those who die before they're ready make difficult corpses –
 Their bodies' stiff, hard to handle
 Their fists clenched, teeth clamped, legs locked
 Was this the case with my mother's body?
 Was her body more rigid than an old woman who died peacefully in her
 sleep?

My mother was not old
 She did not die peacefully
 She did die in her sleep –
 If being unconscious at the time of death counts as sleeping?

I never saw my mother's dead body
 I had the chance – at the funeral home before the service
 But I was too afraid of what I would see

Do I ?

January 2013

Philadelphia, Pennsylvania

*Do I really want to do this?**Do I really want to write a memoir organized around the gruesome murder of my mother?*

I lay in bed at night, tired from the day, wanting nothing more than sleep, sweet and still.
 Instead, I lay awake, thoughts ricocheting across the rocky landscape of my mind.

Logistical Questions

how will i organize the memoir?

which stories will i tell?

shall i include images?

photos?

drawings?

what will be the common threads binding it all together?

Emotional Worries

am i strong enough to write this story?
 process?

will i have an emotional breakdown in the

haven't i cried enough already?

do i really want to dredge up my traumatic

past?

revisit the gory details?

i don't currently have a good therapist – should i find one?

where?

Existential Callings

all things are impermanent – including this one irreplaceable life i lead
 must i try to make meaning of it?
 i will die alone – even if others are
 with me
 will my story help others make meaning of their lives?
 is writing a memoir an act of compassion?
 for me? for others?

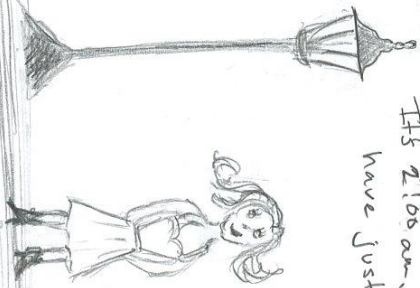
Practical Concerns

what will people think – especially my family? will they be mad?
 will i find a good agent? editor? will they be supportive?
 should i use everyone's real name?
 will my story get published? will others want to read it?
 am i a skilled enough writer to accomplish the task of writing a memoir?

Post Modern Dilemmas

what is my story anyway?
 how true is it? if it's my story to tell, does that inherently make it
 true?
 is it ok to make stuff up – to fill in the gaps?
 is to tell a story to tell a fib? or does truth reveal itself in the telling?
 where does truth lie? in white space?
 in what isn't said as much as what is?

It's 2:00 am. The bars
have just closed.



I eat blueberry pancakes,

He tells me he has just been released
from prison. Accidentally shot his
best friend.
Can still
smell the
gun
powder
on his
hands.



He drinks black
coffee,

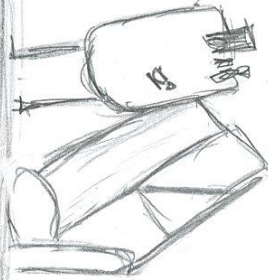
I tell him my man was recently
murdered,



The is a line outside the diner.
I go inside. The booths are full.

There is a sad looking man sitting alone in a booth.

I sit down
next to him.



The sun rises.

We walk out into the
new day
together.

He
walks
this way

I
walk
this way.

Good bye, I say.



Dream

November 1992

Seattle, Washington

I'm in the bedroom, in my pajamas – charcoal grey flannel bottoms and a bright white t-shirt – when I hear a knock on the door. Nils, fully dressed standing at the kitchen sink eating a bowl of granola, sets the bowl down on the pink tile counter and walks to the door.

Dawn, It's your mom.

There she is –
My mother
Standing at the threshold
Barefoot in a whipped cream-colored gown

I run toward her
Jump into her arms
Wrap my arms around her neck
My legs around her waist, as if I am a child

But it is she
Who is the size of a child
And so we tumble down
Roll across the wooden floor

Stopping only when we reach the chair

Then I feel them
Beneath the whipped cream-colored gown
Sprouting from her shoulder blades
Tiny buds fitting perfectly in the palms of my hands

The Day After
September 1979
Leesville, Louisiana

I'm under the covers in my twin bed, fully dressed including my shoes and blue and white polka-dot tie. My mother is on her hands and knees in the middle of the room cleaning vomit off the hardwood floor. It's a couple of hours past noon. My head hurts. I'm very thirsty.

I'm sorry, mom, I say. She doesn't answer, just keeps mopping up the vomit. I feel like I might vomit again so I close my eyes. When I open them, my mom is gone. The floor clean.

It isn't until I get out of bed that I remember what happened. I'm so sore, it hurts to stand. Hurts to walk. Hurts to pee. Really hurts, like someone repeatedly punched and kicked me in my vagina. I look down at my underwear, a mix of dried semen and blood.

I panic:

What if I'm pregnant? What will I do if I'm pregnant? Please God don't let me be pregnant.

I don't want to remember what Dwayne did to me while I lay passed out in the back seat of his mother's silver Oldsmobile, his penis forcing its way inside me, stealing my virginity. I don't want to remember him handing me napkins from Dairy Queen. I don't want to remember him swerving the car, trying to hit the dog. I can see the dog now, in

the headlights, a scared mutt, big like a lab, lost or homeless, probably hungry. My stomach begins to lurch. I'm on my knees, underwear twisted around my ankles, my long strawberry-blond hair floating in the toilet filled with my urine. I can't stop dry heaving. After a shower, I put on my winter pajamas – the set with long sleeves and long pants – even though it's only mid-September. The sun is setting, casting a warm swath of light across my bedroom floor. Yet I feel so cold. I can't stop shivering. I climb under the covers, only to then feel hot. I sit up in bed, close my eyes, rock back and forth, and pray.

Please God don't let me be pregnant.

Please God don't let me be pregnant.

Please God don't let me be pregnant.

Please God don't let me be pregnant.

Please God don't let me be pregnant.

Please God don't let me be pregnant.

Please God don't let me be pregnant.

I don't want to tell anyone what happened in the back seat of the silver Oldsmobile.

As long as I'm not pregnant, nobody needs to know what happened.

As long as I'm not pregnant, nobody ever needs to know – not ever.

Please God don't let me be pregnant.

Motherfucker
August 2010
The Rumpus On-Line

Advice from Dear Sugar:

So write... Not like a girl. Not like a boy. Write like a motherfucker.

Camel

December 2012

Philadelphia, Pennsylvania

The deepest, most intense back bend in the Bikram's series.

The pose that makes me feel I'm going to simultaneously:

burst into tears

projectile vomit

explode in orgasm.

This is how you do it:

Stand on your knees at the top of your mat – make sure knees are six inches apart.

Soles should face upward, toes on the mat.

Place your palms on your lower back, fingers facing down.

Let your head fall back.

Slowly start to bend backwards.

Stop half-way.

Reach back with your right hand and grab your right heel.

Reach back with your left hand and grab your left heel.

Now push your thighs and hips forward – remember to breathe.

Continue to push your thighs and hips forward.

Keep breathing.

The benefits of Camel are many.

It improves the conditions of the:

digestive, respiratory, endocrine, lymphatic, skeletal and circulatory systems.

It's recommended for people suffering from:

asthma, bronchitis, diabetes and thyroid disorders.

It's good for you if you have:

constipation, colitis, dyspepsia and genito-urinary disorder of the kidney.

What the yoga instructor fails to tell you is this:

It will expose your most deeply hidden vulnerabilities –

It will make you feel like you're going to cry, vomit and orgasm all at the same time.

You may feel a little dizzy going into this posture, the yoga instructor invariable says.

What she mean to say is this:

You may feel like the iron gates of your pelvis are being pried open by invisible hands.

You may feel like your intestines have burst spilling forth decades of undigested emotion.

What she means to say is this:

You may feel like your heart is cracking open releasing a million grief-filled pearls into the sky.

Antonia's Line

February 1996

Missoula, Montana

I love film. Not so much winters in Montana – so I break up the tedium of barren winter nights by volunteering once a week to sell tickets and bag popcorn at The Crystal Theater, located on “the hip strip” just over the river from downtown Missoula. The Crystal Theater is Western Montana’s Cinema Paradiso, a community gathering place for film buffs, performance artists and town eccentrics – characteristics often all found in a single person.

Before moving Missoula – when I was just passing through on a road trip – I saw a drag performance of Mamet’s *Bobby Gould in Hell* at The Crystal Theater. It was a lovely mid-June evening – Missoula at its best, when the town is fresh and green before becoming scorched and dull from an unrelenting summer sun. All hundred and fifty seats were full that night and the crowd easy to laugh, creating a warm and pleasing atmosphere perfectly in sync with the season. That night at the Crystal Theater became one of the supporting arguments for moving to Missoula – if a small Montana town could produce a drag performance of a Mamet play, it was certainly a town I could be happy living in.

Now that I live in Missoula, volunteering at The Crystal Theater has become a winter reprieve – a weekly respite from the still and stark, from the low-lying clouds and sub-zero temperatures that stay frozen in place for weeks on end.

The Crystal Theater is near my house, less than a mile down the trail that borders the banks of the Clark Fork River that runs through town from one end to the other – from the old abandoned mill site at the west end where the osprey nest to Mt. Sentinel at the other at whose base the Salish Indians once lived. The Crystal Theater is more or less at the half-way mark of the trail, just up the hill from the old railroad station.

If the trail is not too icy, I ride my bike – a 1964 green and white Schwinn Breeze, with the trade mark “S” on the seat and an old wooden fruit box tied to the rear rack for carrying home groceries. Tonight, however, the trail is icy and so I dress in layers and walk to the theater along the banks of the ice-capped river.

Tonight, like all nights I volunteer at the theater, I wait until the film begins then enter the screening room and sit in the last row in the seat closest to the door. This way, I can easily follow anyone out should they desire more concessions during the film. In which case, I refill their popcorn bag or sell them a bar of chocolate and then return to my seat in the back row.

Antonia's Line is playing tonight – an epic tale, set in the Dutch countryside, of a feisty, smart, independent matriarch and her equally feisty, smart, independent mother and daughters – five generations in all.

Early in the film, Antonia's teen-age daughter Danielle witnesses a rape. She is walking idly by a neighboring farm when she hears muffled cries of distress coming from the

barn. Inside, a brother is raping his developmentally disabled sister while holding his hand over her mouth. Danielle grabs a pitch fork, throws it at the brother as he struggles to pull up his pants. The pitch fork plants itself firmly in his groin. The brother cries out in agony as Danielle and the sister escape, fleeing the barn hand-in-hand.

The brother, humiliated, leaves town – only to return years later seeking revenge, which he accomplishes by raping Danielle’s daughter, Therese – age ten.

When Therese is a young college student, we see her walking down a country lane with Simon, a young man deeply in love with her. They walk side by side, but do not touch or talk. It’s fall, the season of slow and steady death. The branches overhead are empty, and Therese is consumed by feelings of melancholy – clearly still traumatized from rape and not at all sure she has the capacity to open herself to love.

As Therese and Simon walk side-by-side silently down the country lane, the Verteller narrates the scene:

The proverb is wrong.
Time does not heal all wounds.
It merely softens the pain and blurs the memories.

If I were a 19th Century woman with a fainting couch, I would be lying on it now – for upon hearing these words, I feel faint, weak, defeated. My heart rate slows. My blood pressure drops. It feels as if my heart is falling down. My mother has been dead for just

four years, but I know intuitively that the Verteller is telling the truth – *time does not heal all wounds*.

Girl Trouble

1992 – 1993

Tacoma & Seattle, Washington

In the couple of years following my mother's death, I listened to a lot of music and went to a lot of concerts. Whether on CD or live on stage, no music made me happier, made me so fully forget my grief, than the music of *Girl Trouble*: garage punk with rockabilly sensibilities piled high with loads of kitsch – the glorious Northwest bastard child of *The Cramps* and *The Ramones*.

Girl Trouble was – and still is:

K.P. Kendall: 6'5'' and shirtless – vocals and saxophone

Kahuna: never takes off his shades – guitar

Dale: the shy one – bass

Bon Von Wheelie: puts the girl in *Girl Trouble* – drums

A night of *Girl Trouble* always meant two things: tequila and go-go dancing.

My cohorts and I were undeniably some of the most loyal *Girl Trouble* fans in town – rarely missing a show, rushing the stage at every concert and dancing with abandon. One especially tequila-drenched night, I climbed onto the stage as the band played the voo-doo-tinged “Bring on the Dancing Girls.”

Where all the bad boys go

It may not be something, but I'll tell you what

They've got pretty girls who shake their butt

Suddenly, there I was, on stage, inevitable wearing a 1950s vintage dress, shaking my butt.

It became my thing – at the song’s first strum, I would jump on stage, K.P. stepping aside to make room. Before long, I became known as “that girl who dances on stage at *Girl Trouble* shows.”*

*not to be confused with the other go-go dancing girl on stage: Granny Go Go!

Cause of Death

November 1991

The Dalles, Oregon

My mother's body was discovered the morning after she died. When she didn't show up for work or answer her phone, her employer called the police. The police found her lying dead on the kitchen floor surrounded by a pool of blood. Blood loss, as the autopsy report would indicate, was the cause of her death. Blood loss due to multiple stab wounds.

Lucky

October 1979

Leesville, Louisiana

Sitting in social studies class, I feel blood oozing down my vagina. My heart rate quickens, I raise my hand. Miss Rebecca, I need to go to the bathroom.

I walk quickly down the hallway, push through the swinging door of the bathroom, lock myself in a stall, undo my jeans, letting them fall to the floor. I take a deep breath – and slowly pull down my underwear. I'm sitting on the toilet crying before I even know I'm sitting on the toilet crying. I'm thinking about my Pentecostal friend, Jean, who said she felt indescribable feelings of joy upon taking Jesus into her heart as her Lord and Savior. I wonder if this is how she felt.

I'm lucky.

Now I can put this whole experience behind me.

I never have to think about it again.

I never have to tell anyone about being raped in the back seat of a silver Oldsmobile.

If I never tell anyone, than it never happened.

It just never happened.

Chiron

Please Gods, turn me into a horse so I can run far, far away.

Philyra begs the Gods to turn her into a horse so she can flee from Cronus. The Gods take mercy. As horse, Philyra kicks her heels into the air and gallops away across the open meadow.

Within minutes, Cronus, having turned himself into a wild stallion, overtakes her. Philyra snorts at Cronus, rears her head, lashes her tail, paws the ground. Cronus ignores her pleas, mounds her and forces himself inside her. The wild flowers wilt at the sound of her screams.

And thus, Chiron is sired. Half-immortal God, half horse.

Mortified and ashamed at having given birth to a monster, Philyra turns herself into a linden tree.

Despite his violent origins, and unlike his centaur brethren – notorious for their wild, indulgent and carousing ways – Chiron grows up to be civilized and kind, a respected oracle, known for his knowledge of medicine, his gifts as a healer and teacher. The son of Gods, Chiron is also immortal. Until, that is, he begs the Gods to let him die.

This is what happened:

Chiron dines with Hercules in the cave of Pholus, who, like Chiron, is a wise and civilized centaur. During supper, Hercules requests wine. Pholus is reluctant. He does have a vessel of sacred wine given to him by Dionysius, but it has not yet sufficiently aged – and besides, the wine is meant for the centaurs. Hercules insists, and Pholus, wishing to be a gracious host, retrieves the wine.

Once opened, the wine vapors waft from the cave intoxicating the wild centaurs who live outside in the nearby woods. Wanting what is rightfully theirs, the centaurs begin attacking the cave with stones and fir trees. In an effort to drive them away, Hercules shoots arrows at them – arrows poisoned with the blood of Hydra, a many-headed water serpent with blood so virulent that even its breath is deadly. During the battle, a poisoned arrow accidentally hits Chiron in the thigh.

Despite his knowledge of medicine and his renowned healing powers, Chiron is unable to heal his own wound. Given his immortality, there is thus no end in sight to Chiron's suffering. He lives in excruciating pain for years and years – now destined to suffer for eternity.

The pain becomes unbearable. Chiron pleads with the Gods to relieve him of his suffering. The Gods make a deal. Hercules bargains with Zeus – Chiron's immortality for the life of Prometheus, who has been tied to a rock and left to die for his transgressions, namely stealing fire for human use.

In this way, Chiron voluntarily surrenders his immortality in order to end his intolerable suffering. In honor of Chiron, Zeus gives him an eternal place in the sky – known to us as the constellation Centaurus.

Twisted Logic

November 1991

The Dalles, Oregon

The young woman who had been raped at knife point in the parking area behind the picturesque Victorian house had been wise to leave. The rapist had taken her identification. She feared he would rape her again, in her own apartment. Indeed, several months after she moved out, the rapist returned. It was approximately 10:00pm. He approached what he thought was the young woman's door. It was ajar. He walked through the door, quietly closing it behind him. My mother, still in her work clothes, was in the kitchen putting away a bag of groceries. A fierce struggle ensued. My mother, barely five feet tall and not quite one hundred pounds, fought for her life. She lost.

It was her own fault.
She shouldn't have fought me.
If she hadn't made such a fuss.
I wouldn't have had to kill her.

Motherfucker
January 2013
Philadelphia, Pennsylvania

Reply to Dear Sugar:

Writing like a motherfucker is motherfucking hard.

Pot-Bellied Pig

November 1991

The Dalles, Oregon

I assume the pot-bellied pig was hiding; otherwise wouldn't he too have been killed? I imagine him hiding in my mother's bedroom, under the bed – the place pets hide when they are scared. I can see him there, under the bed, tucked into a tight little ball in the far back corner. I can see his bristly-haired body, trembling. I can see his thick snout twitching, breathing heavy. I can see the panic in his tiny black eyes. I can see him, and when I do, I can feel his fear as surely as if it were my own.

I imagine him, at some point after the violence ends and all is quiet, crawling tentatively out from under the bed, his belly dragging across the carpet. I imagine him searching for my mother, walking down the hallway, stopping at the bathroom to use his litter box before walking into the kitchen. I imagine him sniffing my mother's body, nudging her with his snout, grunting with concern. I imagine him sitting down next to her and waiting. Waiting for her to get up. Waiting for her to get up and feed him his breakfast.

Statistics

Sexual assault continues to be one of the most underreported crimes.

The FBI estimates that only 37% of all rapes are reported to the police.

U.S. Justice Department estimates are even lower –

Only 26% of all rapes, or attempted rapes, are reported to law enforcement officials.

A Vicious Cycle
November 1991
The Dalles, Oregon

My mother's white Camry, laden with evidence, was found the day after she was murdered, abandoned on the side of the road just a few miles away from the scene of the crime. Several days later, the young man who raped and murdered my mother was apprehended.

He didn't try to hide when police kicked open his door. He didn't struggle when they handcuffed his hands behind his back. He didn't resist when a police officer placed a hand on his head and guided him into the back seat of the squad car. He didn't smile for his mug shot and he didn't request a lawyer. Nor did he confess. He simply resigned himself to his destiny – the result of a vicious cycle of emotional, physical and sexual abuse that had begun when he was a foster child. A vicious cycle of abuse he didn't know how to stop – only how to perpetuate.

Ross

November 1991

Salem, Oregon

Crime Scene Do Not Cross reads the bright yellow police tape keeping me from walking through my mother's front door, across the blood-stained kitchen floor of her apartment and into the intimacy of her bedroom. I need to go into her bedroom, peruse her closet, her bureau in order to select an outfit for her to wear. But I can't. I can't because inside my mother's apartment a crime has taken place. Inside her apartment, my mother has been murdered. So instead, I go to *Ross Dress for Less*.

I wander the aisles of *Ross* shopping for underwear for my mother to wear while lying in a taffeta-lined coffin. Taffeta, considered a high-end luxury fabric, is often used for ball gowns, wedding dresses – and coffins. The taffeta lining my mother's coffin is the softer, more flexible variety – not the stiff, crisp yarn-dyed version famous for the rustling sounds that emanate as jeweled women waltz across grand ballrooms or as veiled brides walk slowly down the aisle. No need for rustling taffeta inside a coffin where there is no waltzing or walking, just an eternal stillness draped in quietude.

While wandering the aisles of *Ross*, it doesn't occur to me to choose underwear to match the color of taffeta that lines my mother's coffin – a bashful pink. This is not surprising, as there was nothing bashful about my mother.

My youngest brother is the bashful one. He was my mother's baby, always. An oops baby who never really grew up – or grew up too fast, hard to tell which. At any rate, it seems

fitting that he chose a shade of infantile pink. I didn't dispute his selection – even though if it were up to me, I would have chosen fire-cracker red.

A fire cracker – that mother of mine. A fire cracker with a short fuse and a loud, colorful bang that belied her diminutive stature and saintly name: Mary, barely five feet tall and forever hovering at one hundred pounds.

Because of her small size, my mother often shopped for clothes in the teen section of department stores, especially as she got older. The older she got, the more she pined for a carefree youth she never had. The eldest child of alcoholic parents who worked evenings (driving taxi and bartending), my mother was charged, at an early age, with tending to her four younger siblings – three brothers and a sister. At nineteen, she married my father – not knowing he would soon enlist in the Army. By the age of twenty-five, she was a veteran Army wife and mother of three small children, all under the age of five.

By thirty-five, she had had enough of the routine life of an Army housewife and doting mother. When I was younger, I didn't understand her desire – her desperate need – to live a fuller, more passionate life. Of course now I do. But now she is dead. And now I am shopping for underwear for her to wear while lying sealed in a pink taffeta-lined coffin buried under six feet of dirt.

With my head hung low, I shuffle down the dirty aisles of *Ross*, side-stepping bits of store detritus – a wayward shoe size 2, a broken plastic hanger, a crumpled t-shirt. The

black and white checkered linoleum floor is neither black nor white, but a muted and dingy grey scarred with thick oily skid marks. I feel too ashamed to look up. Ashamed to be shopping for my dead mother at a deep-discount department store located in an urban strip mall in-between a Dollar Store and an Outback Steakhouse.

Ashamed to make eye contact with anyone – fellow shopper, sales associate, over-eager floor manager – for I am convinced if *anyone* were to look into my eyes they would know I am shopping for my dead mother. And I don't want their pity, their sympathy, their misguided impulses to help. I don't want to see my shame reflected in their eyes. I don't want to notice the slight shake of their head as they *tsk-tsk*. *Shopping for her dead mother at Ross. Poor thing.*

I dare not lift my head for fear of accidentally looking into one of the many mirrors that line the store. Mirrors that I am sure are two-way mirrors behind which sit men in starched black business suits with glasses perched smartly on the end of their pointy noses while they write terse notes on yellow-ruled paper fastened tightly to thin plastic clip boards:

- *Bereaved female.*
- *Mid-to-late twenties.*
- *Pale, with freckles.*
- *Strawberry-blond hair – needs washing.*
- *Blue eyes, glazed over.*
- *Shopping at Ross for underwear for dead mother.*
- *Poor thing.*

Thing is – while slouching through the aisles, I feel poor – a kind of poor akin to humiliation. An eyes-cast-to-the-ground humiliation, not just for me, but for my mother – even though when alive she shopped regularly at *Ross Dress for Less*. But then again, she is no longer alive.

I read once that shame should be reserved for the things we do, not the circumstances that life places upon us. I am not ashamed that my mother is dead – that is a circumstance. I am ashamed of what I am doing. But could this too be a circumstance? I don't recall making a conscious decision to shop for my mother at *Ross*, but here I am – full of shame nonetheless.

I'm at the store with my two younger brothers and an uncle, who has driven us to the store – not because we couldn't drive ourselves, but because he will be paying for the clothing. The four of us – estranged siblings and a rogue uncle back in town for his sister's funeral – had walked together, silent and stoic, through the opening made for us by the automatic sliding glass doors. We entered as a united front – no one should have to shop for their dead mother alone – but the moment the glass doors slid closed behind us, I felt our unity dissolve. I felt suddenly alone. In that moment, I felt the austere embrace of existentialism waft up and wrap its demand for meaning around my shoulders. Yes, I was definitely on my own.

Meet me back here when you're done shopping, my uncle said as he positioned himself at the front of the store, as if a security guard. My brothers and I huddled together next to an

abandoned shopping cart littered with random items – a vanilla-scented candle, a blue bath mat, a pair of pleated pants. As the only female, I offered to shop for undergarments – underwear, a bra, stockings, perhaps a camisole.

My youngest brother said he would like to shop for jewelry. My mother always wore lots of jewelry – colorful dangling earrings, delicate gold necklaces, an assortment of rings, two to three on each hand. All costume jewelry, except the pink pearl ring with a miniscule diamond given to her by my father approximately twenty years prior – the band now whisper thin from wear. Sometimes, my mother would wear bangles – if, that is, she could find ones that didn't slide off her tiny wrists and fall boisterously to the floor.

My other brother agreed to shop for the actual clothing – the most difficult task. One that I do not envy. For I have no idea what my mother should wear. A nice floral-print dress? Although it is November – maybe a wool skirt and turtle neck? Perhaps a pair of lined slacks and a jeweled cardigan? And what about shoes? Do we need to buy shoes? I wish it were closer to Christmas – my mother was crazy about Christmas. She would love a flamboyant Christmas sweater with blinking lights, preferably one with cats in the motif. She would love a pair of Santa-red pants, a blinking Christmas sweater, dangling earrings in the shape of tree ornaments and an elfin hat. We could even stuff her pockets with Christmas candy.

I'm standing in the lingerie section of the store, tears rolling freely down my cheeks. I'm still concerned about being seen, but have lost the sheer force of will required to keep my

feelings in check. It's the intimacy of the lingerie, which will cling to my mother's body for eternity. I, however, will never touch her body again.

Her body is so small, her breasts so tiny. 32A. Around the house, she often did not wear a bra. *Why then must she wear one while lying in a coffin?* I know my older brother will be indignant should I suggest our mother not wear a bra while lying in her coffin, so I force myself to walk over to the racks of brasseries. I flip through a raggedy-looking bunch of plain white bras. Fuck it. My mother would never buy anything plain white. I turn to the rack of colored bras. The ones with flowers and bows, lace and trim, polka-dots and leopard print. I pick out a fuchsia-colored bra – not quite fire-cracker red, but still colorful and bright. I can't find matching fuchsia underwear so I compromise and select a respectable ivory-colored camisole with matching ivory underwear.

When we finish shopping, my uncle drops us off at our grandparent's house and drives to the funeral home to drop off the bags of discounted clothing and jewelry. There, at the funeral home, a stranger will dress my mother. Will roll her to her side – or perhaps sit her up – in order to reach around her back and fasten the fuchsia-colored bra. Will pull the ivory-colored underwear over her slender hips; slip the camisole over her head.

A stranger, perhaps a different one, will style her short chestnut-brown hair. Will sponge on a thick layer of makeup to her cold, rigid face. Will apply lipstick – maybe fire-cracker red – to her thin, withdrawn lips.

I don't see what my mother looks like while wearing the underwear, clothing and jewelry my brothers and I selected for her – even though there is an open viewing before the service. At the funeral home, I sit alone in the parlor adjacent to the viewing room – the ornate Victorian-era décor trying its best to soften the starkness of death. I sit on the plush, faux-velvet sofa and watch friends and relatives walk solemnly in and out. Some crying, some not. I speak with no one.

As I sit alone on the sofa, I try to imagine my mother lying in her pink taffeta-lined coffin looking pretty and poised. Soft and relaxed. Peaceful. But I am sure she looks like none of these things. I am sure she simply looks dead, because that is what she is – dead.

Still

November 2012

Philadelphia, Pennsylvania

Morrie, Kopple says, *that was seventy years ago your mother died. The pain still goes on?*

You bet, Morrie whispers – his voice cracking, tears falling down his nose.

Twenty-one years ago my mother died, and I feel I've never been more alone – not lonely, just alone. It's been years since I've felt such longing for my mother. Longing to go home. To eat, sleep, rest. To feel safe and cared for. To return to a place prior to suffering. To feel like a child without worry, without fear of the future.

I'm aware of the illusory nature of these notions, notions of permanence and innocence, yet the longing for them is real, visceral, tangible. An ontological tug-of-war in my mind, an internal struggle without any hope of victory, only an assurance of prolonged suffering.

Still I hold on. Still I dig my heels in the earth. Still I lean back and tug.

Impermanence, I know, is the lesson here. Not just of the mother – of my mother – but of all human relationships. Of friends and lovers. Of place and time. Of existence itself.

The Resurrection

At precisely 6:50pm Eastern Standard Time, I place a call to the Wasco County Library in The Dalles, Oregon. It's Thursday, February 14, 2013 – Valentine's Day. I'm here alone, sitting at my desk in my one bedroom apartment on the first floor of a stone house in the Germantown neighborhood of Philadelphia.

Hello, I say, I'm wondering if you keep archived copies of the local newspaper?

I'm a writer and am researching a murder that took place in The Dalles in 1991.

Back in 1991, my uncle saved newspaper articles related to my mother's murder. He kept them in an unmarked, unsealed manila envelope. I was unaware of this envelope until he handed it to me ten years later, in the summer of 2002. That summer I moved from Montana to New York for graduate school, but before doing so I traveled to Oregon to visit my family – to say goodbye. I wasn't sure when I would next be back. Perhaps that is why my uncle chose to give me the envelope at that time. He gave it to me without preamble or segue: Here are some newspaper articles I saved, he said. He didn't need to be more any more specific than that.

Back in Montana, I marveled at the pristine condition of the envelope. I imagined it having been hidden away in a file for the past ten years, in a cabinet tucked into a corner of a windowless home office. As I held the envelope in my hands, I felt both nervous and curious. I had never read a single article about the murder. Had never seen a photograph of the man who killed my mother. Couldn't even recall his name.

I was in my bedroom, packing my carry-on suitcase for the plane ride to New York when I decided to open the envelope. I undid the clasp, lifted the flap, pulled out an article. As I glanced down, my vision blurred, my eyes refused to focus, refused to make sense of the words on the page, refused to identify the images. I quickly stuffed the article back into the envelope, redid the clasp, slid the envelope into the inner pocket of my suitcase. I walked to the window. Looked out at the patch of sunflowers standing nearly seven feet tall in the middle of the garden. I walked back to the suitcase. Took the envelope out of the inner pocket. Walked downstairs, through the sun-lit kitchen and out the side door. I walked along the brick path that cut through the center of the yard, past the patch of sunflowers and alongside the garage, with its peeling green and white paint. I walked behind the garage to the garbage can in the alley where I lifted the lid, stuffed the envelope down into the garbage, replaced the lid. I walked back into the house, through the side door into the sun-lit kitchen and to the sink, where I turned on the facet and washed my hands.

Hello, I say, I'm wondering if you keep archived copies of the local newspaper?

I'm a writer and am researching a murder that took place in The Dalles in 1991.

Yes, we keep all our newspapers archived on microfiche. When was the murder?

1991. November 7.

Who was murdered?

(Long pause, I wasn't prepared for such a direct question so early in the conversation.)

My mother.

Oh, I'm so sorry.

Thank you.

What was her name?

Mary Walsh.

(long silence)

I think there was a trial. Could you also look up articles on the trial?

When was the trial?

I don't know, I think maybe about a year later, but I'm not really sure.

That's ok. I'll call over to the DA's office. They'll know.

That's nice of you. Thank you.

Who murdered your mother? What's his name?

I don't know.

(I think I remember his first name, but I don't want to say it aloud.)

What's your name and address? I'll make copies and mail the copies to you.

*Dawn Walsh
261 W. Walnut Lane
Philadelphia, PA 19144*

Oh, I should probably take your email and phone number too. Just in case.

*215.285.5335
dawn.walsh@gm.slc.edu*

I'm off tomorrow and the weekend, but I'll start researching on Monday.

Thank you for your assistance. What's your name?

Lorna.

Thank you, Lorna. You've been very helpful. I really appreciate your help.

murder *n.*

the unlawful premeditated killing of one human being by another

Thou Shall Not Kill (Sixth Commandment, Judeo-Christian)

Whosoever killeth a human being..., it shall be as if he had killeth all mankind

(Quran, Islam)

I shall abstain from harming all living beings (First Precept, Buddhism)

Dream

I'm walking through the grass toward the front door of my home. It's the middle of the day. A day warm and bright. I'm wearing a strapless cotton dress the color of pink poppies. My hair is long and loose, falling well-past my freckled shoulders. My feet bare, the cool blades of grass slipping between my toes as I walk toward the front door.

The door opens with a flourish. My mother has been waiting for me to come home. She stands at the threshold anxious, her voice high, her speech quick: *Have you seen Forrest Gump?*

No... not recently.

Quick then, come inside. There are marks and graphs on the wall. I don't know what they mean.

I follow my mother into a large room painted white. The room is empty except for a man sitting cross-legged on a tatami mat. A large mound of shrimp is piled high in front of him. He's peeling a shrimp, slowly with great concentration. He looks up, catches my gaze for a brief second, returns to peeling. The pile of shrimp seems to be growing.

Anyway, like I was sayin', shrimp is the fruit of the sea.

You can barbecue it, boil it, broil it, bake it, sauté it.
Dey's uh, shrimp-kabobs, shrimp creole, shrimp gumbo.
Pan fried, deep fried, stir-fried.

There's pineapple shrimp,
 lemon shrimp,
 coconut shrimp,
 pepper shrimp,
 shrimp soup,
 shrimp stew,
 shrimp salad,
 shrimp and potatoes,
 shrimp burger,
 shrimp sandwich.

That, that's about it.

The room goes black. I'm scared someone is going to kill me. I become frantic. I run the palms of my hands along the wall, searching the dark for a light.

The room begins to lighten. I look toward the source. It's coming from a window across the room. A window dressed with white blinds. Next to the window is a round wooden table. My mother is standing on the table barefoot, dressed in a white cotton robe. She's holding in her right hand the dowel that opens and closes the blinds. She rolls the dowel in her hand. The light in the room brightens, fades, brightens, fades.

Why? I cry out. Why did he steal the light?

He didn't steal it, my mother replies. The light is free. The light is always free.

The Resurrection, Part 2

At precisely 6:57pm Eastern Standard Time, one minute after the conversation with Lorna of the Wasco County Library, I place a call to the Wasco County District Attorney's Office. It's Thursday, February 14, 2013 – Valentine's Day. I'm here alone, sitting at my desk in my one bedroom apartment on the first floor of a stone house in the Germantown neighborhood of Philadelphia.

Hello, I say, I'm wondering if you keep archived records of local cases?

I'm a writer and am researching a murder that took place in The Dalles in 1991.

Do you know when in 1991 the murder happened?
November 7.

Who was murdered?
Mary Walsh

What is your relationship to the victim?
She was my mother.

(long silence)

Are you looking up the case in the database?
Yes, but I can't find...

Maybe my mother's maiden name, Thomas, although I'm sure she still used Walsh.
Oh yes, here it is -----.

Yes, that's the man who killed my mother. You seem to know the name.

(Why can she find the murderer's name in the database, but not my mother's? I feel my face flush, my stomach tighten. Why does she remember the murderer's name and not my mother's name? This makes me want to cry – makes me feel like my mother is invisible, just another dead woman who died alone and now no one remembers her name. I hold back the wave of emotion that is rising up inside me. *It's ok, stay on the line, stay focused, breathe* I tell myself as if I've called a hotline crisis center and am both the crisis counselor and the one in crisis.)

Yes, well we don't get many murders like this in The Dalles – at least we didn't back then. Nine counts of aggravated murder.

Were you in The Dalles then?

Yes. The case didn't go to trial though. He took a plea offer and pled guilty.

(I make a mental note to call back Lorna, tell her I was mistaken, there was no trial.)

I can email you the judgment and indictment. You'll need to fax over a public records request.

What do you need?

Include your name, address, phone number, email address and reason for request.

(Do I need a reason other than the victim was my mother?)

We have a victim's advocate, Judy. She was here when it happened.

Ok, thank you. How about the DA who prosecuted the case? Can I speak to him?

He's retired. The current DA is out of the office 'til next week, but I'll let him know you'd like to speak with him.

Thank you.

Tomorrow I'll go down to the basement where we keep the boxes. I'll see what I can find. We usually scan and email items.

Thank you. That would be helpful. What's your name?

Debbie.

Thank you, Debbie. You've been very helpful. I'll fax over the request tomorrow.

The conversation with Lorna of the Wasco County Library lasted six minutes.
The conversation with Debbie of the Wasco County District Attorney's Office lasted nine.

After twenty-one years, the case of my mother's murder has been resurrected in fifteen minutes.

Newspaper articles will be photocopied. Boxes of evidence will be unearthed.
But, I worry, will I have the strength and fortitude to view their contents?

The Mustard Seed

Kisa Gotami, of Savatthi India, was known as a kind and wise woman with an ability to see things as they really are. She possessed a rare ability to see the worth of all things; she could even see gold within a pile of ashes.

Married to a nobleman, Kisa bore one child – a son whom she loved dearly. So dearly she could not let him go, even in death. Thus it is said:

In the middle of an afternoon, as monsoon winds rattled the air and monsoon rains tormented the earth, Kisa felt a surge of energy rush through her body – a surge that came and went as quickly and as brightly as a sheet of flash lighting. *My son, my son*, she cried while running to his room where he lie sleeping – only he no longer was asleep. Death had curled itself around his heart.

Clutching her son to her chest, Kisa cried out to the Gods, to the Spirits, to the devils of hell.

But no one answered. No one. And so, with her dead child in her arms, Kisa wandered the marketplace in search of a medicine powerful enough to cure death.

My son, she said to the merchants, *he is ill, please help me*.

Kisa, they replied. *Your son is not ill. Your son is dead*.

Kisa did not heed their words. *You are wrong*, she said. *My son is only ill*.

He just needs the proper medicine. He will get better. You will see.

In this manner, Kisa, once known for her piercing wisdom, went mad with grief.

As her son turned cold and rigid and then cold and limp and covered in flies, Kisa continued to wander the village seeking a cure for death. In her searching, she happened upon a certain apothecary, who, seeing no end to her suffering, seriously considered her plight. To her request for help, he replied: *No dear Kisa, I do not have a cure for death, but I know who might.*

Who? Kisa cried, *who pray tell? Tell me now! Who?*

Sakyamuni Buddha. Go to him now. He is in the Jeta Grove. Go. He will help you.

Clutching her son to her chest, Kisa ran to the Jeta Grove where she found the Buddha teaching the Dharma to a large assembly of villagers. Reeking of death, Kisa threw herself at the feet of the Buddha, placing her son on the earth before her. *Please sir,* she cried, *please cure my son. I beg you. I can pay you any price, my husband is a nobleman. Please sir, help me.*

Silence fell upon the crowd as the Buddha gazed down at Kisa and her son.

Please! I beg you, Kisa cries. *Can you cure my son?*

Yes, the Buddha replies. I can cure your son. I know the cure for death.

The villagers gasp in disbelief, as Kisa weeps.

I can cure your son, the Buddha says, but you must bring me a mustard seed.

Yes, yes, Kisa shouts, I will bring you a mustard seed.

But, the Buddha says, the mustard seed must come from a family that knows no death.

Kisa rises, and for the first time in two days, begins to travel the earth without her son's corpse, now riddled with maggots.

Come Ananda, the Buddha says, let us cremate Kisa's son.

In precise order, Kisa travels from house to house asking for a mustard seed.

At every house, the answer is yes.

Thank you, Kisa says, but before I take the mustard seed I must know –

Has your family known death?

At every house, the answer is yes.

Yes, Kisa, just six months ago my sister died of fever.

Yes, Kisa, last year, you remember, my father died of old age.

Yes, Kisa, my son – he died in battle.

Yes, Kisa, my mother died years ago, in child birth.

Yes, Kisa, you were there when my sister drowned in the lake, remember?

Yes, Kisa, my brother – he was executed for thievery.

Yes, Kisa, grandmother lies dying now, in her bedroom behind the curtain.

And so it went – Kisa could not find a single house that did not know death.

And so it happened – Kisa too came to know death.

My Mother's Boyfriends The Husband & Father

My mother and father both grew up in Salem, Oregon – when the town was small and rural and had only one high school. My parents were high school sweethearts – sort of. That is to say they met when my mother was in high school. My father, however, was not. For my father, the need to work took precedence over the need for school.

My father's mother died when my father was two years old – my father is unsure under what circumstances – or if he knows he's not telling. A new wife helped raise my father for a few years, but by the time he was in grade school the marriage had ended leaving my father once again motherless. For all intent and purposes, my father was fatherless as well. For my father's father was an alcoholic more concerned with securing his next drink than with securing the well-being of his children – my father being one of four with two older brothers and a younger sister.

My father dropped out of school after eighth grade and starting working to support himself and his younger sister, mostly by means of seasonal labor – fruit picking in the summer, working in the mushroom plant in the winter. The two older brothers had already moved out and if my father didn't work to bring food into the house, there would be no food in the house. My father – still clearly traumatized by the incident – still tells the story about when he almost died from eating rat poison off a dirty kitchen floor. He was four or five and hungry. There was no food in the house and no one there to feed him – even if the cupboards weren't empty, which they were.

Throughout what would have been his high school years, my father worked – determined to stay at home and take care of his sister, whom he drove to school on his way to work and picked up after school when he could. It was during these trips to school that my father met my mother, a friend of his sister's. Who's the pretty girl with auburn hair and freckles, my father asked?

They were smitten with each other from day one – my mother thin, glamorous and feisty; my father muscular, independent and charming. My father courted my mother in a manner that now feels quaint and nostalgic – taking her to eat at the local diner and to the movies at the local drive-in, where I imagine them sitting side-by-side on the bench seat of his Chevy pick-up watching John Wayne westerns and Elvis musicals, my mother dancing in her seat and my father smoking a cigarette, trying to look cool.

Recently, my father told me my mother was his one and only true love. Although there were other women before, during and after, he told me with drunken tears in his eyes, I never loved any woman as much as I loved your mother. This disclosure made my heart sink. My mother never remarried, and I couldn't help but wonder if she felt similarly toward my father. I wanted to believe that they both always loved each other, but just never managed to find a way back.

My parents married in June 1963, just days after my mother's high school graduation. Thirteen months later I was born, followed by a brother two years later and another brother a few years after that. By the time my mother was twenty-five, she had three kids

under the age of five and a husband who had joined the Army. By the time she was thirty-five, the role of Army wife and stay-at home mom had ceased to spark her imagination.

At thirty-five, my mother was still young and frisky – and bored. At thirty-seven, my father was still young and frisky – and carrying on numerous affairs. My mother had always been a screamer and a thrower, but now their screaming matches no longer ended in passionate sex, but in stewing anger and building resentment – the passion between them smothered by routine.

I remember the day I awoke to find my father sleeping on the couch, a dark brown faux velvet couch with plush faux velvet cushions. It was a weekend, a Saturday or Sunday mid-morning. I walked into the living room, still in my cotton night dress, and there he was – lying on the couch wearing nothing but his bleached white Fruit of the Loom underwear, his short, stocky body and budding beer belly partially covered with a thin white sheet. His clothes – jeans, a t-shirt, tube socks and sneakers – lie crumpled on the floor next to the couch. He was breathing heavily in his sleep, the smell of cheap beer filling the room with each outward breath. As I stood watching him sleep, I felt my stomach knot; for I knew what it meant when a father slept on a couch. It meant the end.

About a year before my father began sleeping on the couch, Elvis died. The day was hot and humid and lazy – it was August in the south. We were living in a rented house in Hicks, Louisiana, waiting for a house to open up for us on the Ft. Polk Army Base. The

Hick House, as we called it, was a ramshackle old farm house with peeling white paint and cows roaming freely in the open field behind the house. I had been wandering about outside in search of a breeze when I heard my mother cry out. I ran inside to find her sitting on the couch in front of the television console, wearing nothing but her underwear and an oversized t-shirt. She was crying. Crying as if she herself were dying. Elvis is dead, she said.

My mother and I spent that afternoon watching Elvis tributes on the television. Hour after hour we sat on that couch on a hot summer day, the air in the room stifling hot, the ceiling fan spinning in vain.

After a few months of sleeping on the couch, my father moved out of our Army-issued home on the Ft. Polk Army Base and into the barracks where he lived dorm-style with hundreds of single enlisted men. The day my father moved out was unceremonious; he left for work one morning wearing his dull grey/green Army uniform and his spit-shined black boots and just never came back.

Where's dad, I asked as we sat down for dinner.

He doesn't live here anymore, my mother replied.

On the day my father moved out, he became a husband and father in name only.

Judgment and Indictment

I receive an email from Debbie, the Discovery Clerk from the Wasco County District Attorney's office. Within twenty-four hours of my request for information, Debbie has emailed me the Judgment and Indictment. The man who killed my mother was charged with nine counts of aggravated murder. (Nine)

Debbie says he accepted a plea bargain – pled guilty to the murder and subsequently all other crimes were dismissed. But what were the other crimes?

Upon receiving the email, I glance around the room, as if I have something to hide or am embarrassed. I'm nervous. This a private moment and I am in a public space. I'm in a shared office, sitting at a desk with a view of the Benjamin Franklin Bridge, which upon completion in 1926 was the world's longest suspension bridge. I find the steely grey-blue color of the bridge calming and for a few minutes I sit watching the cars, the bicyclists, the walkers as they cross the Delaware River connecting Philadelphia and Camden.

I return to the email, to the attached file: 20130215155728930.pdf. I stare at the computer screen for several minutes. Yes. No. Maybe. No. Ok.

I open the document. My eyes scan the words, not really focusing on anything in particular, but then my eyes land on the word "choke." I immediately close the document. Log out of my email. Get up from the desk and walk away.

Chiron 2060

Chiron 2060 was discovered by Charles T. Kowal in Pasadena “a little bit before 10am.” Initially categorized as an asteroid and classified as a minor planet, it later exhibited qualities and behaviors of a comet. This dual personality confounded astronomers who responded by creating a new classification of objects into which to place this unique cosmic discovery. Thus, the category of (cosmic) Centaurs was created, of which Chiron 2060 was the first to belong.*

Chiron 2060 crosses orbits with two large planets, Saturn and Uranus, thus making the orbit of Chiron rather erratic and unstable. Cosmic Centaurs display a diversity of color that challenges simple categorization of surface composition. The surface color of Chiron is predominately blue.

Chiron 2060 was discovered in 1977 – the year of Star Wars, the Sex Pistols and the Clash, of Apple Incorporated, of the twenty-five hour New York City Blackout. It was also the year the U.S. government gave the Panama Canal back to Panama. Jimmy Carter was our President, granting pardon to draft dodgers of the Vietnam War. Gas was 65 cents per gallon. The Bee Gees had a hit:

How Deep is Your Love.

1977 was also the year Elvis died, my mom cried, and the disco balls kept right on spinning.

*subsequent notable (cosmic) Centaurs include: Pholus, Nessus, Asbolus and Chariklo.

Subject Line**Re: Message from "RNP154D99"**

Hi Dawn, the DA is out until next week so I wanted to send you the Judgment and Indictment and let you know that this did not go to trial as you can see he took a plea offer and Plead Guilty to your Mother's Murder and other crimes where dismissed. He was sentenced to 30 years.

Please let me know what else you would like, as we have 5 boxes so maybe just talking with someone that remembers the case would be better.

I spoke with our Library and gave them the dates so hopefully they will have newspaper stories relating to this also.

Please do not hesitate to contact our office if we can help with more information.

Sincerely,
Debbie Nicholson
Discovery Clerk

I wonder:

Is this the number associated with my mother's murder case?
Or has my request to view the files of the case been assigned its own number?
The number is shocking, dehumanizing – persons reduced to numbers.
It conjures up images of serial numbers tattooed on the forearms of Auschwitz prisoners.
A symbol of brutality – and yet, for those who survived, a testament to their resilience.

I wonder what Debbie was thinking when she wrote "Mother's Murder" in capital letters.
So formal – like the title of a grade school essay "My Mother's Murder" by Dawn.

5 boxes. Jesus Christ. 5 boxes of what?

I imagine paper files:

police reports, crime scene photos, autopsy reports, court records, sentencing papers

And what else?

sealed plastic bags of my mother's clothing, ripped and torn and covered in blood?

an envelope of costume jewelry – tarnished rings, dangling earrings and a gold necklace?

the contents of her pants pockets – a cigarette lighter and hard peppermint candies?

I notice Debbie's title: "Discovery Clerk." The title makes me chuckle – a kind of awkward chuckle akin to nervous laughter.

At Seventeen (17)

From birth (0) to age three (3),
 I live in Salem, Oregon.
 I have no memory of breast milk,
 Of baby food or
 Solid food.

From age three (3) to five (5),
 I live in Ft. Mead, Maryland.
 (Dad now in the Army)
 I have no memory of food –
 No memory of anything at all during those years.
 Although I'm told one night I awoke crying
 And saved the family from dying in a house fire.

From age five (5) to eight (8),
 I live in Schofield Barracks, Hawaii.
 First food memory:
 Eating a cheese sandwich my mom made for me –
 Wonder Bread, mayonnaise and a single slice of Kraft American.
 I also remember eating bananas my mom cuts down from the banana tree in our yard.
 And pineapple rings from a pineapple I watch her steal from a pineapple field.
 (I watch from the back seat of our VW station wagon as dad pulls over along the road
 side and mom runs into the field and comes back fingers bloody, pineapple in hand.)

From age eight (8) to ten (10),
 I live in Ft. Riley, Kansas.
 I walk home from school in winter
 Across a field a snow.
 Once home, mom makes me hot cocoa
 And cinnamon sugar toast.
 I eat sitting on a chair in front of a warmed oven,
 My steaming stocking feet resting on the open oven door.
 Leaning against the kitchen counter, mom, coffee cup in one hand, cigarette in the other.

From age ten (10) to thirteen (13),
 I live in Nuremburg, Germany.
 I don't remember eating anything my mother cooked.

I do remember eating:

bratwurst on a crusty white roll with spicy brown mustard,
apple strudel after school from the neighborhood pastry shop,
coke gummies and gummy bears, til I had a tummy ache,
weiner schnitzel and pomme frites from the beer tent at Oktoberfest.

From age thirteen (13) to fifteen (15),

I live in Ft. Polk, Louisiana.

A family in crisis and a marriage in distress lead to overcompensation in the kitchen:

pork chops, mashed potatoes and creamed corn,
pinto bean stew with ham hock and crispy tortillas,
pot roast with onions, potatoes and carrots,
chicken and dumplings with onions, celery and carrots,
liver and onions, with extra onions,
frito salad – a bowl of fritos mixed with taco meat, lettuce, tomato and cheese,
hungarian goulash and garlic bread,
swiss steak, fried potatoes and canned green beans,
breakfast for dinner – buttermilk pancakes, pork link sausage and scrambled eggs.

Until, that is, dad moves out. Then we, my brothers and I, are left to forage for ourselves.

From age fifteen (15) to seventeen (17),

I live in Lincoln City, Oregon.

(Dad still in Ft. Polk, Mom now a single, working mother.)

Mom cooks from boxes and cans:

hamburger helper,
tuna helper,
rice-a-roni,
macaroni and cheese,
canned chili,
boiled hot dogs.

Overly thin and perpetually exhausted, mom cooks but rarely eats.

At seventeen (17), I leave for college.

I don't remember the last meal I eat at home

With my mom.

I do remember driving away hungry,

Mom standing in the driveway,

Smiling and nodding goodbye,

Coffee cup in one hand, cigarette in the other.

The District Attorney

I receive a letter from Eric L. Nisley, District Attorney for Wasco County, Oregon. The letter is a response to my request for public records related to my mother's murder and a request to speak directly with the District Attorney about the case.

February 19, 2013

Ms. Dawn Walsh
261 W. Walnut Lane
Philadelphia, PA 19144

RE: ----- (name of the man who killed my mother)

Dear Ms. Walsh:

I stop and wonder:

Why does the letter read, RE: ----- (name of the man who killed my mother)

Why doesn't the letter read, RE: Mary Cecile Walsh?

Why does my mother continue to appear invisible – even when I ask for her by name?

patience: the antidote to anger

i miss....

my mother coming to visit. bringing me stuff i don't need and don't want. like a micro-wave oven, an acrylic sweater, gold-plated jewelry. like a color television set, a case of soda pop, discounted baby clothes for the baby she's been wanting me to have since i was eighteen. i miss taking my mom out to dinner. to places she would never go on her own. like a sushi bar, a vegan cafe, the top of the seattle space needle, a moroccan restaurant where we sit on floor cushions and eat stewed lamb with our bare hands. i miss my mother buying me stuff. stuff I don't need, but want. stuff she buys for me because she loves me. like a beautiful hand-crafted pottery bowl from the solstice fair in fremont. like a pair of sandals made of rope from the same solstice fair in fremont (ugliest sandals she's ever seen, but she buys them for me anyway). i miss my mother coming to visit. i miss taking her out dancing at the vogue. where everyone wears black. everyone. including my mother, who dresses in a black vinyl mini shirt, and in the dark looks younger than i do. i miss buying my mother drinks, watching her sip vodka through tiny red straws. i miss dancing with my mother until one in the morning when the lights come on and she says, but i'm not done dancing. i miss eating corn pancakes with my mother at two in the morning. i miss waking up with a hangover and my mother taking care of me, even though her hangover is worse than mine. because that is the kind of mother she is. i miss

my mother.

The District Attorney Part 2

Dear Ms. Walsh:

I am in receipt of your letter dated February 15, 2013. We currently have a large amount of documents in our possession and copying them would present a significant expense. Please advise if you would like to come and inspect them at some point in the future.

I look up from the letter and gaze out the window.

It's still winter.

The ground hard, the sky grey, the branches empty, the squirrels asleep, the birds hungry.

My Mother's Boyfriends

The Lover

Remember the days of the land-line phone? Not the early days, when a house had but one, either sitting on a table in the hallway or hanging on a wall in the kitchen, but the latter days, when a house had a phone in nearly every room – on the table in the hallway *and* on a wall in the kitchen *and* on an end table in living room *and* on the bedside table of anyone over the age of twelve.

Remember when someone in the family could be on the phone in the privacy of their bedroom, and someone else in the family could pick up the phone in the living room and secretly listen in on the conversation?

One summer afternoon, I came home to an empty house, or so I thought until I heard my mother's muffled voice. She was in her bedroom talking on the phone. I was curious. She was laughing, why? Who was making her laugh? As quietly as possible, I lifted the receiver of the living room phone, holding down the receiver button with my finger and slowing, carefully releasing it to avoid the tell-tale click.

My mother was having phone sex with some strange, unknown man. The moment I realized this, I let out a scream, more like a war cry, but really most like the wail of a banshee signaling an impending death.

My mother came flying out of her room, came running down the hallway as I ran toward the front door. I was in fight or flight mode, choosing flight. I felt so hurt, wounded, deceived, angry. I couldn't fully process what I'd just heard, all I knew was that I had to get out, had to get away from my mother, who in one split-second of recognition, had become a vile, whore of a woman.

My mother and I reach the front door at the same time. I'm yelling obscenities at her, yelling at her to get away from me. I try to open the door. She pushes it closed, tries to keep me from leaving. A physical struggle ensues. *Let me out!* I scream. *I hate you!* Startled, my mom gives way. I flee, running as fast as if I were being pursued by wild game. I run through one cul-de-sac after another until arriving at the door step of my best friend's house, where I stay for several days, unable to face the woman who is quickly becoming unrecognizable as the mother I had always known her to be.

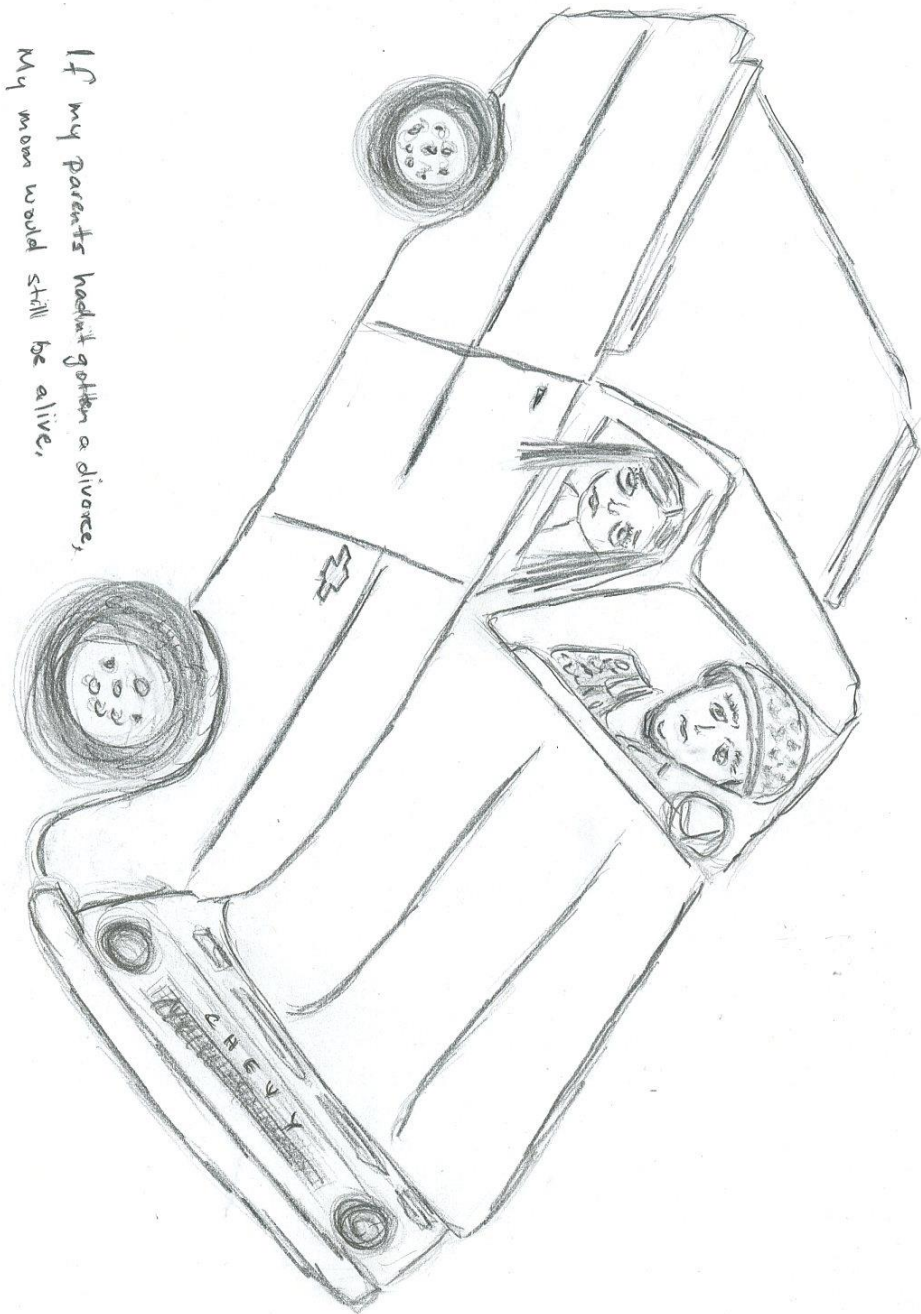
At that time, I didn't understand my mother's desire – her desperate need – to live a fuller, more passionate life. I didn't understand her longing for a carefree youth she never had. The eldest child of alcoholic parents who worked evenings (driving taxi and bartending), my mother was charged, at an early age, with tending to her four younger siblings – three brothers and a sister. At eighteen, she had married my father – not knowing he would soon enlist in the Army. Not knowing that at age thirty-five she would be desperate for sex, desperate for a life, any life other than the one she was living. How could she have known? How was I to understand?

My family was unraveling. I was fourteen and my dad didn't live with us anymore. My mother didn't seem to want to be a mother anymore. She had taken a job in town as a waitress and often worked nights. I'm pretty sure her lover was someone she worked with at the restaurant. My older brother, who was in middle school, became uncontrollably angry, tempering his anger by sliding into an abyss of pot and alcohol and staying out all night. My youngest brother, just a babe with milk teeth, started living at his friend's house at the other end of the cul-de-sac as there were no parents at our house to look after him. As for me, I had recently been raped and had told no one and had begun to give myself freely to any boy who came along. As for me, all I knew was that one-by-one my family was disappearing before my eyes, and nobody seemed to care.

murder v.

to kill someone [Mary Cecile Walsh] unlawfully and with premeditation

In 2012, nearly 500,000 people were murdered worldwide.



If my parents hadn't gotten a divorce,
My mom would still be alive.

From Lorna

The postman delivers an envelope of newspaper articles pertaining to the murder of my mother. The envelope has been sent from Lorna at The Dalles Wasco County Library. The envelope is thick – a quarter of an inch – thus requiring extra postage – three stamps instead of one, two of the American flag (Liberty Forever) and one of the Statue of Liberty. The postmark reads: Portland, OR 972 FEB 22 PM 03. The meter number running along the bottom of the envelope: 1914433273.

The return address is from a stamp, ink once black now faded to light grey from use:

THE DALLES-WASCO CO. LIBRARY
722 Court St.
The Dalles, OR 97058

The word LIBRARY is smudged, as is the zip code.

My name and address has been handwritten in black ink, presumably by Lorna. While writing my last name, she made a couple of errors – the L has been written over a dab of White Out and the S is thick with ink, masking the erroneous letter beneath. Lorna's handwriting is similar to my mother's in that she too wrote with a combination of lower and upper case letters.

DAwn WALSH
261 W. WALNuT LANE
PHiLADeLPHia, PA 19144

The envelope has been sealed with a strip of one inch clear packing tape that wraps around to the front of the envelope, touching the return address on the left and the stamp of the Statue of Liberty on the right.

Area Codes

When I open the envelope of newspaper articles mailed to me by Lorna, I find a handwritten note paper-clipped to the front sheet. The note is written on a piece of library stationery – thin, onion-skin paper that I associate with secretaries from the 1950s and 60s. The stationery letterhead includes the library’s phone number. Lorna has crossed out the 503 area code and written in (541).

The area code system, as developed by AT&T and Bell Laboratories, went into effect in 1947. States that had a single area code were assigned three digit codes with 0 as the middle number, such as 503 for Oregon. States that had more than one area code distributed to them were given three digit codes with 1 as the middle number, such as 916 and 213 for California. The first and third digits were allotted according to population density in the city or region the area code was going to, with the most populated areas getting the lowest numbers. The New York City area, for example, was assigned 212. The rationale for this “low number/high population” scheme was based on the fact that phones had rotary dials in those days. Lower numbers resulted in shorter “dial pulls” so it was reasoned that the regions with the most people in them should require the least “work” to call. (<http://www.area-codes.com/area-code-history.asp>)

From 1947 to 1995 Oregon had but one area code: 503. In 1995, due to increasing demand in telephone services, as well as convoluted issues related to deregulation, Oregon was assigned a new area code. While 503 remained the area code for the greater Portland and Salem regions, all other parts of Oregon, including The Dalles, were assigned a new area code: 541.

Through simple mathematical calculation, I have determined that the note from Lorna was written on stationery eighteen years old – at minimum, but in all likelihood many years older.

In The Dalles, change is designed to arrive slowly and in small doses.

THE DALLES-WASCO COUNTY LIBRARY

East Seventh Place and Court Street

The Dalles, Oregon 97058

Telephone (503) 296-2815

(503)

DAWN,

I'M SORRY THIS HAS TAKEN SO
LONG & I'M SORRY THE COPIES
ARE NOT BETTER.

I TALKED TO THE DA'S OFFICE
& LEARNED THERE WAS NO TRIAL.
SHE GAVE ME THE DATE WHEN
CRAVEN WAS SENTENCED. SHE
SAID YOU COULD GET THE POLICE
REPORT. I'M SORRY FOR THE LOSS OF
YOUR MOTHER.

LORNA

Chiron

The thoughtful, reflective and wise centaur known for his knowledge of medicine and gifts as a teacher. The acclaimed healer who unable to cure his own wound happily exchanged his immortality in order to end his eternal suffering.

In astrology, Chiron represents the seemingly incurable wound. Nothing less than the grand wound of human existence, of incarnate being itself. For to be human is to suffer. Is to endure life's slings and arrows. There's no getting out of the way. No hiding behind a tree or under a bush. Suffering is inevitable. It is the flip side of life; it is life. To accept an embodied life is to accept suffering, to accept death. Immortality? It doesn't exist. Breathe in death that life implies. Breathe out illusions of happily ever after.

The appearance of Chiron in a natal chart points to the place, in one sense, where we each carry our own piece of the collective wound of embodied existence. In another sense, Chiron indicates the place of our own particular and persistent suffering. The place of our own chronic vulnerabilities shaped by our own unique biographies, especially the aspects of our biographies connected to a profound wounding related to the loss of the mother.

My Mother's Boyfriends

The Bartender

I often saw my mother at two-thirty in the morning, at the one café in the seaside town of Lincoln City that stayed open to serve hungry teenagers and their parents. Not, however, at the same table, or even in the same section of the room. We self-segregated as we selected our tables. We teenagers, drunk and stoned, sat at tables in the front close to the windows where we could watch for those still out cruising in their Mustangs or Novas or Camaros or Luvs – Chevy beating Ford three to one as the town's reigning car maker of choice. Our parents, also drunk and stoned, sat at tables in the back close to the kitchen where they could pretend not to notice their own intoxicated kids out on the town well past midnight.

We, my mother and two brothers, had moved to Lincoln City, Oregon from Louisiana sometime after my father had moved out of our house and my mother realized she couldn't continue to stay in an Army-issued house without an Army-issued husband. We moved to Lincoln City because that was where my mother's parents were living, where they were managing an oceanfront hotel, and where we lived before my mother found us our own house – a blue house on a hill with a fireplace, wall-to-wall carpet and a view of the ocean.

Upon moving to Lincoln City, my mother got a waitressing job at the Inn at Spanish Head, a ten-story resort built so close to the ocean's edge that every winter the first floor would close due to a flood of sea water and an invasion of sea kelp. The restaurant where

my mother worked was on the tenth floor, as was the adjacent bar – both with a wall of windows looking down upon a beach of driftwood and out upon a sea of grey.

At some point, long after my mother worked there as a waitress, The Inn at Spanish Head became host to KATU Channel 2's Live Coast Camera, which broadcasts on-line views looking north to Cascade Head and south to the mouth of Siletz Bay.



The view, looking south, at the time of this writing:

Saturday, March 16, 2013, 12:07pm PST.

This on-line image refreshes approximately every 7 minutes.

To see what the central Oregon coast looks like now, visit

<http://www.spanishhead.com/site/katu.html>

It was while working as a waitress that my mother met the bartender who also worked at the Inn at Spanish Head. I never properly met the bartender, but I saw him often with my

mother at two-thirty in the morning at the one café in town that stayed open to serve hungry teenagers and their parents, and the lovers of their parents.

At least I knew what this boyfriend looked like – this was progress as I never saw my mother's first boyfriend, only heard his voice as he and my mother engaged in phone sex. The bartender was handsome in all the stereotypical ways – he was tall and broad-shouldered, had dark hair and an easy smile. I certainly thought he was handsome. He had a mysterious allure about him, a relaxed ease that I suppose one has to have to be a successful bartender.

At the café, I would watch him, out of the corner of my eye, as he sat casually next to my mother in a booth in the back, sometimes with an arm draped over her shoulder, sometimes not. My mother seemed happy with the bartender. I often heard her laughter rise above the din of the café. But my mother never brought the bartender home to meet us, her children. Maybe, I used to think, the bartender didn't want to meet us. Maybe he didn't like children. Maybe he didn't want a girlfriend who had kids. I realize now that I've always assumed it was the bartender who didn't want. But now I wonder – maybe it was my mother who kept the bartender at bay, not wanting to get tied down again so soon, so soon after finally being released.

The Man Who Killed My Mother

It's been three weeks since I received the envelope of newspaper articles from Lorna, and I still have not opened it.

Tomorrow. Tomorrow I will open the envelope and read the articles. Tomorrow I will stop calling the man who killed my mother, "the man who killed my mother." Tomorrow I will start calling him by his given name. Tomorrow I will start writing his name in my notes, typing his name on these pages. Not just his initials (JPC), but his full name. Tomorrow I will say his name aloud. Tomorrow I will, I will not let his name frighten me any longer.

Phyla

Chiron's mother abandoned Chiron at birth.

Horried by Chiron's very existence,

A half-man/half-beast sired by rape,

Phyla begged the Gods to turn her into a tree.

A Linden Tree

Trunk thick and sturdy

Branches that divide and subdivide into finer and finer twigs

Flower buds the shape and color of fresh sweet peas

Buds that awaken into clusters of pale yellow dew drops with bright yellow stamens

A sweet fragrance, perfect for perfume

A tangy taste, perfect for afternoon tea, good for colds

Heart-shaped leaves that offer cool shade from a searing sun

Heart-shaped leaves that sway to the refrain of an autumn breeze

Today

is the tomorrow I wrote about yesterday. Today I will open the envelope of newspaper articles pertaining to my mother's murder mailed to me by Lorna of The Dalles Wasco County Library. Today I will open the envelope and read the articles. Today I will stop calling the man who killed by mother, "the man who killed my mother." Today I will start calling him by his given name. Today I will start writing his name in my notes, typing his name on these pages. Not just his initials (JPC), but his full name. Today I will say his name aloud. Today I will, I will not let his name frighten me any longer.

John Patrick Craven.

John Patrick Craven is the name of the man who killed my mother.

John Patrick Craven *is* the man who killed my mother.

murderer *n.*

a person [John Patrick Craven] who commits murder

assassin, butcher, cutthroat, hit man, ice man, infanticide, mass murderer, ripper, serial killer

tweet: #murderer

google search image: murderer

(warning: results may cause nausea, vomiting, primal fear)

Chiron Return

Chiron has a fifty year orbit. Next year I turn fifty, which means that on my fiftieth birthday Chiron will return to the place in the sky it occupied at the time of my birth. Unless I live to be a hundred (a one-in-seven chance*), this Chiron return will be a once in a lifetime event.

A Chiron return is the perfect opportunity to revisit the origins of the seemingly incurable wound. Astrologers usually mean this in a metaphorical sense. Figuratively speaking: How has your life developed from the time of the Chironic wound?

Do you waddle through field and dale asking, are you my mother?

Do you embody the role of town mom, keeping everyone and everything in order?

Do you stay on the run, trying to hide the hurt?

Do you huff like a bull, seeing red even when red is nowhere to be found?

In addition to the metaphorical, my Chiron return is guiding me toward a literal return to the scene of the crime. I can't explain to you logically or rationally or reasonably why, twenty-one years after my mother was murdered, I feel compelled to return to The Dalles. To meet with the District Attorney, to review the contents of five cardboard boxes pertaining to the crime, to sit in the courtroom where John Patrick Craven received a life sentence, to stand on the sidewalk in front of the house in which my mother was killed. I can't tell you why other than it has something to do with the unseen, but surely felt, cosmic influences of Chiron.

*Based solely upon my year of birth (1964). By comparison, girls born in 2013 (in the western, developed world) have a one-in-three chance of living to be a hundred.

**AGGRAVATED MURDER
COUNT I**

The said defendant, [John Patrick Craven, age 22], on or about November 7, 1991, in Wasco County, State of Oregon, did unlawfully and intentionally cause the death of another human being, to-wit: Mary [Cecile] Walsh [my mother, age 46], by **choking and stabbing her** in the neck with a sharp instrument, in the course of intentional torture.

[intentional torture]

Longing

I awake to find a single feather lying on the wooden floor of my bedroom. The feather escaped sometime in the night – either from a down pillow or the duvet. The feather curls slightly upward, as down feathers tend to do. I stand barefoot looking down at the feather, but I don't pick it up. Instead, I walk past it, into the hallway to the bathroom where I sit down on the toilet and pee.

A feather floating in the breeze is a central metaphor in *Forrest Gump*:

I don't know if we each have a destiny, or if we're all just floating around accidental-like on a breeze, but I, I think maybe it's both. Maybe both is happening at the same time.

A few days after finding the single feather lying on the wooden floor of my bedroom, I go into the bedroom to vacuum. I had forgotten about the feather – but it's still here, having migrated under the bedside table where it now lies next to a mote of dust and cat hair. I have an urge to pick it up. To pick it up and place it on the bedside table. To pick it up, place it on the bedside table and save it as a sign. A sign of what I'm not sure, but somehow a sign connected to the dream, to my mother, to me, to my life, to my destiny, to the unknown mysteries of life. But to pick it up and save it feels like a cliché – and I have been trained (not always successfully) to avoid clichés.

I remember what my friend Christine has written about building an authentic life:

An authentic life will not be built on what we think ("I've escaped the city") or of what we buy (a pine bench for the entryway, the perfect work pants). Not of what we say ("buy local" and "live in the moment") or even what we find (feathers, shells). An authentic life will be built, at least in part, of ordinary verbs: wake, plant, dig, mend, walk, lift, listen,

season, note, bake, chose, store, stack, harvest, give, stretch, measure, wash, help, haul, sleep.

To which I add: vacuum.

I run the vacuum over the feather. The vacuum sucks up the feather in a flash so quick there is no time to change my mind. No time to second guess my decision to just let it go, to just let it go without clinging to it for meaning – even though, I know, I will continue to long for meaning long after the feather has gone.

**AGGRAVATED MURDER
COUNT II**

The defendant [John Patrick Craven, age 22], on or about November 7, 1991, in Wasco County, State of Oregon, did unlawfully and intentionally commit **Burglary** in the First Degree....and personally and intentionally caused the death of another human being to-wit: Mary [Cecile] Walsh, a person who was not a participant in the crime, by choking and stabbing her in the neck with a sharp instrument.

[my mother, who was not a participant in the crime]

Seven Out of Ten

Sometimes, for some people, Chiron is just another random force in their astrological birth chart, not necessarily connected to anything else. In my case, however, Chiron is *directly* connected to: Pluto, Venus, Mars, the Moon, the Sun, Neptune and Jupiter. This is an unusually high number of connections – seven out of a possible ten (only Mercury, Saturn and Uranus are exempt).

What this means:

The influences of Chiron as representative of the seemingly incurable wound, especially as related to the loss of the mother, figure prominently in my biography.

What is remarkable here is that these connections were present at the time of my birth – they did not come into being after my mother was murdered. In other words, I came into this life, into this particular physical manifestation, with these connections to Chiron.

Any astrologer who looked at my chart at the time of my birth would have been able to say:

A very traumatic and surprising event will cause a profound wound in this child.
The exact nature of the event will reveal itself in time.
The event will, however, most certainly involve the mother.
Make no mistake; the story of this wound is present.
The story of this wound is embedded in this child's very being.

**AGGRAVATED MURDER
COUNT III**

The defendant [John Patrick Craven, age 22], on or about November 7, 1991, in Wasco County, State of Oregon, did unlawfully and intentionally commit the crime of **Sexual Abuse** in the First Degree....and personally and intentionally did cause the death of another human being to-wit: Mary [Cecile] Walsh [just under 100 pounds], a person who was not a participant in the crime, by choking and stabbing her in the neck with a sharp ~~object~~ instrument.

[clerk error: instrument, not object]

My Mother's Boyfriends

The Car Mechanic

After the bartender, there was the car mechanic. This I found extremely distressing. The bartender had been handsome in all the stereotypical ways – tall and broad-shouldered, dark hair and an easy smile. He had a mysterious allure about him, a relaxed ease. He made my mom laugh. I liked him, even though I never met him.

The car mechanic, on the other hand, was – well – a car mechanic. He was grimy and greasy, even, it seemed, when he was clean. For reasons unknown, this is the boyfriend my mother decided to bring home. As a teenager overly concerned with appearances, I found my mother's choice appalling. Not only did the car mechanic appear perpetually dirty, he was not handsome in any of the stereotypical ways – he was short and slight of build, had a pointy nose and crooked teeth. His hair was disheveled, and not in a fresh sea breeze-tossed fashion, but in a dirty un-brushed and un-washed kind of way.

Every year along the Oregon coast, warm summer breezes give way to cool autumn winds give way to fierce winter gales. Kite flying gives way to extreme wind surfing gives way to “get inside and batten down the hatches.” Gales are named according to their strength. There is the near gale (32-38 mph), the fresh gale (39-46 mph), the strong gale (47-54 mph) and the whole gale (55-63 mph). After that we move into hurricane wind classifications, although strong and whole gales can include hurricane-like wind gusts up to and over 100 mph – gusts strong enough to rip off new roofs, demolish old

barns, topple tracker trailers, knock down telephone poles and flip trailer homes upside down.

The winter my mother met the car mechanic was the winter a gale wind blew the driver's side door of my mother's car so far open it bent backwards onto itself, not unlike a double-jointed elbow. My mother had just parked her car, a mid-1970s brown Ford Pinto station wagon, on the top of the hill in the employee lot of the Inn at Spanish Head. She opened the door to get out at the precise moment a violent wind gust tore the door from her hand nearly ripping the door completely off its hinges and threatening to suck my mother out of the car and carry her out to sea. The door of the car was bent backwards so severely that my mother was unable to bend it forward. Enter the car mechanic.

Like the bartender, the only time I saw the car mechanic was in the early morning hours. Only in this case, it wasn't at the café but at our house when I would come home after drinking and driving on dark and dangerously winding roads. They would be in the kitchen, my mother and the car mechanic, making fried egg sandwiches. I had to walk by the kitchen to get to my bedroom and so would see them, drunk and giddy and flirty. Their bodies sloppily nudging each other as my mom flipped eggs in the pan. I remember desperately wanting one of those hot and greasy fried egg sandwiches, or even a simple bowl of cold cereal, but the whole scene was just too awkward. I still wasn't accustomed to a mother who was also a sexual being – a sexual being who was acting, it seemed at the time, like a drunken teenager bringing home the bad boy when her parents were out of town.

**AGGRAVATED MURDER
COUNT IV**

The defendant [John Patrick Craven, age 22], on or about November 7, 1991, in Wasco County, State of Oregon, did unlawfully and intentionally commit the crime of **Sexual Penetration with a Foreign Object** in the First Degree....and personally and intentionally did cause the death of another human being to-wit: Mary [Cecile] Walsh, a person who was not a participant in the crime, by choking and stabbing her in the neck with a sharp instrument.

[foreign object not identified]

Anger

Several months have passed since my mother's murder. Heida, my therapist, is sitting in the chair, a modern chair of Scandinavian design. Her legs are crossed, a yellow notepad balancing on her knee. I'm sitting across from her, on the couch, also of Scandinavian design. My shoes are off, stocking feet tucked under my body.

Let's talk about anger, Heida says. How are you dealing with your feelings of anger?

I don't feel angry, I reply.

Your mother was murdered. You must feel some anger.

I don't.

Kübler-Ross Stages of Grief: denial, anger, bargaining, depression, acceptance.

I'm not in denial. I know my mother was murdered. I just don't feel angry.

Do you feel anger toward the man who killed your mother?

No.

I want you to try and find your anger. Just try.

I try. Late that night, while lying in bed with the lights off, this is what I imagine:

I'm standing on a dusty dirt path at the tree line in the Cascade Mountains of Washington. Above me on the path – steel grey mountains, their slicing pinnacles reaching for the sky. Below me on the path – a forest of pine trees, dense and fragrant.

Standing next to me on the path – a man, the man who killed my mother. He’s a non-descript man. I don’t know what he looks like, and I don’t try to make anything up. He’s just a man. Average height. Average weight. Average build. Without really looking at him, I reach out and give him a push. He doesn’t resist, just falls easily to the ground, landing face down at my feet. A small plume of dust rises and settles on the toes of my hiking boots. I look down at my hiking boots, creased with wear but with laces still bright blue. I look down at the man lying in the dirt at my feet. For a moment, I am still. Then, I lift my right foot and kick him in the torso. Firm, but not too hard. He begins to roll down the path. More small plumes of dust. I kick him again in the torso. Again, he rolls. Easy. No resistance. I keep kicking. Right foot. Left foot. Right foot. Left foot. He keeps rolling. We’re in the forest now, on a path carpeted in pine needles. The path curiously smooth, devoid of rocks or fallen branches. He’s rolling faster now. I start to run to keep up, to keep kicking. Pine needles are collecting in his hair, on his shirt and pants, in my socks. I keep kicking, he keeps rolling, the pine needles keep collecting. The trees are dense around us. The light dim. The path narrow. The air warm and quiet. Kicking and rolling, kicking and rolling, kicking and rolling. Then into the quiet grows the sound of rushing water. The trees begin to clear, the path begins to widen. The sound of rushing water grows louder until the carpet of pine needles gives way to the muddy banks of a river. The air turns cold, the mist off the white-tipped rapids clings to my eyelashes, gives me a chill. The man who killed my mother gets stuck in the mud. I have to kick harder. I kick as hard as I can until the mud releases its grip. I then kick one last time as his body rolls into the river, creating a splash of water ice cold on my shins. There I stand, wet and

cold and covered in the mud, as I watch the river carry away the man who killed my mother.

At our next session, Heida is sitting in the chair, a modern chair of Scandinavian design. Her legs are crossed, a yellow notepad balancing on her knee. I'm sitting across from her, on the couch, also of Scandinavian design. My shoes are off, stocking feet tucked under my body.

How did that feel? Heida asks. *Did it feel good to kick him? To watch him float away?*

No, I reply. It didn't feel like anything. It felt like watching a silent movie from a faraway place.

**AGGRAVATED MURDER
COUNT V**

The defendant [John Patrick Craven, age 22], on or about November 7, 1991, in Wasco County, State of Oregon, did unlawfully and intentionally commit the crime of **Robbery** in the First Degree....and personally and intentionally did cause the death of another human being to-wit: Mary [Cecile] Walsh, a person who was not a participant in the crime, by choking and stabbing her in the neck with a sharp instrument.

[he stole her white 1988 Chevrolet Beretta]

My Mother's Boyfriends

The Suspect

I wasn't the only one who immediately suspected my mother's boyfriend, Jim, of being the one who murdered her. We all thought it, only nobody spoke it. To this day, when I think of Jim, I feel a big ball of sadness weighing heavy in my stomach like wet bread dough, dense and sticky. I feel sad because I know Jim truly loved my mother. But instead of inviting him into our family to share the burden of grief, we ostracized him as if he were a murderous criminal. As if he were the one who brutally killed our mother, our daughter, our sister, our aunt.

In those early weeks following my mother's murder, when nobody really knew what had happened, when we were all so confused and looking for answers, when we were in shock and walking numb through our days, we looked for someone to blame. Jim was the closest, easiest target. He was defenseless and alone. Ultimately, so were we, but we didn't want to acknowledge that truth to ourselves. So instead, we transferred our fears onto Jim.

Truth be told though, I found Jim suspect years before my mother was killed. My mother began dating Jim when I was a sophomore in college. He was but a few years older than me and a good fifteen years my mother's junior. Why would a man so young want to date a woman so much older? Why would a woman of forty want to date a man in his mid-twenties? What childhood traumas were they each playing out with one another? I didn't trust either of them, but it was a lot easier and much less painful not to trust Jim.

aggravated murder *n.*

murder accompanied by other circumstances, such as in the case of my mother's murder:

- choking and stabbing

- burglary

- sexual abuse

- sexual penetration with a foreign object

- robbery

- concealing the identity of a perpetrator of the crime of

 - burglary

 - sexual abuse

 - sexual penetration with a foreign object

 - robbery

metta: loving-kindness, the antidote to violence