

Fidelity

by Chanel Dubofsky

The night before leaving, we have French toast and red wine in Matthew's kitchen, our packs and sleeping bags and tents surrounding us, looming like golems. Because we're nervous, and a little drunk, the conversation inevitably turns to grammar.

"I'm sure I learned about adverbs," Topher says, steering his toast ends around his plate, "but I couldn't pick one out in a sentence."
"Oh, Toph. That is sad." I lean across the table and the ends of my hair drag through a puddle of syrup and butter. "What will happen to us on this trip?" Matthew says, in his voice that's earnest without meaning to be. "We will die. How will we die? Horribly. Horribly is the adverb."

At the beginning of our last semester of college, when the rest of us were buying textbooks, Topher went into town and bought ten small rubber ducks, the kind you'd put around your bathtub. "What are they for?" I asked as the clerk rang them up. "You'll see," he said, and stuck the brown paper bag into the inside pocket of his coat. When we got back to the apartment, he made a row of them on the window sill in the kitchen. "I'm lining up my ducks." He grinned at me like he'd just discovered plutonium, and pointed to the duck with a lumpy plastic bow tie. "This one is for our road trip."

The three of us stare at the duck now, on the table amongst the dishes. It's dirty, from moving apartments and states, the pupil in its left eye is rubbed off. Matthew puts his hand on my knee, and at the back of my throat, I feel a quickening-sharp, shivery, metallic.

We set the alarm clocks for 6 am. (Alarm one: Kurt Cobain singing. Back up alarm: Dinosaurs shrieking.) Topher lays down on the couch and shuts his eyes, crossing his arms across his chest like he's

dead. "Leah Bee," he says, as I pass him on my way into Matthew's room, "we are going to have a fucking adventure."

In his bed, Matthew and I lay beside each other, arms and legs spread out like starfish, ankles hooked together. We're that perfect kind of drunk, warm and giddy and bright eyed. "I love you," he says, his breath infusing the air with the smell of lemon and wine. "How?" I whisper back. "Like an adverb," he says. "Madly."

