

Farm

by Corey Zeller

The green shot of the earth. The coffee in squares of ice. The walled. The shed in the back completely covered in ivy. A rocking chair painted twenty times in fifty years. An arm missing. Your *thank you*, which sounds nothing like that. Something you said by her small aquarium that day. All that blue rock of the bottom. The gray shape against the glass. A gill spilled open.

A first wound. Logs of split wood under new snow. A toy phone you bought the baby girl. The eyes that bobbed up and down when you pulled the cord across the wood floors. A fake ring. Up and down and the shrubbery outside roped for the winter. A door off its hinges, leaned against the house. And what was that story?

A refrigerator fell down your uncle's steps. His coat covered with grain. And you liked holding that coat in your lap didn't you? Like another badly-drawn villain the anvil got the better of. Balanced on his pinky finger, his nose. And somehow the rocking chair moved out there in the wind. Leaves tumbled below it.

And the wool your uncle shaved from the lambs. The electric lights extension-corded about the rafters. The tufts of white noise covering the mud. How we'd volunteer ourselves to help with the work. Those mornings, so cold you could pour coffee from your thermos into a tray, put it into cubes for the baby girl to suck.

And even back then we knew borders went further than all those acres. The town just a series of things. And you kept repeating North to me in the dark, below the red quilt you made in high school.

NORTH:

In full, the speech of try, of free, of quoting old thinkers and realizing they were wrong.

NORTH:

How every time the storms came, pieces of roof were in the grass. We wanted to be anyone but the middle, but all this gray came in pieces. Like a ferry of clouds, a clot, a birdbath anything but a birdbath. Even the finches gone, the sheets soaked.

And you were teaching me to live my life a joke inside a joke. The populations of you seemed endless and unbroken and I couldn't decide if your mouth was a chalice or a padlock. The snow below us crushed like aspirin. You tossed feed to the air from a barrel the way a movie cowboy tries to blind the black hat who got the jump on him. And the dark chickens went on clawing and ducking. You made some kind of *moo* song.

You got sick on bad milk from a bucket, wore that flannel scarf through all the fevers that came. Like some old wash woman. Around your neck like a noose. As if wrung to the ceiling and sky. And it was funny when you put it over your mouth like you'd been kidnapped in a movie, but I hated it over your eyes like a firing squad was coming. A luxury of bullets, the detailed ripping of smoke and red, and you, finally still.

Still as the knife on the counter there still. Like mothballs in a chest. One with clear bags and newspaper clippings and your scarf inside it. The baby girl could put a mothball in her mouth and suck it like a penny. The way too close to a light bulb burns. A jar you kept pencils in and the marks inside. And even a doorknob of a lion, from wherever doorknobs of lions come from. The tips of shoes all pressed into corners.

And outside there was blue and stars and sun in the sky all at once and I held a bit of rusted gate in my hand and you touched my coat, brand new, touched my coat like a crystal ball and told me that the future was made of down.

And North became Northeast. Astray. And it began.

What was over-simple made graves in us. The geese pulled away from each other and the geese pulled apart, pulled apart. I saw feathers and huge, blue, industrial buckets full of legs like twigs and red. Someone's keys were jangling from their belt. And the rubbing of wet gloves. A ceremony of hands and birds and all direction this direction. Whatever the opposite of flight is. The way an ancient inventor must have taken apart a wooden flying machine. A design he based on his study of birds. A study that concluded with the knowledge he was nothing like them, that his hands would never brush against the utmost tips of the trees, the highest of green.

And how many tries had he made? And how long? And what misjudgment had he made in the incline? In the wind? And I suppose he must have been a little like us, doing any odd job no matter how foul. Watching the sky tip over into ground. Knowing the insides of a wing. It's true working, how wind is always exiting its bottom, never holding it, tucking it away. How flying is working against the wind. The way a man tries to find the top of a lake as not to drown. The lake.

The reflection of the geese in the water so much like the hesitation of your cool, unmeaning hand moving closer, closer, like blasting through bedrock. And I'm steadily rubbing my blue jeans. Worn with two long weeks of work. And I'm rubbing to stay warm. That's what I say, at least. And I taste plastic. I feel blue being stripped from my eyes.

UNFELT:

A Northern song. The way one mistakes a bridge with a headache, with a pure and manic pattern of notes, with sugar spilled on the floor.

A record in your room left spinning on its table, the static sound and the baby girl barking at herself in the mirror, the vibrations of her mouth. And you just left it playing there like that. I put my thumb over your face in a picture on the dresser and the sex of the no-head picture seemed uncertain like the time we took the screens out of all the windows for uncle. You behind one. All those little pins of light. Their absurd slur and fall through black mesh, and you.

Already Northbound and almost threadbare, a circle of light beyond a circle of dark. And I remember that old car we found at the abandoned airfield just outside of town, the one full of leaves. I remember you kept things in the trunk, things wrapped in white paper. And I was never sure if it was the moon or the moon glow that burned. All I knew was that the dead engine of that strange machine was a confessor. An apostle who taught us that everything stops. Stops literally at the exact spot of liftoff. A machine trying to do what it isn't capable of doing. A failed, mad inventor in a series of mad inventors.

Trying. Those nights out there with trees in collective, the empty runway useless, starting to cover with grass. And the old shell of a car someone had left behind. They must have seen something. And maybe they left me a clue. Maybe they took off, got somewhere. I doubt it, but maybe. But for sure, I knew, they'd been trying. Failure after failure, invention after invention, test after test. Someone had been trying out there.

