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Still Bridges

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STILL BRIDGES

by

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DEDICATION

To my mother.

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This manuscript would not have come to fruition without my father, my mother, my two younger sisters, whose love and patience have been unwavering; Adam, whose support was encouraging and inspiring; my godmothers, who were so gracious throughout this process; my MFA cohort, Matt, Christina, Jennifer, and Chris, who saw the beginning, middle, and end of this project; and naturally, the encouragement and feedback of Jim Barilla, my adviser, Catherine Keyser, Nikky Finney, and Mark Kramer, my thesis readers; finally, the instructors who inspired and pushed me: Nicola Waldron and Jessica Handler. Thank you.

ABSTRACT

This memoir-in-essays tells the story of four generations of a family living in one place, Pittsburgh, as they navigate the rise, peak, collapse, and disappearance of the steel industry. In terms of the manuscript's "situation," the family must navigate the complex economic, ethnic, environmental, and social struggles that are inherited when living in a place for over one hundred years. The manuscript argues that family and place are so intimately connected that the two entities cannot be separated. Pittsburgh becomes part of the narrator's family, a kind of gene that is embedded in all of its residents, and the family helps to shape Pittsburgh's shifting identities. The real "story" of the manuscript is about how various generations of a family reckon with their inheritances, which range in scope and severity from family myths to cultural problems, from class identities to mental illnesses.

My manuscript seeks to find a balance between creativity and reality, between myth and truth, between dogmatic acceptance and sensitive scrutiny. The manuscript follows a quasi-chronological trajectory and uses hybrid forms, partially informed by the loosely-based structures from which I was inspired.

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CHAPTER 1

TIL TASTING YELLOW METAL BURNS

In the fall of 1918, bodies fell. They lay in heat, sweating through pores, through long underwear, through embroidered quilts. They felt chilled even along ankles and elbows. Their breath infected their loved ones, and even more bodies dropped onto old hardwood floors, even more eyelids fell into eternal rest, even more heads bended back into forever sleep on white, sweat-soaked pillows. Priests drew invisible crosses on the foreheads of men and women, granting their last pardon before judgment. These dead floated away on carts, made high the tide of all-consuming fear, of formidable wonder at the force of such destruction.

This great extermination of life was well-known. The British, the Germans, the French, the Americans knew the flu killed strapping young men and glowing young women, that it missed *djeca* and the elderly. These countries wanted morale to soar for the soldiers fighting and their ladies waiting, so writing about the flu became illegal; headlines showed baseball scores and activity from the Front. Only Spain, a neutral state, wrote vociferously about headaches and sweats and falling and death tolls, and the rest of the world watched bug-eyed, called this pandemic the “Spanish flu” as breathing, coughing, sneezing bodies walked in and out of saloons, theatres, schools.

When the number of dead spiked high, many countries shut the doors of recreational facilities. Church and school were kept open to bare bones meetings, but that could not keep the working class from suffering the most debilitating number of victims. Fifty million worldwide in a single year. Five hundred thousand in America.

Pittsburgh saw more corpses than any major city in America. Every minute, someone caught it. Every ten minutes, someone gave up the ghost to it, hesitantly at first and then freely; the fever lifted to rest eternally the fallen bodies. Eastern European peoples, who, with derision, were called the “Hunkies,” were struck the hardest. Slovak, Croatian, Italian, Hungarian immigrants lay squeezed together on mattresses in hallways, in cellars underneath all sources of light. Smog had already been pumping through their distressed lungs. They tasted penny mucus. Dust mixed with their sneezes like tiny, golden flakes of light. The pieces of themselves misted into tight, windowless spaces. The flu forced men to pile wooden boxes of bodies on top of each other, four or five high. When there was a shortage of caskets, they wrapped people in sheets and dug massive, forgotten graves.

One woman, whose name remains unknown, died at the end of 1918 and left three *djeca* under the age of ten and a *muž* standing: that *muž* was my great-grandfather, John Stipetich. John, a 28-year-old immigrant from Ogulin, Croatia, grieved for his lovely *supruga* and his motherless *djeca*. He knew that Stella, George, and Franny needed guidance and womanly wisdom, that they must have a *majka* but specifically a Croatian, Catholic *majka* to teach them how to say the Rosary and make pig’s feet.

Years earlier, John had run from Ogulin to America to escape the ethnic strife within the Austro-Hungarian Empire. When he stepped out of the train that glided past

farmlands, far away from bustling Ellis Island and the ships at sea, he breathed the yellow air of Pittsburgh. Everywhere he walked in this new city he could taste and smell menstrual blood, that iron-y, earthy sensation. This yellow air that he breathed presaged his jaundiced life: his cowardly bosses, his wife's sickness, and the cautionary nature of existence in a steel town.

After getting off the train, John might have known that a relative would be nearby to greet him with a hot meal and a bath and some possibility of work. He might have known where this relative dwelled in the valley of Jones and Laughlin Steel Company, what the Pittsburgh locals called "J&L," though his words would have been dumb to the ears of English speakers. As a young man of sixteen, he might have labored for a wealthy family, likely Americans, for a few months or years rather than in the mill. This family may have forced him to sleep in a barn for repayment of his passage to the new world.

Whatever the speculations about his first few years in Pittsburgh, John married the woman who fell in 1910 or 1911, and he fathered George when he was just twenty years old. He settled into working at J&L and living on the Southside, where he knew his people, the Croats from the old Austro-Hungarian Empire. He knew these people before he ran away, before his friends wore gas masks, before the yellow air and sleepless nights, and before the Spanish flu pandemic, a dying *supruga*, and complete, breathless, exhaustive loneliness.

While he was working at J&L, perhaps his emotions steadied. John would have walked into the mill sometime before six in the morning when the blackness of the Earth at least seemed natural. As he entered the home of the open hearth furnaces, where steel

was formed, he would have seen five gaping mouths yearning for their meals. These open hearth incinerators breathed. Every day, John and the other Hunkies hustled to their assignments with shovels and gloves and hats. They started sweating as soon as they picked up their tools. Even in the frigid Pittsburgh winters, these men gave away little droplets of perspiration, like little parts of themselves, to the mighty giant of steel. The men who worked like Big John did not complain. Not of the twelve hour day, the fourteen hour day, the twenty-four hour day, the horrific safety conditions, the mill housing, the wages, or the health hazards.

John's position as a millwright prevented him from having to do the grunt work specific to his ethnicity, like laboring in the blast furnace cast house or in the orange iron-ore yard. Millwrights fixed the furnaces, the ladles, the pipes; they used seventy-pound wrenches to turn bolts as big as baseballs into their correct places. My great-grandfather became known as Big John because the kind of man fit for this arduous work had to be huge, with giant hands and a strong back and the wherewithal to withstand the fast-paced work, because a furnace could not go cold. Big John had to recraft a furnace out of his own breath and body. His work broke arms, seared backs, enflamed legs. Bricks regularly fell from the cranes above his head, and sparks flew into his eyes, his mustache, his hair. He became the mill's white blood cell, rushing to fix its parts, becoming a necessary appendage, a small cell within a very large organism.

After John fixed an open hearth furnace, other Hunkies threw in iron and alloys and scrap steel, pieces of other steel beings broken whole so that the mother mouth could consume them. Big black pots of molten iron, sparking and sparkling, hustled around the men's bodies and over their heads into the open hearth. Machines yelled to each

other. The molten steel, curling and lively in its ladle, flowed in and out of spouts, slid onto the floor. The steel, when rolled into sheets after heating, boomed upon first hit. The mill worked at a rate more constant than the human heart, never stopping, never ceasing, ever pumping. Mistakes were made because of language. Men yelled in Slovak, in Croatian, in Italian, Russian, German, in English to move, to duck, to feed the eating machines.

The Hunkies were considered the strongest, the mightiest men, and they even crafted a hero based upon this ethnic stereotype. His name was Joe Magarac, and he was a mythical Eastern European figure who protected and guarded the steelworkers. There are many different versions of the Joe Magarac legend: one is that he was born out of an ore mine; another is that he appeared to interrupt a competition between the workers; another is that he was birthed from the furnace, not a man but completely composed of steel. Joe Magarac was said to form steel rails from his bare hands. He could ladle molten steel in his hands like melted butter and move it from vat to vat for the workers. He could complete the work of twelve men, and he never stopped, and he never took a break to eat or sleep. Even though these Czecho-Slovaks, Serbs, and Croats were similar to their mythical sire Joe Magarac because they were the bulkiest of steelworkers, they could barely manage the unrelenting schedules and the intensive physical labor.

A mill laborer, Charles Rumsfield Walker, recalled this observation in his 1919 memoir *Steel: Worker Diary of Furnace Worker*. Walker referred to the whole steel production operation as a “molten Niagra.” He was working in the open hearth furnaces and blast furnaces in Bouton, Pennsylvania at the same time that Big John was working as a millwright in Pittsburgh. At the blast furnaces, where limestone, coke, and iron ore

made iron (one of the three main components of steelmaking), Walker saw Hunkies haul wheelbarrows full of the three ingredients up monolithic furnaces and then shoveled the materials down violent, rash red esophaguses. Carbon monoxide puffed from the top, so the Hunkies spoke an important adage: “If you wait there a bit, you’ll get drunk. If you wait a little longer, you’ll be dead.” Even though what breathed from the lips of the furnaces could kill them, they referred to these furnaces by their first names. Most of them, especially the blast furnaces, were named Eliza or Carrie.

At the base of an Eliza or Carrie Furnace was the cast house where, once heated and pressurized, the molten iron would burst out of the furnace’s glory hole and rush into troughs. There was constant fear of being killed by these fiery iron rivers, but also of being within feet of them. The troughs led the iron down a waterfall which cascaded the molten mess into torpedo cars moved by rail. Temperatures on the floor of the cast house sometimes rose to 120 or 130 degrees. A man’s clothes might burst into flames if he was too close to the troughs because iron is finicky, jumpy, wild. It flickers and sparks into open air. The Hunkies watched their brothers in steel smack their clothes to prevent burning into ash. When the workers had ten or twenty minutes to spare, they walked over to a water trough and washed off the dust that accumulated in their sleeves and around their necks. This short break was their only respite. Cranes rattled and moaned above their heads like omnipresent gods. Iron chains jangled, and limestone and coke creaked out of wheelbarrows and freight cars. Everything was anxious.

Despite the heat and flames, only millwrights and carpenters wore overalls. The other men had to wear whatever they could find at their homes into the mill. Three-quarter length button-down shirts. Raggedy pants. Leather belts. There were no

goggles. No aluminum suits to protect bodies from blazes. No government-issued hard hats. No fire safety measures. Since there were no unions, laborers worked seven days a week, occasionally with a twenty-four hour shift. If any union activity was suspected, the workers were fired or else scared into submission.

Thousands of immigrant laborers died. Just a few years before Big John started working at J&L, twenty percent of the total adult male deaths in Pittsburgh occurred in steel mills. Most of those fallen would have been Hunkies, but this staggering statistic didn't matter to anyone. Walker, who was of Anglo-Saxon origin, wrote about a senior open-hearth laborer, not unlike Big John's co-workers, who asserted: "There are a few of these Hunkies that are all right, and damn few. If I had my way, I'd ship the whole lot back to where they came from."

For decades, Big John watched white men, like the Irish, Scots-Irish, Germans, and Americans, move up to positions of prominence, leadership, and skill; whereas men like him, and the Serbians and African-Americans, perhaps even the Russians and Italians, stayed in the heat. It is true that not one of the Eastern European men was promoted to boss or foreman in the time that Big John would have worked at J&L; although, despite rampant xenophobia and racism, these immigrants earned more money than in their home countries. Walker remembered a Hungarian stove-gang boss of a blast furnace who once said to him, "American all right mak' money, old country place live."

Perhaps Big John knew, like Walker, that he was working in a hellscape, that the work was too dangerous and too hot to continue doing forever. Perhaps, though, Big John was proud of his work, of earning his keep as an American. My great-grandfather must have at least wanted to earn that American citizenship privilege because, eventually,

he did. Perhaps though, when he left the mire of the steel mill at the end of the day, he considered himself, even for just a moment, an indentured servant or a serf. Maybe even a slave.

Upon leaving J&L, Big John would have strolled down East Carson Street, the main drag in Southside. The smog would have spread across buildings around him. Gas lanterns might have been lit at 9 a.m., 12 p.m., 5 p.m. like fireflies amid a vast, impenetrable dark. As he thought about what to do for George, Fanny, and Stella, for his motherless *djeca*, the sounds of horses and buggies that traveled up and down the gravel roads probably did not disturb him.

Perhaps the young Croatian Hunky and the trains that chugged a half a mile away from him were heading in the same direction, moving swiftly, roughly, uninterrupted. On his walks through town, Big John might have passed Smoke City Beach, a public pool where little white boys swam as J&L rattled behind them. A group of young men may have hung out of windows atop a livery stable and an undertaking business. Perhaps Big John saw a woman with one of them and knew that he needed to find another *supruga*.

He might have decided on a journey back to the land of Kula, the medieval castle standing in the middle of Ogulin, Croatia. He might have gone back to the evergreen borderline and softly-sloped mountains which backgrounded rustic little villages near the Adriatic Sea. Big John might have traveled back to Ogulin's cool azure lakes, which so contrasted the murky Monongahela River that bordered the Southside. His surname indicates that he might have been related to famous Croatian war generals and filmmakers, but in Pittsburgh, he was just another dark-skinned, dark-haired mill Hunky.

If he had still lived in Ogulin, he might have been the proper social class to marry Marija Padovic, my great-grandmother.

Marija was from the villages of puffing chimney smoke, the smoke of a hearth, of the quaint valley in Vrbovsko, Croatia. Her village with its white church bell tower centered the little town to reach towards the heavens. Vrbovsko had ginger roofs on houses that popped out against their snowy white walls and landscapes of lush evergreens. Marija's hand was supposed to go to a gentleman of her elite social rank, but all of them had gone to fight in the Great War. They were falling in the trenches, went missing, were coming back to Vrbovsko disfigured, or laden with that mysterious disease, the soldier's heart.

And if Big John did go back to Croatia searching for a new *supruga*, he might have asked for Marija's hand in marriage on the condition that she would move back to Pittsburgh with him. Or perhaps Big John never returned to Croatia looking for a *supruga*, but perchance Marija's family, seeing all of the dying and diseased men, pressured her to leave Vrbovsko. Marija needed to act quickly as she was a homely, portly woman with no prospects and small eyes. She was approaching twenty-eight years old and still single. Although the origin of John and Marija's first meeting has fallen into the chasm of myth, Marija Padovic arrived in Pittsburgh sometime around the fall of 1920.

During the two years between Big John's first *supruga*'s death and meeting his new *supruga*, his *djeca* needed to be relocated, for some unknown reason. George, Fanny, and Stella stayed at a temporary home, perhaps a friend's or a relative's, and Big John may or may not have visited them, may or may not have known their whereabouts

at night, but when his *djeca* returned to their *tata*, he only noticed lice jumping around their heads. Their stench filled the kitchen, and dark circles bore into their once-lively faces.

This unknown time spent living separately from their *tata* was not very long because within a year of Marija's arrival to the United States, she and Big John were married. In their wedding picture, they shared the same hard faces; their skin seeming like smooth, solid stone. He wore a simple suit with flowers on his jacket. She dressed in an ornate gown with bows and ribbons and flowers throughout her hair and bodice.

My instinct is to believe that John and Marija's marital union was initiated for the sake of necessity, maybe even for love, but undoubtedly, fear played its part, too.

Their home was a modest row house on Larkins Way, just a few streets away from East Carson Street. Their home had a big kitchen with a sizable hearth and a large table to feed a growing family. Their cellar housed some chickens and turkeys, and there were a few bedrooms upstairs where the *djeca* slept, though the house was not always peaceful. George, Stella, and Fanny immediately rejected Marija as their new *majka*, probably because she was a replacement *majka*. Perhaps the *djeca* thought that their *tata* was more preoccupied with this new *supruga* rather than his very own flesh and *krv*. Whatever the case, I know that my great-grandmother had a difficult time raising her adopted hormonal, teenaged *djeca*.

Perhaps Marija thought about her new parenting role as she moved along East Carson Street to buy fruits and vegetables, meats and fabric for her new *djeca* and *muž*. She would have seen Sherrer's Saloon enticing men in black woolen jackets. Other mill workers in overalls and dark protective hats stood under pathetic wooden telephone poles

which carried so many wires that the poles slanted just ever so slightly toward the road. Marija would have seen a large Coca-Cola advertisement: “Delicious! Refreshing!! Coca-Cola for five cents.”

Perhaps on Marija’s walks she wondered about the woman who fell, the woman in the spot where she slept next to Big John, that she was just the replacement *supruga*. Perhaps she ignored those thoughts and praised Jesus that she found a *muž* at all.

She would have seen lunch pails lining railroad tracks, which were just feet away from peoples’ back doors. None of the houses’ windows remained open for long as grime beset everything. A church steeple turned black as it pitifully tried to challenge the dozens of smokestacks in the sky. After months of Marija’s new routine, this city, this Pittsburgh stuck to her so that her limbs stopped moving. She left her home only out of necessity, and she began to take comfort in food.

Marija’s typical dinner included only a piece of bread soaked in grease, and if that was her only large meal, then it’s easy to imagine that she should have lost weight. Although, on the contrary, she expanded more and more every year. Her wondering and worrying and sadness subsided after having *djeca* with Big John. When Marija was thirty-four, she had her first son, Joseph; at thirty-five, she had her first daughter Olga, my grandmother, and at thirty-eight, Marija bore her third child, Marie. She cooked pig’s feet and potatoes and meats for Big John and her six *djeca*. After they ate supper, as was tradition in a Croatian household, the *supruga* of the house ate last, scavenging through the scraps, though that did not mean that she didn’t hold power in her marriage.

During one Thanksgiving, Marija instructed Big John to cut off a turkey’s head in the cellar so that they could eat it for dinner. He walked dutifully down their earthy cellar

stairs to fulfill his wife's request. He decided first to pick up his *tamburitza*, a traditional Croatian stringed instrument, then drink some of their homemade wine. He sang that he did not want to kill the turkey, and as he carried on serenading the poultry, Marija stormed into the basement and sliced off the turkey's head in front of him. She cursed at him in Croatian and finished doing what she had to do in the kitchen.

Olga told that story to her family decades later, and she laughed when remembering her sensitive and strong *tata* and *majka*. Big John was strong enough to swing a fifty-pound sack of flour by his teeth, strong like Joe Magarac, and Olga loved that her *tata* was built like the protagonist of the legendary steelworkers' myths. Because her *majka* did not have the trim waists of Hollywood stars, Olga feared fat, and so she ice-skated on the ponds throughout her neighborhood and rollerbladed in the summertime. She did, however, appreciate that her *majka* was an independent, sassy woman who taught her *djeca* about money, about budgeting and cash flow. After John brought home his pay from the mill and gave it to Marija, she showed her girls each dollar, each cent, forced them to sit around the dining room table and face her as she counted every nickel and penny into different funds. The mortgage, the butcher, the grocer, the utilities, the church tithe. She pointed at the remaining coins after all the little necessarily piles were stacked, and introduced her daughters to the cost of living in the Great Depression. Although Marija was equipped to handle balancing the finances of the home, she was unable to speak eloquent or even fluent English.

Marija may have been homeschooled in Croatia, may have had a tutor or helper because she was from an upper-class family, but despite her education, she never let English words come from her mouth. Big John only received a fifth grade education, but

he let flow the tongues of English, Serbian, and Croatian. Indeed, once Marija and Big John had their own kids, their household warmed with language, laughter, jokes, and stories. Olga read *Anne of Green Gables* on the dirt stairs that led to their cellar, and she loved the feeling of the cool earth under her bare feet during the hot and muggy Pittsburgh summers. Although Marija couldn't understand her daughter's interest in reading works of fiction, John loved that his little girl was reading English and becoming an American.

Despite the warmth inside the Stipetich home, the family could not escape the reality of the outside world. They lived surrounded by thick pollution and the glowing yellow particles of dust that drifted into the air. Poverty forced them to be unsettled in their home because they had to leave it quite frequently to get to their outhouse.

Their outhouse was located just a few feet from their back door. And there, inside the standing wooden restroom, through a circular hole, a family's excrement reeked. It's difficult to being a woman and walking to the outhouse each month to deal with menstrual cycles, with *krv* dripping onto innocent, snowy ground, with seeing thin wan legs hovering over a wooden plank.

Even beyond this public exposure of private bodily acts, the Stipetichs' backyard met their neighbors' backyards, so there was not any real opportunity for privacy. The houses were so close together that one person's mistake meant another person's misfortune. Olga experienced this vividly when a house near the Stipetichs' burned to the ground. Flames scorched an entire street of homes. The irony metal taste from J&L mixed with the ashy smoke of the fire. The smell of fresh cotton linens mixed with burning. Olga witnessed firefighters throwing *djeca* out of bedroom windows and the

screams of the *majka* as she watched her *djeca* fly through the yellow air into a stranger's arms.

Vermin infested their streets, schools, and churches. One afternoon, a neighborhood boy played with a stick on Larkins Way, and Olga and other *djeca* were playing with him. He found a rat the size of a small housecat and started to poke at it. After a few seconds of enduring this repeated torture, the rat jumped onto the boy and gnawed on his neck. The boy tried to shove it off, but his *krv* poured thick down his neck and chest, and he ran back to his home. These accidental neighborhood mishaps were not the only vices that the Stipetichs witnessed. These things were just what happened when they looked out of their windows. In the larger metropolis, the macabre ruled.

After 1919, when Prohibition dried up Pittsburgh, store owners, businessmen, and regular Joes paid off cops who turned a blind eye to illegal alcohol operations. Pittsburgh's streets were littered with whorehouses and speakeasies. One newspaper even described these speakeasies as "yell-outs," but violence did not reign in Pittsburgh, like in Chicago or New York City, until the mafia arrived in 1926.

From 1927 until 1933, in the years that my grandmother Olga was a child reading *Anne of Green Gables* on dirt steps and listening to her *majka* and *tata* bicker about turkeys, there were one hundred unsolved gang murders in Pittsburgh. The number of solved gang murders was even higher. Gang members were killed in their homes, in cars, in front of hospitals and on busy streets. They were gunned down in coffee shops, strangled with wires, knifed in front of their families, stuffed into barrels, set on fire, and decapitated. Men were shot in the streets at the noontime hour from Squirrel Hill to the North Side to the Hill District, three neighborhoods just about ten miles apart. The

murders were listed on the front pages of the *Post-Gazette* and the *Zajedničar*, the Croatian press. So Marija and Big John knew the dangers of making wine and the consequences of stepping on anyone's toes, but they did it anyway.

Marija made wine in their earthy cellar, and she only had one close call with the law. A neighbor ratted her out to authorities, and during a pleasant summer afternoon, two policemen banged on the Stipetichs' front door. Marija was outside in her small garden near the outhouse surrounded by the concrete partition, and she was calmly combing out her hair with a four-pronged brush. Olga watched the stern policemen from an upstairs window inside their house. She saw the policemen give up on the front door and walk around their home and the concrete partition to greet her *majka* who was still soaked from her bath.

In English, the policemen asked if they could look in Marija's house because someone had reported wine production. Olga wondered if her *majka* understood the policemen, and she nervously awaited her *majka*'s answer. Marija responded to the policemen in Croatian, and she continued to fuss with her hair. The cops repeated the question, but Marija just continued speaking Croatian. Eventually, the cops left out of frustration. When Marija came back inside, she told Olga that she knew what the policemen were saying, but she just pretended that she couldn't comprehend English. Olga laughed and joined her *majka* in making fun of the ignorant American policemen.

By necessity, the Stepetichs had to live modestly, but in census records, John reported that he earned income from "private work," the nature of which he never fully disclosed. All that my family knows for sure is that Big John started to carry iron knuckles and a pistol in the late 1920s and early 1930s. He might have chosen to take up

arms because of the violent crimes happening all around Pittsburgh. My family's legend is that Big John might have been the muscle for a Croatian gambling ring. Or, he might have been a bootlegger because the amount of income that he reported in these decades equates to far more than a millwright would have been able to earn, and more pointedly, other men in the neighborhood were afraid of him. While it is possible that Big John's size incited fear in people, it's more likely that he had to rough up, or even kill, some of them.

I imagine that Big John stood outside of his home on Sunday afternoons, fingering the iron knuckles and pistol, perhaps smoking. I imagine that he was not afraid, that he thought of his *djeca* when he walked out into the streets late at night, believing that one day his *djeca* wouldn't have to carry a pistol, wouldn't have to slave away in the mother furnaces as Hunkies. He would raise good American *djeca*, even though he knew that they would be hated by their neighbors.

Into the 1930s, and not very far from the Southside, the number of anti-Catholic white hoods grew from a few hundred to eight thousand people in a matter of hours. The Ku Klux Klan exhibited their hatred of Catholics, immigrants, and African-Americans by burning flags in peoples' front yards and holding boisterous rallies. Big John and Marija might have read about these rallies and marches in the *Zajedničar*, and perhaps they feared for their heavy-lidded, dark-haired, Catholic *djeca*.

Big John knew that his daughters were already at great risk of being victims because violent sexual assault occurred regularly. Stella was often sought out by rapacious men as she walked down East Carson Street with lean, athletic legs and a long,

auburn mane. Often, she removed her shoes when she stepped out of the restaurant where she worked as a waitress so that she could sprint through the Southside streets.

Olga remembers pretending to sleep and waiting for one, two, three. She knew when Stella returned home because she heard a very precise, rhythmic pattern: the crunching sound of the old key entering their back door, the turn of that key, and then the open and slam of their door. One, two, three. Olga would then hear her *majka* comfort Stella after the night's run. She heard her aging Croatian *majka* and sister Stella talk about wiping away *krv* from the soles of Stella's feet, about how she dodged the darkest corners and alleys trying to find the quickest and safest way home.

On one night, Stella came close to being raped. A man ran at her heels as she huffed into the night, feeling the gravel and dust and mud and cobblestone on the soles of her feet. The yellow, metal-tasting air blended with the metal-tasting phlegm rising in her throat. "*Tata! Tata!*" She screamed for Big John as she bolted through the alleyway behind her family's house. Usually, men stopped chasing her once she got into the alley in her residential neighborhood, but this assailant kept running. She used her speed to hurdle herself over the four-foot tall concrete partition, but the man scaled the wall with ease.

"*Tata! Tata!*" She yelled again, and Big John pulled the door open. Stella ran past him into the kitchen. The man looked up at the door, nearly entering Big John's home and saw the large Croatian man, like Joe Magarac, with a pistol and iron knuckles standing in the doorway. The man hurriedly jumped back over the concrete wall and never returned.

Perhaps my great-grandfather let out a *Bog nijemačka* (“what goes around, comes around”) into the night at his daughter’s assailant. I wonder which of his hands held his iron knuckles, which pocket or belt loop carried his pistol. In these nervous times of reckless behavior, of guns popping off at midday, of hoods that symbolized hatred, of women being openly chased by men on the street, Big John survived with his brawn and ferocity. I wonder when he learned to shoot a gun. It might just have been some trait that every man needed to know.

Like when to go to the doctor and when to tough it out. Olga remembers that her *tata* developed a large, unsightly goiter. It grew slowly, first starting as a bump at the base of his neck then expanding into his Adam’s apple and consuming his throat. Shaving and swallowing troubled him. The goiter could not be ignored after weeks of enlarging, so Big John, by necessity and by not choice, had to see the doctor. When he came home later that night, Olga saw a bandage around his head and *krv* saturating the bandage’s whiteness. Perhaps Big John wondered if Irish and American people also received this same butchering treatment from the doctor as Hunkies always did.

Big John was not only a recipient of Pittsburghers’ cool indifference to their fellow man; he was also a participant, even with regard to his own family members. On one afternoon, he took Olga shopping because she loved trotting alongside her *tata* down East Carson Street. As they entered a shop’s revolving door, she noticed that her *tata* eyed a young man who was exiting the store. The three people moved the glass in sync with each other. Her *tata*’s face did not indicate his usual vivacious, happy smile. Rather, he soured when he saw this young man. Olga didn’t understand how the young man could have made her *tata* look and feel so unlike himself.

She asked, “*Tko je to osoba, Tata?*”

“*Vaš najstariji brat, George,*” slowly spoke Big John.

Big John later explained to Olga that George, the oldest of Big John’s *djeca*, had married a Serbian woman. George was fourteen years old when Olga was born, so by the time that Olga had a memory vivid enough to accommodate language and people, George had moved out and married a foe. When Big John found out about George’s taboo marriage, he disowned his oldest son. Even though in the new world, where both the Serbians and Croatians were considered Hunkies, where they labored together near the rash-red furnace esophaguses, the tradition of despising each other continued as if they had never left the Austro-Hungarian Empire.

Big John continued to work steadily, day then night then day then night, alternating weeks. Sometimes, the railroad cars, the telephone wires, and the tops of buildings were the only visible signs of civilization in their neighborhood, especially during wartime. The Southside’s street signs and billboards were black. The smog stuck onto everything living or unliving. As Olga walked to and from her parents’ house and waitressing jobs, she would have seen the dead. Trees bloomed, but the ubiquitous smog kept the natural world from showing off its nascent whites and greens and browns. People walked as if they were ghosts, their shadows preceded their bodies, and the mill digested, burped and threw up whatever the Hunkies dumped into it. By the time that Olga graduated from high school, twenty-three smokestacks burst into the Southside sky, blowing out exhaust, gases, impurities. The posture of these furnaces rose higher; they multiplied in number, no longer tolerating little white church steeples

One evening in 1945, when Big John was thinking about retirement, he answered his front door. Upon opening it, he saw a red-headed, cheery, tall Irishman, so Big John swiftly slammed the door back into its place. No Irishman would enter his house, he told his *supruga* and *djeca*. My grandmother tried to explain that this Irishman was not like the ones at the mill. Olga pleaded with her *tata*. Big John did not want one of the Irish to date his daughters, especially his Olga, so he cursed loudly and walked away, but Marija, who was not as experienced with the mill's xenophobia and racism as Big John, scolded her *muž*. She quietly explained to Olga that she too had a boyfriend in Vrbovsko with red hair, red hair like this boy who wanted to take Olga on a date. Marija opened the door again and chuckled into her *babuška*.

After this big Irishman entered their home, Big John and Marija listened to him talk about being a prison guard in the Army, about wanting to start working at the mills when the war was over, about his immigrant *tata* and deceased *majka*, about being Catholic. Big John and Marija loved their Olga, so they settled into accepting this freckly young man. Over time, Big John appreciated this Irishman's commitment to his daughter, so he quieted his temper and let her lead the life of an American girl, free to choose whom to love. Olga married the Irishman, and Big John and Marija attended their wedding. Big John retired before J&L opened up new departments, and then it grew more mightily than he had ever seen.

He and Marija witnessed Olga move to the suburbs with her new husband, and they met three of Olga's *djeca* before the day that Big John fell. He had felt strangely tired and asked Marija for a glass of water, but when she returned with it, Big John had stopped moving. Even after Big John died, Marija still waited for him outside of their

home on the days that he would have worked. She still cooked pig's feet and occasionally spent time with her youngest daughter Marie who lived nearby. Big John's three oldest *djeca* had long left the Southside, and while my Great-Uncle Joseph spent his soul on alcohol, Olga was busy having babies. So alone and standing with her linens, letting the smog darken them, Marija held on for another year and a half.

After she died, the policemen could not fit her body through the front door of her home, so they needed to lift her body through a window. Marija had been too full of grease-dripped bread and yet so sickly insatiate after John fell. Olga remembered the police car carrying her *majka*'s body from her childhood home to the place where it lay to rest beside her *tata*.

CHAPTER 2

ON THE ETYMOLOGY OF “ROMANCE”

I do not know a love story more hopeful than my grandparents'. Their love for each other, a love that only lives in fairy tales and folklore, illuminates our hellish pit, our home wherein the smallest of luminarias help us outlast a menacing blackness.

In the first few years of my grandfather Michael's life, he lived with his Irish immigrant parents and four other siblings in a narrow, three-story home that sat smugly behind the University of Pittsburgh in Oakland, a neighborhood just a few miles east of Downtown Pittsburgh. Michael was re-christened “Red” and “Cyclone” by the time that he reached high school. His curly strawberry-blond locks and proclivity for being full of hot air renamed him in the way that all men who have overcome great obstacles are renamed, reworked, remolded.

Red towered above most people of average height. He sat at Saint Paul Cathedral's services every Sunday. His younger sister once said to me that “everyone thought your grandfather was perfect.” One evening at their home when Red was preparing to go on a date, she watched her older brother comb gel through his hair. When he saw that she was watching him, he turned to her and smirked: “You're so lucky to have such a handsome brother.”

In these teenaged years when Red walked to Central Catholic High School in the mornings, just a few blocks away from his home, he wore a white button-up shirt that he had pressed the night before, but by the time that he walked home in the afternoons, his white shirt turned to slate gray. Home, he knew, was synonymous with grime, and he accepted this ubiquitous filth as part of his American upbringing.

The City of Pittsburgh implemented air quality controls the year after Red graduated from high school, just before the Donora smog disaster. The small town of Donora, a few miles south of Pittsburgh, experienced a smog blanket that did not relent for five days. Some residents of Donora were attending a football game during this time, and they saw the kicker punt the ball, heard his kick, but they lost the football in the misty cloud that hovered above them. Warm air had held down cool air, which caused sulfuric acid and other poisonous substances to float near the earth's surface. This suffocating smog departed from the small town only when rain fell, but by that time, over 5,000 people had fallen ill. Twenty-two residents died. The deaths of the residents were first attributed to asthma, so consequently, the Donora Works, owned and operated by United States Steel, did not halt its steel production.

Despite this toxic environment, Red wanted to stay in Pittsburgh even after he graduated from Central Catholic High School in 1940. He enrolled at the University of Pittsburgh and walked on to the football team. He made it through his few months of freshmen year, but he never finished his post-secondary education. His grades were not the cause of his unfinished education. His behavior was impeccable, but the circumstances of his life grew to be too complicated after his father was fired from his job.

Red returned to his father's house and sought employment in the steel industry. His mother had died when he was only thirteen, and since his father could no longer provide for his five other siblings, as the oldest son, Red had to step in. He began working at Homestead Steel Works, another branch of United States Steel, while his oldest sister Margie took care of their youngest siblings.

It was during his time at the Homestead Steel Works that Red would have seen an intensification of steel production. Pittsburgh was at the center of the "Arsenal of Democracy," and the city produced over 95 million tons of steel for the war effort.

Eventually, the draft swept Red into the Army in 1943, and he was placed in a unit called the Tank Destroyers. He knew that upon deployment, he would be stationed in northern Africa on a mission to attack and disable slower German tanks; however, during basic training, he suffered permanent ear damage from a cannon explosion. As a result, he could not be deployed with the Tank Destroyers. Instead, he was relocated to Fort Hood, Texas where his 5'11", 190 pound stature made him a great candidate for being a military policeman for German prisoners of war.

This cannon explosion had been divine intervention. His former Tank Destroyers unit was massacred in northern Africa. Very few of the men he knew in that unit came home.

In the fall of 1945, Red was on furlough for Margie's wedding, and he assembled a bunch of his old Central Catholic High School buddies together for a night out at a dance hall in the Southside. These good ol' Catholic soldier-boys swaggered in their pressed, white military uniforms. Feet tapped to the beat of a drummer on a stage.

Smoke puffed from long and elegant cigarettes as the boys walked into the dance hall and watched women drift across the dance floor.

Jazz flourished in Pittsburgh because it was the mid-point between New York City and Chicago. Big-time entertainers like Duke Ellington and Ella Fitzgerald stopped in the Steel City to give inconspicuous shows at restaurants and night clubs.

So from inside the dance hall in Southside, Red would have heard trumpets scream tunes like Benny Goodman's "Sing, Sing, Sing" and saxophones wail in Glenn Miller's "String of Pearls."

He could sweep any girl off her feet with his Lindy Hop, Jitterbug, and East Coast Swing. He couldn't wait to show his buddies that he was still the best dancer, the best flirt, the most magnetic young Irishman in Pittsburgh. While he looked around the place searching for a girl with whom he might Jitterbug, the skirts of women with scarlet lips and curled, pinned hair whizzed in his peripheral vision. But then he saw only one woman glow: the image of Aphrodite incarnate. This woman had short, milk chocolate hair, a voluptuous figure, and a busty chest. She faced him and then looked away.

By the end of the night, Red danced with every girl in the place but not with the most radiant woman that he had ever seen. Once Red found this woman amid the crowd of strangers, amid the tapping feet and bustling dresses and currant red lips, he asked her to dance, but she refused on the basis that she had been watching what he was doing. He had jitterbugged with many other women that night, and she was just the last one in his lineup. Despite her rejection of him, Red continued to beg for just one dance. She was skeptical, but rather than give up, he asked the band leader to play one last song, one last

song for his girl. With the pressure of the last song and this earnest Irishman, the fiery woman caved and agreed to grant his request of just one dance.

After their dance, this beautiful woman immediately exited the dance hall. Red wanted to follow her and ask for her name. He wanted to know if he could write to her, but his buddies were leaving. They yelled for him to get moving because they needed to catch the train back to Fort Hood or else they'd be AWOL; they tried to convince him that he didn't have time to go chasing after some random dame around the city, that he'd find another. Red wasn't satisfied with their reasoning, and rather than run to catch his train back to Texas, he chose to pursue this gorgeous dame.

He jogged out of the dance hall and eventually found the girl walking with a friend, so he introduced himself and asked the two young women their names. His former dance partner wouldn't speak to him, wouldn't even look at him, but the other woman told Red that her name was Clara. Red excitedly asked where Clara and his former dance partner were going, what trolley they were taking home, and if they had had a good night. The gorgeous girl would not make eye contact with him while Clara mitigated the awkward encounter. Red struggled to make small talk, and Clara felt sorry for the striking Irish officer who just wanted a chance to communicate with her friend.

The three young Pittsburghers stepped into the trolley, where Red's former dance partner looked stoically out of the windows and remained quiet, but Red kept trying to get her attention and even paid for the two women's fares. He asked for this lovely stranger's address so that he could write to her. She didn't answer but told her friend, in fluent Croatian, that they needed to get off the trolley. Clara, whose pity now reached a

threshold, quickly jotted something on a note and slipped it to Red without her friend's knowledge. The note read: "Olga Stipetich, 2625 Larkins Way."

After Red returned to Ford Hood, he was pronounced AWOL and suffered some kind of punishment which he never fully disclosed. He wrote to this fiery and striking Olga about his time in the war as a soldier and about his family that lived in Oakland but were from Cork and Galway in Ireland. Even though Olga was already writing to two other soldiers, she wrote back to this Michael Barry who called himself Red. She explained that he had competition for her affections, but still, Red wrote witty, thoughtful responses in a casual tone of confidence and graciousness. They continued to write each other nearly every day about their families, about what they saw in the world around them, about each other, about Pittsburgh. Olga sent pictures of the other soldiers who were vying for her love just like Red. He simply wrote her that they were quite good-looking. He told her, too, that he had kissed another girl in California, but the kiss didn't matter very much to him. He was just giving himself a test, a test to see if he thought of Olga when he kissed the other girl, and the kiss proved a truth: that he only thought of Olga. She kept all of his letters, and after months of their epistolary romance, Red nicknamed Olga "Hot Lips," a sure sign that they had met again in Pittsburgh when he was on furlough from Fort Hood.

Their correspondence endured throughout Red's time in the Army, and after his term of service ended, they dated for another year. They attended weddings and dance halls. They went to the movies because Olga loved old Hollywood films. They gained each other's (and their family's) trust. An Irishman dating a Croatian girl was taboo, but their Catholic families approved of this union because of their obvious affections towards

each other, and one day, Red casually handed a ring to Olga and said with a smirk, “See if that fits.”

After my grandparents’ marriage, they decided that Pittsburgh city life was too smoggy and smoky and dusty for a new family, so they moved out of the crowded city and into to the suburbs.

Red secured a job as a bricklayer at the Homestead Steel Works where he worked tough but not grueling shifts. Unlike his father-in-law Big John, whose working conditions and long shifts deleteriously affected his health, Red had the benefit of the increasingly credible labor union, the United Steel Workers of America. Also unlike Big John, whose intense labor forced him to become one with the furnaces, Red worked in maintenance and rebuilt brick floors, relined the insides of blast furnaces, constructed new additions to the mill.

Red promoted equal working opportunities for black people, women, and other minority groups because he just wanted reliable people to come into work and do their jobs safely and successfully. He didn’t care for racial or ethnic discrimination, and because he was a well-liked, smart, and successful bricklayer, he was promoted to General Foreman of Masonry. Though he wasn’t a kiss-ass. He could have kept moving up the ranks of his division, but he didn’t withhold his opinion and didn’t mind if that bothered some of the higher-ups.

Olga, as was custom at the time, was not employed, but she was pregnant for twenty years. She and Red raised eight children. Red grouped his children based upon their ages, behaviors, and interests. The two oldest were the “smart ones.” The middle

children “should have gone to jail, and the youngest, were the “artistic ones.” Matthew, their only son, is my father.

Red and Olga baptized and confirmed their children in the same church, Saint Benedict the Abbot, of which they were life-long members. Olga’s only other preoccupation besides mothering her children was the League of Women Voters. She volunteered with the organization and held meetings in their home, but no matter what chores or errands Olga needed to complete throughout her day, she always grabbed her lipstick from out of the bathroom medicine cabinet and quickly made up her lips before her husband got home from work.

The Barrys had a creek behind their acre and a half lot where Red grew apple trees, pear trees, asparagus, tomato plants, rutabagas, green onions, potatoes, and corn. Red and Olga’s children played in their yard, a giant expanse of grass lined with formidable pine trees. The neighborhood kids played in the Barrys’ yard, too, because it was the most spacious place in their neighborhood. Red built his own brick fireplace and outdoor patio just outside their back door where he made hamburgers in the summer, and in the same outdoor space, Olga watered tulips, sunflowers, marigolds and roses. After all of Red and Olga’s hard work, they had earned that prized goal: the American Dream.

Though they never lost sight of their roots. Olga sent money to her starving cousins in Croatia, and Red sent packages of food and clothing back to his relatives in Ireland. They received a plethora of letters from County Cork and Vrbovsko asking for money, for winter clothes, for shoes. These requests might have been influenced by Red’s siblings who thought that he and Olga lived in a mansion because they had a five bedroom house with a lawnmower and a bar in the basement.

Due to the prosperity of Pittsburgh's industry during the 1940s through the 1960s, all of Red and Olga's children went to college. All of their children became professionals, became white collar people. Most got married. Red and Olga saw the birth of eleven grandchildren, and they watched some of their grandchildren get married in Catholic churches just like they had done. They even met their first great-grandchild.

Their life was perfectly planned out and secure until my grandmother showed signs of Alzheimer's disease. My father remembers the first occasion of his mother's dementia when he called his parents after the 9/11 attacks, and he said to his mom: "Ma, isn't it awful what happened today?" She responded, "Yeah, that'll make a great movie." My father paused. He couldn't believe what his mother had just said, and Red quickly took the phone out of Olga's hand and said goodbye and told his son that they needed to leave.

In the following years, Red didn't want anyone, not even his children, in their house. His Olga wasn't able to recall what they ate for dinner, where she put her beloved pots and pans in the kitchen, where her grandchildren were going to college. His Olga was becoming even more conspicuously demented on a night in 2004. Before seeing a musical in downtown Pittsburgh, my father and I attended a five course dinner with my aunt, her husband, some of their kids, and Red and Olga. The environment, the food, the venue was decadent. Gilded ceilings surrounded us. The wait staff wore black ties, and it was the first time I can remember worrying about meeting dress code requirements. It was also the first time that I ever ate truffles; they were mashed with some kind of fancy herb mixture. All of us raved about these truffles, and my aunt told the waiter to tell the chef that the truffles were excellent. Olga then said, "I know what you did. You just

took yesterday's potatoes and mashed them up. I used to work at a restaurant. I know what you did." My aunt and uncle looked as if their faces were going to fall off, and they apologized profusely to the waiter who soured and walked away. My father laughed loudly, and as a 14-year-old who was starstruck with the ambience of the restaurant and the amount of forks that I had to choose from, I didn't quite understand the implications of what my had grandmother said. I just thought that she was being goofy. Maybe facetious even.

But my father and his sisters started making planned visits to their parents' house because they realized that Red was having a hard time caring for Olga. Red cooked meals for the two of them but gave himself too little food and gave her too much, so he became willowy and she became rotund. My aunts took Olga to the hair dresser, to see the opera, to go to the ballet and theatre. My dad insisted that these outings were planned so that Red could have time for himself, so that he could go to the store or putz around the house or watch the Steelers.

After a few years of this charade, Red and Olga's children started to notice that their mother could not bathe herself. They began asking Red what he was doing to clean her because sometimes she smelled like shit. He insisted that he was doing the best that he could, but his children began making surprise visits to ensure that their parents were, as my dad would say, "still alive." My father and his sisters wanted to look for nursing home options for Olga, but they initially kept this issue to private discussions. When they found choices that seemed satisfactory and reasonably priced, my aunt, a former geriatrics nurse, was asked to talk to their father. Her visit to Red and Olga's house was initially cordial and warm. Everything seemed fine until she started mentioning Olga's

future care. Red became angry, unsettled, restless, and she tried to reason with him that he could not care for her mother indefinitely. Rather than remain calm, Red walked over to a cabinet and pulled out a steak knife. He said, “No one’s leaving here! Get out! Get out!” Frightened, she left her father alone in the kitchen and her mother staring into space. She didn’t speak to Red for months, but quietly, she and her siblings continued planning the day that their parents would have to leave their home.

After months of working to persuade Red that he could not take care of Olga by himself, he agreed to grant his children’s wishes. Olga lived in five different homes over a period of three years. Red travelled to these nursing homes every single day. He stayed with Olga for eight to ten hours and observed the doctors, nurses, and attendants care for her. He watched the news with her, ate meals with her, kept tabs on the way that she held a stuffed animal raccoon like it was a baby, saw her lose the ability to walk, to speak, to understand. He traveled back to their home alone by nightfall.

Red stopped taking his heart medication six months before he died of his second heart attack, just short of 90, in 2012. Olga lay in bed for another year and a half after Red’s death. Her body weight dwindled down to ninety pounds. My godmother was her power of attorney, and she told the doctors to administer as much morphine as they wanted. Olga lived for ten days without food and water, and I’m pretty sure that she could have lived longer if it weren’t for the morphine, but on a gorgeous day in May, she joined her husband in the afterlife.

Despite the prolonged denouement of this tale, my family glamorizes and memorializes Red and Olga’s love story as the quintessential romantic drama between a man and a woman, as a fated, providential union between two godly people. And truly I

have never seen so much love between two spouses as I saw in my grandparents' relationship.

That love has been commemorated on a stone bench outside of their church. Surrounded by a small garden with the Virgin Mary at its center, rose bushes, and a narrow walking path, the stone bench reads: "This Garden is Dedicated to Dear Parents Olga Stipetich Barry (1925-2013) and Michael Terence Barry (1922-2012) Whose Marriage was God's Love Personified."

In August 1975, Red dropped off his son Matthew on the University of Pittsburgh's campus. Matthew, sweeping aside his permed hair, looked up at the formidable Cathedral of Learning which towered forty-two stories above the ground where his feet felt asphalt. This building was the largest academic building in the world. With his father's green eyes, he stared into his fate: the next four years at the University of Pittsburgh, disco, women, rum, and freedom from the shackles of a Roman Catholic family bursting with children.

Matthew remembered having long conversations with his high school buddies about the party areas that they would soon frequent in and around the University of Pittsburgh's Oakland campus without venturing too far away from the Shampoo Bottles, the generations-old nickname for their dormitory.

In the mid-1970s, the neighborhoods around Oakland were perfect social and cultural binaries, even though Oakland was its own kind of disco, and my father knew this at the time. The area had changed drastically from the time that Red was living there as a kid at his father's house. Oakland was nicknamed the "Dirty O," and its residents were college students, renters, and low-income working families. The Hill District, a

neighborhood in between Downtown Pittsburgh and Oakland, housed many low-income families. It was a place known to have problems, known to be dangerous for preppy kids like my father. Another neighborhood, Shadyside, a short walk from the University of Pittsburgh's campus, was a locale for the rich, for the people who could afford to live in ex-millionaires' homes, to live in mansions that were built on the backs of immigrant labor and the early steel industry. Squirrel Hill was where Pittsburgh's Jewish people lived, and it boasted a gorgeous synagogue, Jewish bakeries, smaller Tudor-style houses on tree-lined streets, and private Jewish schools. In many ways, Oakland was just a warm, bustling, couched neighborhood wherein alcohol was cheap and kids were free.

Matthew walked in the thick of it. Around him women with soft curls, giant aviator sunglasses and platform shoes chatted, flipped their hair, and crossed Forbes Avenue. A sea of orange and pastels moved past him, and a kitchen of smells sour and pleasant wafted through the thick August wind: stale pizza, garbage, bus exhaust, tons and tons of cigarettes. There was honking, cursing from bus drivers, and the hymns of homeless people. He saw 1975 in front of him, the present moment in which he was young, good-looking, full of mischief, and very much alive.

Everything was just a bit hazy, like his head was disconnecting slowly from his body. A yellow glow misted around Oakland, and the air that he breathed tasted of sweet metal. A by-product of nearby steel production. Dirt sweated off of the academic buildings, but it was murky, sexual, and pulsing with the kind of rod-iron, dingy, and lived-in grit that the suburbs lacked with their pristine streets and finely cut grass and friendly, old Catholic neighbors. There was danger here, and Matthew sought to be part of it.

Matthew met his roommate and more friends on his dormitory floor. In the first few weeks of the semester, he had his first encounters with African-Americans and Jewish people and gay people, and he started working at a college bar named the Wooden Keg. He became the bartender notorious for his whistle. Whenever he used his whistle, every patron in the bar hollered and drank a shot. Red and Olga weren't helping him with money for food or housing, so working five days a week was his only palatable option unless he wanted to starve or be homeless. It was at this point in time that Matthew turned away from his shy high school days and became the man that I know today: the life of the party. He and his friends listened to "Stayin' Alive" by the Bee Gees and "Disco Inferno" by the Trammps. He spent most of his nights working from seven until two or three in the morning and then wouldn't wake up until noon. He didn't care to go to class and decided upon geography as his major so that he didn't have to study very hard.

Matthew knew that his father had started at the University of Pittsburgh, that Red had to drop out because of family circumstances that were out of his control. Matthew knew that Red's mother had died when he was young and that his father was an alcoholic, that he had to become a man quickly, but Red was a different man than he was. Matthew wanted to live a little. He did just enough schoolwork to earn the necessary Ds to keep from failing. He figured that he'd bartend or labor in the mill with his dad once he left school, that it'd all work out somehow.

My mother was the complete opposite student from my father. Tina was a petite, personable, smiley Italian girl from Johnstown, Pennsylvania, an ex-coal-mining town, who earned a full nursing scholarship to the University of Pittsburgh when she was a

second semester freshman. Before she moved to Pittsburgh, she had never been in a city over the size of 10,000 people, and just before her sophomore year, her mother and father dropped her off on one of the busiest intersections in Oakland to say their goodbyes. She knew that her parents had to go home and care for their five other children, so she put on a fake smile and picked up her two bags before walking into her single room on the fourteenth floor in Lothrop Hall. Her efficiency had a small, crummy sink, a twin bed, and a window that overlooked the rest of steamy Oakland. The Cathedral of Learning loomed in the evening sky. The sun set westward, giving the entire city a ginger glow, a glow that would soon be associated with disco and youth and adventure, but Tina looked around her room, and she saw only little things. No younger sisters, no goofy brothers, no home—just books and dust.

From seven in the morning until ten at night, Tina was either reading, in class, or at clinical. Every day, she walked through underground tunnels between her dormitory and the nursing building and the hospitals. She barely saw natural light except for that which came through her dormitory window in the morning, or from the classroom buildings, or the hospital rooms. Dark and lonely were her days of biochemistry and cleaning other people's asses before she met my father, but she remained lighthearted and unaffected by the city life, the dank days.

There is a possibility that my father met my mother on a night in 1976 when he was bartending at the Wooden Keg. My mother had started working there on Friday nights to help the wait staff serve cheap, bottomless spaghetti dinners, and perhaps my father asked my mother out on a date on one of the evenings when they were working together. Or, there is a possibility that my mother and father met on their dormitory floor

in Lothrop Hall because they lived on the only co-ed floor in the entire university. The resident assistants allowed their residents to drink alcohol, and my father often attended and hosted floor parties. It's possible that my mother decided to attend one of his parties with some of her nursing student friends. She may have approached my father to tell him that she and her friends thought he was cute. It's possible that she kissed him on the cheek, and then he responded: "I have to go to work." But none of these stories have been proven by my mother or father. These speculations are my parents' guesses, their haphazardly remembered first encounters. Unlike Red and Olga's quixotic first encounter, my parents disagree about the details, about the place and time of their first meeting, so I too have not yet committed to one re-telling.

But no matter the mythology of their introduction, Matthew eventually took Tina on a date to a place none other than the Wooden Keg. When they walked in together, his friends blew his notorious whistle. These young men with mustaches and long, straggly hair reminded Tina that if she wasn't interested in Matthew by the end of the night, then she could contact any one of the other bartenders. She just laughed and blushed, the cherry red of her cheeks contrasting with her green halter top. Matthew told his friends to shut up, and he laughed and blushed as well. Once they were seated in a booth, he ordered two White Russians, and they talked about their time at the University of Pittsburgh and their large Catholic families. They sipped on their drinks. Tina, who wasn't a drinker, was really feeling the liquor by her last sip.

Matthew realized that she was drunk when she had a hard time even standing up and walking out of the bar, so he held onto her as they walked back up to Lothrop Hall. The lights of the city stared at them in the background. Matthew wanted to guide her

back to her room and make sure that she was okay. He liked this girl from Johnstown, and he knew enough from having seven sisters that a gentleman always escorts a lady back to her room, that a gentleman made sure she was safe. After he saw that she entered her dorm room and lay on her bed to go to sleep, he went out drinking with his goofy friends.

Tina didn't usually go out drinking because nursing school was so demanding and time-consuming, but she also liked this Matthew Barry from Pittsburgh. After their first date, there were more dates, and Matthew showed Tina his care-free lifestyle. He smoked weed, drank with his buddies, didn't really go to class. She worked and studied, went to the hospital and attended class. Sometimes she felt jealous about her boyfriend's carefree lifestyle, but she knew that he wasn't doing well in school. Though she understood that his need for rent and grocery money far outweighed his need to attend classes in philosophy or English.

But one night of drinking nearly led to the end of his career as an undergraduate. He and his friends sat around guzzling rum and grape soda. They talked about Tina's work as a nurse which led to slurred discussions about the medical school and the cadavers in the medical school's basement. "Let's go look at them," one of his friends said, and all of them agreed that that was an excellent idea. The young men trickled onto the streets of Oakland at two in the morning. They hiked up the steep hill to the medical school in Scaife Hall. The front door of the building swung open. They entered with toothy smiles and tried to hide their laughter as they tiptoed down dim halls to where they thought the cadavers might be located. They were stopped by a locked door and tried to break it. Just as they were about to snap it, an alarm sounded. They ran until security

guards locked down the building. Then, there were red sirens; sweat and heart beats pounding. They were trapped and ultimately cited for trespassing.

All of the young men, who were in their junior year, were put on academic probation, and just a week after Matthew broke the news to his parents, Red approached the limestone stairs that led up to the Cathedral of Learning. He craned his neck and stared at the top of the tallest academic building in the world, at the place where he was not able to study as an undergraduate because of circumstances beyond his control. And this was the very place where his son was so recklessly and irresponsibly fucking up. He and Olga didn't have time to deal with Matthew's ridiculous unreliability, but he'd be damned if his son didn't finish his schooling, so Red walked up the stairs to the Office of the Dean of the School of Arts and Sciences. He didn't want this meeting to take very long, but he would have to plead to keep his son in school. He never wanted to beg for anything from anyone, but he knew that this act of supplication was for Matthew and not for himself.

The Dean was patient and serious as he heard a steel mill worker's story of pinching pennies and eating scrambled eggs for dinner, of many young children, of building part of his own house in the suburbs only so that his son could destroy his family name. He promised the Dean that his son would change if he lived at home, that he wouldn't drink a drop of alcohol, that he would admirably finish his studies. Red assured the Dean that Matthew's older sisters weren't so badly behaved, that Matthew just needed the supervision of his parents for a little while longer. The Dean, proving the graciousness of his understanding of young men, agreed to let Matthew stay in school as long as he lived with Red and Olga.

My mother's parents didn't necessarily like this Matthew kid because he seemed like trouble, especially with his academic probation and bartending and being required to live at home. They warned Tina not to see him again, but she railed at her parents in their living room that she *would* see him again or else they'd never see *her* again. After experiencing their daughter so fiery about this Matthew kid, her parents backed off and told her that she needed to make her own decisions because she was in her early twenties and becoming an adult.

And so Matthew saw Tina less because he lived an hour away. He spent more time in class, too, and during the rest of his junior year and throughout his senior year, he found a little desk on the fourth floor of the Hillman Library. He sat there high above Forbes Avenue trying to study geography. When he was bored, he leaned upon the windows that stretched the length of the walls and eyed the grassy knoll which led to the stairs of the Cathedral of Learning. He watched his peers walk hand-in-hand, with platform heels and bell bottoms that covered their shoes, with books. He watched the Toyotas and Oldsmobiles drive down Bigelow Boulevard. Even though the air still tasted like pennies, no longer was the city blackened and charred, but its air was slightly healthier. Matthew knew this because the whole scene he looked upon had a yellowish, ginger tint, the color of Pittsburgh life in the 1960s and 1970s. The buses to Shadyside and Squirrel Hill blared; but mostly, Pittsburgh was just overcast and gloomy. He felt caged in the library.

He knew that he needed to straighten himself out, perhaps drink less alcohol, but this chained-in feeling...he couldn't shake it. Everything that Matthew ever wanted was *out there*. He wanted noise and work and doing something with his hands. He leaned

against the wall with the image of his father searing into his mind, a man who owned a house, cars. Red had a decent-paying job to care for his wife, his children. He lived in a community that he loved. Red made it just by working in the mill. Matthew wanted to do the same. He'd work with his hands in the same way that his grandfather and father and uncles worked with gloves on in the steel mills, melding and molding, causing the yellow dust to float through Pittsburgh's air. As Matthew returned to his desk to bend over a book for a class called Rhetoric in the Free Society, he knew that he needed to get out, that working life was calling him.

One night during their senior year when Matthew and Tina were spending time together, months after his probationary period, months after her altercation with her parents, she looked at him and said, "Hey, do you want to get married or what?" His response was a simple, "All right." And that was that. They were married a year after they graduated and rented a house in Oakland near Tina's new workplace.

My mother secured a job as an intensive care unit nurse. She befriended many of her co-workers who had also recently gotten married. A lot of her nursing friends were in their early twenties, very tan, and helped little premature newborns breathe a little easier in the world. She worked full time at the hospital. Twelve hour shifts. She and my father labored enough to move out of Oakland and into the Dormont neighborhood, which was just outside of the city limits, where they bought their first house.

Red got his son a job at Homestead Steel Works when United States Steel was looking to boot out senior workers in favor of a younger and less valuable labor force. My father started as a foreman in production, primarily in crane operation. Just twenty-two years old and newly married to my mom, he guided a crane that carried three

hundred tons of molten hot alloy steel at 3,000 degrees Fahrenheit from one part of the mill to another. My father worked day and night, thirteen hours a day, six days a week for three years. He absolutely loved it, and he was making really good money for a twenty-three year old.

My parents' generation lived in a city that reaped the benefits of the steel industry's peak. They saw the end of the first Pittsburgh Renaissance and the beginning of the second Pittsburgh Renaissance, when huge skyscrapers re-outlined the city's skyline, when the point at which the three rivers converged (literally called "The Point") was no longer filled with warehouses and smokestacks and bridges but with a park and a fountain and trails. My mother and father inhabited a world built by their ancestors, one that relied upon the hard work of immigrants, one that guaranteed such work would bring a modest income and a chance for survival. Their future was secure and bright, and they believed that everything would lead into something else, something positive, because of the world's inherently sensible design.

And then, steel crumbled.

In 1984, my father answered a telephone call that explained he was being laid off. In the next few weeks, he applied for unemployment benefits while my mother continued to work at the hospital. My father resorted to working as a car salesman and then an Orkin man. He carries the anger of being let go with him to this day. Working with steel was his life blood, his connection to his father and grandfather; the stem that planted him into the city.

They cannot live without each other. Their bickering that I once thought was malicious as a child is actually quite funny, and their honesty with each other is

something that everyone notices. Even though I've never seen them kiss or show any affection other than a pathetic side-hug, they have always cared greatly about my sisters and me, and we are sure that that care forced their relationship to survive.

I searched for six years. I looked for love, romance, companionship, courtship just like my forebears had done. They paved a way for me to discover soul mates and unwavering friendships. I assumed that moving to the city of Pittsburgh would provide some kind of glimmering hope for my romantic life. I assumed that I was the daughter of Yinzers who would find a son of Yinzers, and we would craft anew the city that gave us role models, stories of strength and ardor, of patience and passion and star-crossed love. I assumed that I was similar to my ancestors, that my generation was similar to theirs, but after six years of searching, I left Pittsburgh because all that I found was rootless, indefatigable lust.

On my first day as an undergraduate at the University of Pittsburgh, I met a young man named Bob. He was standing in the cinderblock hallway of our co-ed residence hall and having an animated conversation about Frisbee with some other guy. I stepped outside of my doorway and approached the two young men to introduce myself. The one dude with reddish hair immediately smiled and shook my hand and told me that his name was Sean. The other guy gave a simple head-nod with a lame greeting, something like, "Hey. I'm Bob." He could have been in a Hollister advertisement with his muscular shoulders and thick forearms, a luscious head of black hair, and a strong jaw. He wore a Batman t-shirt, and I figured that he was probably a real tool though I was definitely interested in his physique.

We soon became friends on Facebook. On AIM Instant Messenger, he said that he was studying dietetics, and I told him that I was pursuing creative nonfiction writing. He often went home on the weekends to visit his girlfriend who was still in high school, and during that time, I developed other friendships with guys and girls on our floor. I would see him occasionally on weekday nights when the floor was quiet because my friends were rushing sororities or going out for Thirsty Thursdays. I wasn't a drinker, and neither was he, so we bonded over that abstinence and our love of Pittsburgh.

A few months into the semester, Bob and I started to study together in our dorm rooms. He would lie on his bed while I sat at his desk, or I would lie on my bed while he sat on my floor. Other friends from our floor joined us, and we developed a close-knit social circle that consisted of a few girls and a few boys who didn't go out drinking but liked to watch movies and study and laugh at goofy YouTube videos.

Before long, Bob and I sat up talking nightly. We met each other at the dining hall or in the lounge or outside after dusk and talked about past relationships (or a lack of them in my case), friends from home, or friends at our new home. I loved musicals and danced in a few throughout high school, and he also loved musicals but was too embarrassed to try out for a role. We chatted about running. I sprinted in my early high school years, and he was the captain of his high school's cross country team. We grew up in different but relatively similar suburbs of Pittsburgh, and both of us were oldest siblings of a three kids.

We studied at the Cathedral of Learning, and we'd marvel at its victory lights all pink and red and golden. We laughed at our fellow undergraduates who called the Cathedral of Learning the "Drunken Compass" because we swore that we'd never drink

an ounce of liquor. I considered Bob to be one of my best friends, and it didn't take him long to call me his best female friend.

We were merciless and unyielding. He liked that I was opinionated but terribly innocent. I liked his charm but not his vanity. I was amazed to hear his stories about disciplining his body to get ready for wrestling matches, about losing ten pounds overnight to prepare for weighing in. Our electricity was palpable, and somehow I knew, like I was trying to prophesize, that he and I were inexplicably linked, that I had captured his attention and he mine, that we would ruin each other.

People started showing their suspicions about the two of us when one of Bob's friends walked into his room as we were watching *The Office*. The friend apologized awkwardly for interrupting, and Bob laughed and said, "Yeah, like we were really doing it, Dan." Bob looked slyly in my direction. In my minimal amount of interaction with the opposite sex, I thought that possibly Bob had feelings for me, and I was certainly starting to feel joy every time Bob looked slyly at me and smiled.

On Valentine's Day in 2008, I received a note on my door that read: "You are cordially invited to an evening of enchantment, dining, and fun. Meet us for dinner at 9 p.m." Bob and a few of his friends drafted these invitations and placed them on my door as well as three of my girlfriends' doors. Even though a few of the boys had girlfriends, they dressed up in suits and accompanied us girls out to dinner in Squirrel Hill, though everyone paid separately. Apparently, the whole plan was Bob's idea which at the time I assumed was a way to make sure that I had plans with him on Valentine's Day, even though he had a girlfriend and even though we were "just friends." Later that night, he

held me close after I found out that a friend from high school was killed by a drunk driver.

During our second semester, I started smoking hookah and cigarettes and listened to Janis Joplin records with other writing majors. I went out on Friday nights and drank Natty with the other freshmen on my floor. Bob and I continued to be friends, but he was critical of my lifestyle choices until one night when Bob got plastered. We had said that we would hang out together, but our plans fell through and we went to separate parties. My wing-woman and good friend Susanna walked with me out of our dormitory, and we inhaled the smells of garbage and grease and cheap perfume. The Cathedral of Learning had been power-washed that year so it was golden with lights, and it had a hypnotizing power to guide, to seek, to yield to the whims of youth. The night sky was clear and full of stars. People strolled on sidewalks before jay-walking across Forbes and Fifth Avenues. Undergrads being undergrads. We had pre-gamed, so we high-fived other students as we walked down Atwood Street in tight black skirts. We stumbled into a fraternity highlighter party where everyone wore white t-shirts and drew on each other underneath black lights.

Susanna and I found random guys with which to grind. I touched other guys' hips, junk, other parts of their bodies while they breathed into my neck, my hair, kissed my cheek, showing the symptoms of liquid courage. Even though I had straightened my hair like all of the other freshmen girls, it was starting to curl with the humidity and closeness of bodies, with the sweat that dripped down my back. The speakers blasted "Get Low" by Lil' Jon, the EastSide Boyz and the Yin Yang Twins and "Low" by Flo Rida. The bass and the rap lyrics about grinding and sweat dripping down a guy's balls

made everyone just want to fuck. I knew that's what all the guys wanted, and Susanna and I knew that girls wanted it, too. It would just be a matter of where and when.

Bob and I texted back and forth about cuddling. I left the highlighter party and skipped back to my dorm room. A few minutes later, I heard pounding on my door. A look through the peephole revealed Bob standing there staring at the floor. When I opened the door, Susanna and Sean and some other friends were chatting and pointing at Bob and ogling at the two of us. I knew that we looked shady in my doorway. He slurred a question that sounded like: "Can you take care of me?" His eyes were glassy, and he pretty much tumbled into my room without any answer from me. I brought him to the bathroom and attempted to get his massive 5'10", 170 pound body to bend over the toilet. Once he was in puke position, he told me that he was a virgin, and I laughed out loud. He kept going: "I wish you weren't so pretty. My girlfriend fucking hates you." Despite knowing that Bob was drunk, something in me tightened and dimmed at the thought of that girl at home, probably asleep, dreaming of the day that she and Bob would be together again. His roommate tried to get him out of my room, but he refused to leave.

We curled up in my bed. He asked, "Promise you won't kiss me?" Then he leaned over my body and smiled, and when I promised that I wouldn't, he said, "you're so witty." His fingers ran through my long, newly dyed dark brown hair. He rolled on top of me and caressed my arm. I wanted him to hold me, protect me; I told him this, and he pulled me closer. Later, while he slept and after my tipsy started to wear off, I stared at the cinderblock ceiling and wondered what I was doing with this prick who wouldn't break up with his needy high school girlfriend. The thought of that little girl made my

anger surge, and so without explanation or thought, I rolled his body off the standard-issue elevated extra-long twin bed and heard him crash onto the ground. He lay there in silence. Minutes went by and the darkness grew cooler without his body next to mine. I thought that he'd leave but also felt terrible for knocking him off the bed almost immediately after I did it. I asked him to come back, and all he said was, "Convince me."

At the end of freshman year, he came into my room when all of my things were packed away and I was waiting for my dad to pick me up. Bob tried to tell me that things would be different next year because he was going to be an RA and I was living in a different dormitory. He said that he'd miss me, and then we stood in awkward silence. I reached my arms around his neck, and he grabbed my waist and lifted me off of the ground, dug his face into my shoulder and held me tightly. His embrace had done what it always did. It made me feel safe.

During the summer, we continued to talk, to fight, to laugh, and to say goodnight to each other. I recalled his words "I would date you if you were skinnier" over and over and over. It was unrelenting. His little high school girlfriend was a twig, and I wanted to be everything that Bob wanted me to be, so I shrunk down to ninety pounds. We tried to see each other in June and July, but I was working three different jobs and too nervous to see him. He was always with Rachel; although, things between them were getting rocky. At the beginning of our sophomore year, he and everybody else noticed my weight loss. He had broken up with Rachel just a few weeks earlier, and I guessed that we would start dating soon.

In Lothrop Hall, where my parents lived in 1976, we first saw each other after a long summer apart. By that point, the sickness had completely taken over me. In my

delusional state, I decided that the fact that we were together again on the same floor where my parents lived was a sign that we'd end up married. After hanging out in his room and staying over quite late, I asked if I could sleep on the floor. He agreed that I could sleep over, but he wouldn't let me sleep on the floor. I couldn't understand why until he eventually proclaimed: "You once told me that there isn't any chivalry left in the world. Let me sleep on the floor."

There were other nights together, other sleepovers when we actually stayed in the same bed. He cradled his arm around my waist, "How are you? Do you need more blanket? Are you cold?" He inched closer to my face. He lifted me up onto his chest and rubbed my back in the most protective, gentle way. "I just want to make you happy. I just want to see you smile," he whispered in my ear. I wanted him to say that he loved me, that he'd take care of me. I could finally touch him and kiss him without feeling guilty, and before I went to sleep every night when we weren't together, I waited for his text message, waited for the goodnight, for him to search for me.

The tenor of our relationship shifted when one of his late-night texts said that I could use him and he could use me. He wanted to remain emotionally detached. I called him minutes later and screamed that he was a creep and a user and an asshole, like every other guy that I had ever met, that he wasn't chivalrous at all. He called me a cunt, a crazy bitch, a psycho. He said that he didn't need my friendship, that he was dumping me. Our relationship halted just as quickly as it accelerated.

In those college years, Pittsburgh provided no solace. In 2009, the Steelers won the Super Bowl, which would seem like a celebratory event, but for some reason, Oakland erupted, and students and residents attacked businesses, street signs, and traffic

lights. The G-20 summit occurred in the same year, and amid tear gas, sirens, and overly aggressive policemen, I watched my friends get arrested from my young sister's dorm room in the Shampoo Bottles. Our beloved city had turned to crisis in minutes.

By the summer before my senior year, I was a regular at the bar that replaced the Wooden Keg. Its new name was Hemingway's, and it was the kind of place that served shot pitchers named the "Miley Cyrus" with gummy worms popping out of the pitcher. My friends and I loved Wednesday nights because Hemingway's hosted karaoke, and every time I walked into that bar, no matter what night, I always saw someone I knew. Guys liked Hemingway's because Pittsburgh sports were always on the TVs. Girls like Hemingway's because guys were always there, and I liked Hemingway's because the bartenders served rum and diets in pint glasses that I could see through.

One night before the start of my senior year, I walked to Hemingway's to meet up with some friends from freshman year that I hadn't seen for a while. I ordered my rum and Diet, and we reminisced about how we used to frequent gross fraternity parties on Atwood Street and use the Cathedral of Learning as our Drunken Compass. Then, Bob walked in. I hadn't seen him for over a year and a half, and the last time that we had spoken to one another was on the night that we screamed into our phones.

I slugged my rum and Diet Coke and asked for another. He approached our group, and all of us exchanged hellos. He asked how we were doing, and we invited him to sit down with us. He and I acknowledged each other, and after about an hour, we were talking with the same electric intensity as if our sophomore year argument had never happened. We made fun of each other, laughed, tried on compliments. Our conversation was a tennis match of wit, and it was completely intoxicating. Bob and I conversed about

how I had become a Christian and how he was looking for another church. He asked permission to walk me home, and when we got into the doorway to my apartment complex, he swung me into his arms and kissed me.

Later, when I was on top of him, he grabbed his flip phone and started texting someone. In my passionate drunkenness, in my constant, latent rage toward him that always wanted to boil over, I grabbed his phone from his hands and threw it into my bedroom wall. It crashed and split in half. I shouted that he just wanted to use me like he had used me years before. I cursed wildly at him, and he panicked and tried to explain himself, but I kept yelling. So he roared into my face that I was acting crazy, and he looked throughout my bedroom for his clothes. He hurriedly put on his pants then grabbed the pieces of his phone.

Of course, even though I was very willing to engage in our rendezvous, I wanted him to feel guilty for being so emotionally unavailable, and in my drunkenness, I wanted him to think that I was crazy and to know that he had hurt me over and over and that I wouldn't be able to forgive him even though I was desperately trying. Without wearing pants, I ran through my hallway shouting at him as he bolted down the staircase of the apartment complex and onto South Bouquet Street. I kept running, pants-less, kept crying and bellowing for him and at him until I realized, after nearly two blocks, that my attempts were foolish. As a result of that realization, I walked back to my bedroom and slept soundly.

The next morning, I woke up completely hungover to a text from him asking if I was okay and if I wanted to go to church. We agreed to meet at 11 a.m. I waited for him outside of the building and saw him walking down the hill from his residence hall where

he was still an RA. He was slightly wet from his morning shower and wore a tight Batman t-shirt. His eyes ignited with deviance, and he simply said, “We cool?” I just smiled, and we walked into our house of worship. We continued going to church together for the weeks leading up to the start of our senior year. Bob liked hearing me sing the old Christian hymns, and he bent closer towards me to listen to my voice. We always had lunch afterwards.

On one of our lunch dates just before the start of our senior year, Bob posed a question that I had expected for a long time. “Was I the one that did it to you?” He and I knew what he meant by “it.” The skinny, the shrinking, the bones coming out of skin. His eyes were sincere, yearning, hoping that I would reassure him. I couldn’t lie and said, “Yeah,” and kept eating my eggs. I stared at the bread on my plate and thought about a time when I wouldn’t have buttered my bread, or eaten it. “I’m so sorry, Anna. I never thought that you’d get so thin.” I told him that it was my fault, that I had had problems, that I didn’t want to talk about it. He wasn’t satisfied with my answer and tried to push me to explain, but I wasn’t ready to discuss the rituals, the obsessions, the psychological trauma of fasting so furiously that I became skeletal. We never brought it up again.

By the end of that summer, we watched each other date other people, but I always left room for Bob. My boyfriend knew about him, knew that Bob and I danced every Thursday to Ke\$ha’s “We R Who We R.” Bob and I grinded with the anonymity of red and blue lights and \$2.50 Long Island Iced-Teas as if they were walls surrounding us. We stayed just close enough so that a kiss was ever-pending.

One night after dancing, I drunkenly strolled to my boyfriend's house after two in the morning. I put my phone underneath my pillow and cuddled next to my boyfriend. Then I heard a buzz. The bluish glow from my flip phone illuminated the room. It was a simple text: "Anna, I love you." The impact of those words was stunning and horrific. I thought about the way that I wanted to hear those words for the longest time, how I would've given anything to hear those words from him, but Bob and I were only good for manipulating each other. I had once dreamed that I would marry him, but I knew that we were beyond romance, beyond happily-ever-after. And yet there we were, supposedly with other people, but completely unable to let go. I settled for a response to this text in the way that he might respond to me. I told him that he was drunk and needed to go to bed, that he needed to think of his girlfriend. He wrote, "Okay. But it's true. I should have told you years ago." We met at church the following day, and when I asked if he was okay, he explained that he was just really inebriated the night before.

Bob and his girlfriend split one night when he smashed a dresser in her room after finding out that she had given head to one of his friends. My boyfriend and I broke up pretty soon after we graduated, so Bob and I continued to see each other, sometimes in a platonic way and sometimes in a nauseating and relentless and lustful way. We performed outrageous outbursts for another year, on and off again like an addiction. I served in an AmeriCorps program while Bob became a super senior and waited tables at a restaurant. But in 2012, after yet another night of romping and a morning of stupid, sorry apologies, I ended it, told him to exit my life, and there wasn't any resistance. I knew that if he wasn't such a violent, narcissistic asshole and I wasn't such a controlling, crazy bitch, then we could have been together. Probably. Probably not.

CHAPTER 3

THROUGH BREWING

Eli, 24 year old male

At Industry Public House in the Lawrenceville neighborhood of Pittsburgh, my sister Gwen and I wait for her high school friends to show up. Industry is a bar where craft beer and funky appetizers are served by an attractive wait staff. It's always crowded, and sometimes people can get rowdy, but it's the type of place where someone can bring her mom and not feel totally weird about that. Gwen is on winter break from teaching physics. Her best friend from high school is the first to join us. More of Gwen's friends arrive and start drinking 7and7s and vodka tonics and IPAs. Everyone is trim, happy, white, and well-dressed. We fit in to this bar, this scene with other slim, well-dressed, young, white people.

I, however, do not feel connected to these people, mostly because I am only sipping on ginger ale and saying hellos to vaguely-remembered acquaintances from my sister's youth, but she is happy. I am her DD, and letting her have a good time is all that matters because she's had a tough year teaching physics to kids who must keep pistols in their backpacks when they walk to school.

After we've been chumming around in Industry for an hour or so, I order some food because Gwen's friends are starting to yell as loudly as other folks. Then I walk around the bar, which probably has close to 100 tables, and look for people that I might know. I work as a waitress in this part of town, in a little ma-and-pop café about a block away from Industry. There are people from Lawrenceville who I'd love to see, like the middle-aged black guy who owns the corner store, the young Asian bartender with her septum piercing, my drag queen coworker with the Cyndi Lauper tattoo on his right thigh, and there are those who I'd rather not see, like the middle-aged white bartender who owns the zombie store down the street and regularly hits on me, my black and white bi-racial ex-lover who I met in our AmeriCorps service term, my middle-aged micromanaging boss with her terrible 90s mom hair. Thinking about running into that latter group of people makes staying sober a rather difficult decision, and I wonder if that makes me a substance abuser.

And then I see my cousin Eli. A very strange surprise. Even without wearing his giant winter jacket, he is huge. He has to be close to three hundred pounds, but he smiles half-heartedly and walks over to where I'm standing. It's hard to repress my shock that he is in Lawrenceville and at the same bar as Gwen and me. We hug each other like cousins should hug, and I take him over to where my sister and her friends are sitting. Gwen also looks surprised that Eli accepted her juicer invitation over Christmas dinner to join us at Industry.

The dark circles under Eli's eyes are magnetic, and I can tell that Gwen is looking at them, too. Gwen's friends stare skeptically at our cousin, wondering the identity of this large, seemingly intoxicated, druggie-looking big white dude. He's a cousin from the

Barry side of our family; he's just seven months younger than me and only nine months older than Gwen, which makes him the closest in age to both of us on either side of our large Catholic families.

After receiving the necessary introduction to Eli, the rest of Gwen's friends carry on with their conversations about corporate and nonprofit jobs, meeting with clients, dealing with employers, and Gwen makes a conscious effort to discuss climate change and politics with Eli, who also engages with her in an intelligent way. Eli has been working at a fracking company, so my cousin and sister talk science while I quietly observe their conversation and watch Eli drink like a juicehead. He doesn't sip. He gulps. Taking just a few swigs before the entire beer is gone. I watch him carefully, keeping tabs on their conversation, on what he says to Gwen. He takes a few more swigs of another beer. Of another. Of another. He doesn't drink any liquor, just lots and lots of beer. Gwen seems to be enjoying his company, laughing, talking, sipping on her 7and7.

Before long, it is nearing midnight, and I want to leave because Gwen's friends also started to leave. I imagine that it's too cold for Eli to wait outside for the two or three buses he'd have to take back to Munhall, and I also don't want him to continue drinking like an alky because I don't want to feel responsible for what he does after he leaves Industry so I offer to drive him back to his dad's apartment, but he says that he'll take a taxi. I am skeptical, but after he reassures me that he'll be fine; we hug each other and say our goodbyes.

After Gwen and I leave, she asks why I said next to nothing to Eli. I then inform her that Eli's sister-in-law, our cousin by marriage, privately shared a secret with me

regarding Eli that I could not forget, and when I tell my sister what Eli did and said, she gasps. She too is nervous that we left him at the bar by himself. On the way back to our parents' house, she texts him, tries to show concern and love and support by asking how he'll get home and telling him that he's smart and funny and that we enjoyed hanging out with him. All the while, I concentrate on driving back to the suburbs and silently try to answer a litany of questions: How did Eli become the person still sitting at the bar? How long can a family wait for someone to clean up his act before the family completely gives up on him? And why *have* we given up? Why is Eli less forgivable than my father or Great-Uncle Pat or Great-Grandpa Edward?

Is Eli less forgivable because medicine gives us genetics and research and treatment plans and doctors and addiction programs and psych evaluations and understanding, so we know what can be done for Eli even though he chooses not to get help? Or is there something else at work here, some kind of nebulous, vague cultural and social plague that won't seem to let up for generation after generation after generation after generation?

Have we understood less now that we know more, or are we just in a constant state of finding new words to describe old problems?

I can't seem to answer these questions on our drive home, but I know that, at some point, I will need to figure out answers because things seem to be getting worse for Eli, because I feel guilty, because I can be obsessive, because looking back tends to give the present more nuanced outlooks, more colorful horizons.

Eli, 23 year old male

The oil, natural gas, and fracking industries are booming in Pennsylvania in the last few years. They offer lucrative positions for men and women, for college grads and for those who did not succeed in or go to college, and especially men who can handle the intensive and dangerous labor. My cousin worked in this industry for a few years, but when he and his wife learned they were going to have a baby, they moved back home to Pittsburgh where he began to work at well sites near the city.

He secures Eli a job, too. The two brothers were ex-high school linebackers, so at over six feet tall and quite hulking, these men have important positions operating and testing well sites, drill locations, and machinery. They regularly post to social media the conflagrations that they see at their worksites. My cousins, and men like them, might be considered the modern-day Joe Magaracs of old Croatian myths because they tap into the earth using high-tech apparatuses to give us the things that make the world go. These men are burly, tough, towering, most of them not educated beyond high school, and yet, they are the contemporary blue collar work force, the men who would have been in the steel mills a hundred years ago, the men who often go unnoticed.

It's encouraging for me to see and hear that my cousins are working together, especially knowing that my older cousin can keep tabs on his little brother. Eli is maintaining his work schedule and making money, and my family hopes that one day perhaps he'll leave his father's apartment and be able to take care of himself.

After Eli works for this company for a little while, he buys a new truck and a motorcycle—things that as a twenty-something AmeriCorps volunteer I definitely don't own—and he loses a pretty significant amount of weight.

Our family breathes a sigh of relief when Eli comes to Thanksgiving and doesn't look like he's a drunk grim reaper.

Matthew, 55 year old male

Red passes away in the early morning hours of a cold day in February. When I find out that Red died, I have to leave work because I cry hysterically. When I speak with my father on the phone, he tells me that he's going to keep working rather than come home to grieve with my mom and me. At first I think he's being calloused, but my mom tells me that "it's what Red would want him to do."

On the day after Red's interment, my dad travels to the gravesite and drinks a Guinness before pouring another one on the dirt that protects his father's body.

Patrick, deceased male

When I am home for fall break during my penultimate semester as an undergrad, I type out a story on my laptop about my father's family. Dad stands in the kitchen and pours himself a glass of boxed wine even though his booziness is already showing. I ask my dad about my Great-Uncle Pat because I need to know more information for my story, but Dad laughs at me, at the question. He laughs so hard that his face turns beet red, like an alcoholic.

"Uncle Pat!" He pauses for a long moment, appearing to recall a memory from his childhood.

I think that he's going to continue speaking after he's done with his nostalgia, but when he does not talk at all, I ask him, "Dad, what do you mean?"

"What, Anna? What? What do you want to know about Uncle Pat for? Alcoholism runs on that side of the family."

“That’s all, Dad? That’s all you’re going to tell me about him?”

“He was nuts, Anna. That’s it. Pat was a crazy drunk.” And with that, my father walks down into his basement den.

Eli, 20 year old male

I call Le Cordon Bleu to ask about an application for Eli. He enjoys cooking, so I figure that this opportunity may be a good idea for him. I speak with a representative for twenty minutes about my cousin’s interest in the culinary arts. My wish is that he does something, anything besides being a rummy and playing video games and spending hours on Facebook. Le Cordon Bleu asks for Eli’s address to send the application, and I give it to the representative over the phone.

Eli never pursues Le Cordon Bleu, and I never make an effort to talk with him about why.

In the same year, my father goes to his sister’s house and yells at Eli to get his shit together. When Eli visits our grandparents, Red yells at him to find a fucking job. Almost every day of Eli’s life, his mother yells at him to figure something out. His brother tries to get Eli a job at FedEx. Eli’s older sister thinks it might be a good idea for her baby brother to join the Army, to live under her ranks as a private for a while. Eli pursues inebriety and does nothing.

Eli, 19 year old male

I have yet to earn less than an A- at the University of Pittsburgh, but at Indiana University of Pennsylvania, a small state school, Eli gets Ds and Fs. While I am an inebriate at frat parties and experience some nights when I black out from drinking too much, Eli smokes weed and never goes to class and plays video games and drinks. He

flunks out in our second semester. I find out that our wealthy aunt and uncle foot his tuition bill.

At a summer party later that year when I had dwindled to ninety pounds, I ask him what happened during his freshmen year. He gives a vague answer about smoking too much weed and perhaps getting caught with it, something about having to pay a fine. He tells me that I need to eat another hot dog, and I retort that he needs to eat one fewer. We cautiously chortle at each other, both succumbing to our sicknesses and feeling disgusted with the others' sickness. While I tell him that I have my class schedule planned down to the moment I will graduate, he explains that he has no plan about what to do next except to move in with his mother even though they fought constantly when he was a senior in high school.

Matthew, 52 year old male

My father's motto has always been: "If you go to work every day, then you'll be fine." He grumbles about talking on the phone all day to "idiots" who drive too quickly and wreck their cars, but he won't deny that he loves being a salesman. He sees his work as a way to help people through difficult situations. He'll say, "Who do people call first after they get into an accident? Me."

Dad has the strongest work ethic of anyone that I've ever known. He never sits down at big Christmas dinners, always helping the host or hostess with food prep or washing dishes after dinner is over. He's usually quiet at family gatherings, but sometimes becomes quite boisterous when he's in a fuddle.

His older sister talks to him about his drinking problem and encourages him to get help for it. She explains that she had to realize that she was an alcoholic and needed to

stop drinking completely in order to get sober. When he is not receptive to her advice, she scolds him, saying that if he's going to drink alcohol, then he should just stick to one kind of booze, either beer or wine or liquor, and not all three each night like he has been doing.

I don't know his response to her suggestions, but I can imagine that he just scoffed.

Patrick Barry, 78 year old male

My great-uncle Pat, who I never met or else can't remember, dies of a heart attack at age 78. My father goes to his uncle's funeral in support of Red, who is amazed that there are so many people at the viewing. Pat and Red didn't get along during many points of their adult lives because Pat was such a raging whetter, so Red lost touch with his only younger brother.

At the funeral though, Red witnesses many friends and neighbors and community leaders bow down before Pat's body and pay their respects. These non-family visitors approach Red and explain that his brother helped them become sober. Red knew that his brother was in Alcoholics Anonymous but had no idea about the magnitude of his brother's positive impact on their community.

Eli, 16 year old male

Eli scores higher than me on the SATs. Nearly perfect. I am furious that he can get into a better college than I can, especially since he seems so goofy and lazy, but I reason that his intelligence is the result of his private schooling. I assume that my public schooling is just not good enough to ace the SATs.

I remember when Eli's brother and our other older cousin tackled little Eli during a game of flag football in my backyard. These fights happened constantly. My dad often broke up their tiffs and yelled at our older cousins for being too rough with Eli. When Gwen, Nina, and I were kids and went to our aunt's, Eli and our other cousins rarely surfaced from the basement. They played video games for hours and goofed off, so it's hard to believe that my cry-baby, goofy, video game-playing, ridiculous cousin outscored me on the SAT.

I should really be more impressed that Eli even made it to the testing site as his mother and father just finalized their divorce. He is having a tough time with the household changes. My dad says that Eli even blames his mother for his parents' divorce. His father is planning move out soon, and Eli assumes that the domestic shifts are his mother's. My father and Red become Eli's surrogate dads while he continues through high school.

Eli, 8 year old male

I have a summer birthday, and all of my family is at my house to celebrate it. My mom made my favorite cake, and she wants me to sit in our living room to open up presents after dinner. Gwen, Nina, and Eli come into the living room, too, while all the adults gather around with drinks in their hands and watch me open up gifts.

My godmother wants me to read aloud the cards, so I begin with the first one and have some trouble saying words like "congratulations." My aunts and uncles encourage me to keep going. Mom says that Eli can also read cards if he wants. His words flow like water from his mouth, so fluid and clear. The adults ooooohh and aaaaaah over his

reading of *my* birthday cards, and I decide that I do not like my cousin anymore and that I don't want to read any more birthday cards.

Patrick, 53 year old male

Uncle Pat works at the Homestead Steel Works at the same time as my father. Uncle Pat, though, is on his way towards retirement, and my father is just a young twenty-something. Pat works a very technical job in the forge department. He lays out metal, works with machines, moves cranes back and forth. My father works in management as a foreman and primarily directs cranes to different locations near the open hearth furnaces. Pat also works as a foreman but operates more machinery and handles more equipment, and therefore has the potential to do a lot more damage to the production of steel as well as men's bodies than my father.

Matthew, 21 year old male

My father is the bartender with the whistle, which he hangs in a sacred place in the employee room at the Wooden Keg. A thirty foot bar precedes an illuminated dancefloor upon which the disco era at the University of Pittsburgh was born. Dad has permed hair and wears platform shoes. His chest hair sticks out of his shirt as he prepares rum and cokes and vodka tonics for the college kids and friends he knows, for my mother, his girlfriend. He collects tips and tries not to think of the long night that he has ahead of him, of the cleaning that he must do, of the tumulencie he must encourage to earn his livelihood.

Patrick, 43 year old male

At age fourteen, my father stands before the bishop at St. Benedict the Abbot Church. He has been an altar boy for most of his life, and now he waits for the bishop to

say the holy words that recognize he has reached spiritual maturity in the eyes of the Catholic Church. Uncle Pat waits behind my dad as his sponsor. With his plie-pot uncle, my father walks forward, and Uncle Pat puts his hand on my father's shoulder while my father puts his hands in prayer position at his chest.

"Be sealed with the gift of the Holy Spirit," states the bishop as he blesses my father with Chrism oil and the sign of the cross. The two men walk alongside each other as they head back to their pew.

Patrick, 38 year old male

At baptism parties, Christmases, and Easter dinners, Pat stands next to his wife, his siblings, and their significant others. All of them seek distemper, but Pat's face is that of a sot, pulsing, vibrant ruby, which is part Irish heritage, part tippler. He is hulking and stalky, an imposing man, but smiling, laughing, and joking with priests and neighbors and siblings and his nieces and nephew. Pat, Red, and their siblings physically resemble their mother, Nora Barry, with her high cheekbones, deep-set blue eyes, and curly strawberry hair, but when their faces are flushed, they resemble their father, Edward Barry.

Edward, 62 year old male

Edward's daughters are worried. He has been a drunkery all day, and they are tired of his antics. He needs to sleep off his drunkelec, but he's not been compliant with his daughters' demands to go to sleep. My great-aunt calls her older brother Red because she and her sister figure that they might need a man to straighten out their father.

Red drives from his suburban home to his childhood home in Oakland. He walks into his father's house and hears him yelling and hollering about nothing in particular.

His yveresce is so bad that his speech slurs, and Red tells his father to quiet down and get into bed. He follows his dad into a bedroom on the first floor and waits there beside him until he goes to sleep.

The next day, the housekeeper walks into Edward's room to check on him and finds that he is cold as the icebox.

Patrick Barry, 20 year old male

Edward needs his two sons to come to the house and fix the cement steps that lead to the front door. They've been cracked and crumbling for years, and the housekeeper is afraid that Edward will fall down one winter's day. So on a warm afternoon, Red and Pat head to their childhood home. Pat just came home from Japan and isn't in the mood to deal with Red because he'll just be bossy all day. The two men arrive separately and greet their father and younger sisters and housekeeper before starting on the project that their father asked them to complete.

Red yells at Pat to measure this and that in his hard, husky voice, to keep working so that they can finish pouring the cement before it gets too hot out. Pat, who started his drunkship as soon as he got to his father's house, tells his brother to fuck off. Red accuses Pat of reckless drunkelewness, and Pat, stupiddrunk and angry, sticks his beer can right into the middle of the cement mold.

There, it solidifies and memorializes a stupid fight. The secrets of a family, so emblematic in that concrete, wait for the day when they will be cracked open.

Patrick Barry, 11 year old male

Edward takes his boys to County Cork, Ireland, also known as the "Rebel County," for a year in search of a second Irish wife. The boys were in Ireland once

before, but they were very young. Pat only two and Red only four. What they remember is that between visiting their mother and their father's families, their little sister was born.

So close to the Celtic Sea, County Cork's cliffs act as a barrier to the pearly-crested waves of the salt water. County Cork is green, like no other emerald or Kerry that Pat or Red have ever seen. The green is so plentiful, and it infinitely ornaments the ground where their father grew up.

Even though Red and Pat knew that their mother and father grew up in Ireland, they knew also not to ask too many questions. Edward did not talk to his children about his involvement with the Irish Free Army, the reason that most of Edward and Nora's children were born in America. The children knew only that their father needed to leave Ireland because anyone who was involved in the Free Army was sentenced to prison.

On this second trip in Ireland, Patrick and Red attend school together while their father continues his dronkehede, stumbling around his homeland, lost and found, hidden and revealed. Their father's drunkenness progresses as he falls down a small hill off the main road one day while walking home from school with his boys.

Edward does not find another Nora, but Pat and Red encounter the Homestead, the place where Edward was born and where Edward's father built his own home on top of land that extends to the Atlantic Ocean.

Patrick Barry, 10 year old male

Pat feels the rain drip at night and watches out for his little sisters so the rats won't bite them. He thinks about what Red told him earlier that day when they were both so hungry.

Red and his friends passed a pie shop on their way into school. That afternoon, Red and his friends' hunger took over them, and they decided to break into the shop to steal all the pies.

If Pat stole the pies rather than Red, then he'd have somehow been caught and reprimanded. But Red could do no wrong. Even his kid-sister called Red the "white knight" and Pat the "black knight."

Edward Barry, 46 year old male

Despite Edward's Irish post-secondary education, he only has two career options after coming to Pittsburgh: public transportation or public safety work. He chooses the former and typically drives the 77/54 streetcar, which is nicknamed the "Flying Fraction" by Rege Cordic's popular morning radio show.

Perhaps on these rides, Edward recalls the first time that he saw Nora, who was a patron on his bus route, and the smile that she gave to him when she agreed to go out on a first date. Maybe he drifts into memories of their wedding when she smiled widely, like she was laughing, like she was proud of her teeth. Her anachronistic smile contrasted other women's smiles from the same time period. Most women tended to purse their lips before the camera, but on the day that she and Edward married, Nora flashed her carefree, lovely smile.

Perhaps Edward drives and remembers her stories about coming to America. Nora was working on the Joyce family farm in Galway before she came to Pittsburgh. When she arrived in the first decade of the twentieth century, she looked for work as a maid, and on trolley rides to various clients' homes, she had her first conversations with Edward.

As the driver of the Flying Fraction, Edward watches the city crash in the 1930s. From Brentwood, Edward drives down the hilly, turbulent Banksville Road to Mount Oliver, then moves through the Southside and up through the Hill District. He drives past the Carnegie Library and his church, Saint Paul Cathedral, then through Bloomfield down to Lawrenceville and into the North Side. He sees droves of men and women in line for soup kitchens, homeless children and families, the smoke coming from the steel mills, the ashen look of everything.

Edward Barry, 46 year old male

Edward's drunceness begins when his children are asleep upstairs, when the rats make his kids flinch in the middle of the night. He drinks whiskey alone while his children lay wide awake, impatiently waiting for the coming dawn.

After their mother's death, their father never speaks her name. The youngest girl is told that she was the problem baby, that she was the reason Edward and Nora should have stopped having children, that she killed their mother and, consequently, their father.

Edward probably frequents the confessional booth at Saint Paul Cathedral on Saturdays when his kids play in the neighborhood. Perhaps the guilt pervades him. Perhaps he confesses that he should have stopped, that he did not need to know Nora as Adam knew Eve, that her death was his fault.

Edward Barry, 42 year old male

Edward cannot bear to hold his baby girl because he thinks about Nora, and as a result, he does not hesitate to wash his hands of their youngest child. He gives the child to a neighboring family, to people that he knows, good Irish Catholic folks who will raise her until she reaches adulthood.

Perhaps this is when Edward's druncennisse occurs regularly, after knowing that his wife died at the hands of their sixth child who, he determines, will not know her father's identity until he dies. Perhaps Edward thinks about if and how his older children might comprehend his decision to give up their baby sister. Perhaps he thinks that if he does not say anything to them, then they will know that he doesn't want to talk about it. Perhaps he never finds out that Margie tried to steal the child from this neighboring family but was caught before she could make it home.

Edward Barry, 42 year old male

Nora's blood rushes out of her opening along with the head of her youngest child. The doctors could not have known this, but during Nora's pregnancy, the placenta attached itself to the bottom of her uterus, near her cervix, and when her water broke, so forth came the blood, unmitigated, overwhelming.

And the bleeding does not stop. Though the doctor removes the child out of Nora's body, he is not able to revive Nora. She dies of placenta previa and leaves Edward to his druncennisse and their six children to the will of God.

I imagine the silence in Edward's home after returning from the hospital, after Nora finished her last breath and only the sounds of the newborn baby could be heard crying out, unknowingly motherless, into taupe walls and her father's untrusting hands.

Eli, 26 year old male

Eli has always been good with kids. They laugh at his goofy faces, his Donald Duck impersonations, his quirky sounds. His nephew is particularly fond of Eli's goofiness, and on Christmas Eve, my family watches Eli play with his nephew in my aunt's living room. He is just cracking up over Eli's animation of a stuffed animal, a dog

that the boy has come to love. The baby and his Uncle Eli share the same ice blue eyes, the same square face, the same dirty blonde hair. His cute little baby laugh puts a smile on everyone's face, and it is a joy to see Eli playing with his nephew.

This is the first time that Eli and his brother have interacted since Eli was fired from the fracking company a few months ago. My cousin helped cover for his brother as much as he could until Eli skipped out on work just one too many times. I pay attention to the brothers' interactions and watch how my older cousin handles the awkward situation with his brother.

My mom holds little Brittney, the newest child in our family. Mom always inspects the babies, and as the neonatal intensive care unit nurse of the family, my cousin nervously expresses concern about the newborn's eating habits to my mom. Mom cradles the baby and assures her that the baby girl is fine.

With a glass of whiskey in his hand, Eli sits down next to his brother on the couch, and I eye the two brothers talking cordially to one another. My mom notices this too, and she walks over to her nephews.

My mom shoves the baby at Eli and says, "Here, Eli, take your niece. Put down that drink. She needs to know you."

Eli and his brother look surprised at my mother's insistence. I too am shocked that Mom didn't take into consideration that Eli has been smoking all day and that she doesn't deserve to smell that second-hand smoke, but Mom still shoves the baby into Eli's arms after he puts down his drink. All of my family members seem to hold their breath because we are aware of the tension between the brothers, but they simply go along with Aunt Tina's command and pats his baby girl's head while Eli holds her. Eli's

giant body dwarfs the little girl, who doesn't cry or whine. She simply sleeps in the arms of her uncle.

When my mom comes back over to the kitchen where I'm standing, I whisper to her, "Mom, Eli smells awful."

"Oh, he's fine," she waves away my concern. "I give babies to parents who smell like smoke all the time. Eli needs this."

When I look back at my two cousins cradling and caring for the next generation of the Barry clan, I can't help but think that this is a sentimental and touching scene, that my mom is right. Perhaps everything that we know about Eli and his troubling past can be blamed upon some other phenomenon, upon a "broken home," or genetics, or social conditioning. It's not in my nature to make this argument, but perhaps Eli's joblessness and drinking and smoking habits are just his choices and not his laziness or his addictions. Perhaps it's easier to blame someone for his faults when you grow up beside him rather than look back upon his past. In any event, two questions loom in my mind as I ponder these thoughts and witness this scene. Two questions directed to his niece and nephew that have yet to be answered by time, and those questions are these: little children, will you know your uncle? Will your uncle see you grow up?

CHAPTER 4

ABOVE AVERAGE FUNCTIONING

Because of my mother’s career as a nurse, I know a bit about how institutions in Pittsburgh have contributed to advancements in women’s care, but as a survivor of multiple mental illnesses, I’ve come to learn much more about the history of mental health treatment in the City of Steel. Western Psychiatric Institute and Clinic (or “Western Psych,” as we locals call it) is one of the country’s leading institutions on psychiatric education and research, and this makes Pittsburgh a hopeful place to those of us who are neurodiverse. Even though I’ve never been a patient at Western Psych, I know that its providers treat a variety of illnesses ranging from Alzheimer’s disease and anorexia nervosa to schizo-affective disorders and substance abuse.

I’ve only ever seen the insides of a psychiatric hospital—when it was no longer a hospital. In early 2016, I visited the grounds of Mayview State Psychiatric Hospital with my sister Nina. In the days before Western Psychiatric Institute and Clinic, Mayview was Western Pennsylvania’s hospital for the mentally ill. It was built upon the rolling hills of the suburbs of Western Pennsylvania, miles away from the bustling city of Pittsburgh but very near where my parents live now.

Prior to the 1970s, Mayview patients were expected to maintain a work schedule that included doing laundry, cleaning, working in the coal mine, or sewing clothes for other patients. Everyone kept busy. The hundreds of acres surrounding the hospital grounds were used as farm land so that the live-in hospital staff and patients could maintain their own livelihood. After the 1970s, patients were not allowed to work for their stay because of changing views about mental illness treatment, but some of those long-time residents actively resisted the institution's new policies. They liked feeling as if they had a place to work, to live, to be social, a place that gave their lives meaning.

The hospital saw a great variety of people other than those living with mental illnesses. It began as a poorhouse in downtown Pittsburgh but grew into its suburban site which, at different points in its history, included: an orphanage, a house for unwed mothers, a respite for tuberculosis patients, and a home for people with intellectual disabilities. This long-term care facility saved lives of Pittsburghers and their families, but in 2008, its tenure as a long-term stay mental health institution ended in favor of less restrictive, community-based programs for the mentally ill, like those found at Western Psych.

Nina was cited for trespassing on Mayview's property. In 2013, she and two of her girlfriends drove to the abandoned psychiatric hospital to see if they could find the ghosts of patients who had died there. They found railroad tracks and walked along them until they crept into the abandoned hospital, where they saw patients' artwork on the walls, the hydrotherapy bathtubs, and the rooms where tuberculosis patients stayed. When the cops approached the site, Nina and her friends scattered. My little sister jumped over a fence but was found and then cited. She and her friends eventually sat in

front of a magistrate who smacked them with a fine. When Nina told this story recently, she laughed and said that poking around the old hospital was “the greatest thing she’s ever done.”

When she and I looked upon Mayview in 2016, the hospital and its plethora of buildings were no longer standing. The site was not open for visitors, so we just stood on a hillside that overlooked the rubble. Nina explained that there were a total of seven buildings standing on the property when she had walked through. She pointed to where each of the buildings had been located, and I saw the small heaps of red brick that once formed beautiful, turreted Victorian buildings. We mostly talked about the place’s sadness and that there should be some type of memorial for the people who served, lived, and died there. I wondered about the kinds of people who tried to break out of Mayview in the hundred plus years of its existence as well as the people who tried to stay.

It might have only been a generation or so ago that I would have been placed in a facility like Mayview, but medical science has determined that, at least in this era, I am fit for life outside of an institution. Looking at the remains of Mayview on that grey January afternoon made me wonder about the relationship between what we deem functional mental well-being versus dysfunctional mental well-being behavior and where we draw the line that separates the two. Obviously, if a person wants to hurt himself or others, then that’s a pretty suitable distinction between his dysfunction and everyone else’s functionality, but what about people who don’t fit that specific description? Is there a definite distinction between mental wellness and mental illness now like there was when Mayview was open? I didn’t (and still don’t) have the answers to these questions, but they have caused me to think more deeply about the labels we use for mentally ill

people.

I have received many labels. The usual stigmas: crazy, psycho, insane. The medical labels: dysfunctional, patient, client, sick, sufferer. The academic ones: disabled, needing accommodations, neurodiverse. I have created indexes for my labels, listing and alphabetizing them, and in the years of their accumulation, I've grappled with the types of words that we use to categorize madness and what those words actually mean, especially when they become part of peoples' identities and (auto)biographies, when they become part of the family.

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Above Average Functioning (2012) – I hand the evaluation papers to the young psychiatrist so that I can complete my application to the Peace Corps. We are in a little room in the bowels of Western Psychiatric Institute and Clinic, a place in Oakland that I passed daily when I shrunk to ninety pounds four years prior. The young doctor begins to ask the questions:

“What do you normally eat in a day?”

“I'm a vegetarian...and an Italian. I don't know...food?...lots of spaghetti.”

“Do members of your family have a history of mental illness?”

“Not that I'm aware of. My mom exercises a bit much, but that's it.”

“Do you ever think about committing suicide?”

“Oh, God, no!”

After the two-hour interview, the young doctor proclaims that I am “above average functioning” and that he had a pleasant time interviewing me. I thank him and know that his label speaks to my intelligence and emotional awareness about overcoming

anorexia nervosa, but there are other things that I do not yet know, that I will only find out in time.

Anna Mae (1968) -- Aunt Anna Mae is Red and Olga's sixth child, and she has tight, blonde ringlets and a round, cute, curious face. In a home movie, Red and Olga and a priest and my Great-Uncle Pat, Great-Aunt T, and Great-Aunt Elenora hold adult beverages and praise my godmother on her first holy communion. Aunt Anna Mae watches my dad, who is roughly ten years old, and laughs and laughs at his ridiculous dancing. She joins him on the makeshift dancefloor, and they move wildly and smile and throw their arms out into the air with background music that I have to imagine because there is no sound in the video.

My dad and Anna Mae look so happy, so goofy and so free, but nearly every morning before school, Anna Mae throws up the contents of her stomach. It's unclear if she is being bullied, which might explain her anxiety, but every time that she vomits, Olga lets her stay at home. Red and Olga never take her to see a psychiatrist or a doctor; they just think that she is nervous. By the end of the school year, Anna Mae's report card shows that she has missed almost the maximum amount of school days. She nearly doesn't make it to the third grade.

Anna Mae (2000) -- Aunt Anna Mae has a Master's degree. She was raised in the generation of Second Wave Feminists who sought equal wages for equal pay, who wanted women to be in the top positions of traditional boys' clubs, and she has certainly followed that trajectory. She glues together a web of relationships at her work place, but she cannot keep her family together. Her husband's employment has always been less

than stable. When their marriage starts to fail and when they find out that she cannot have children, they adopt a baby boy.

They find a child who is malnourished and whose mother dropped him off on an orphanage's doorstep. His pathetic little life comforts Anna Mae, who considers this child a gift from God. The couple brings the little boy, my cousin, back to their suburban home in Pittsburgh.

Years later during a Christmas dinner, Anna Mae's son pulls off Olga's wig. Red grabs his grandson by the arm, shakes him, and tells him to apologize to his grandmother. Only my cousin Eli is really able to get through to the little boy. Eli wrestles and watches TV with him; the two of them are the family misfits, belonging to us only in a distant sort of way, but at least they have each other.

Anna Mae (2012) -- My family meets at Olga's nursing home to have an intervention with Aunt Anna Mae. All of the six other siblings are there and so is Red. They have been planning this intervention for months and just needed to find the right time. As everyone is coming together and chit-chatting, they look at their mother who is lying in a hospital bed and cannot speak or move. She blankly stares at the television and holds a raccoon stuffed animal. Red confesses how Olga had been getting forgetful at their house, how he was barely able to give her a sponge bath for a while, but that nurses and doctors can care for her now, that it's been okay. In his sadness, he mentions that his beautiful Olga doesn't even know her kids' names anymore, even though her kids already know this. Red says that she is losing it.

"You're next," he points at Aunt Anna Mae with a boney finger.

Her eyes widen and she looks terrified before running out of Olga's room.

Anna Mae (2014) -- Aunt Anna Mae looks well at our family's Saint Patrick's Day party. I notice that she doesn't look as skinny as I've seen her in the past, like she has slept in the last 48 hours. She doesn't have those heavy onyx circles under her eyes. Her teeth are white. On her dinner plate there is more than half a hotdog.

She talks calmly and not with the performative zeal and enthusiasm of someone who isn't exactly aware of her performative zeal and enthusiasm, of her overeager act. I listen to her with intensity and compassion as she speaks mostly about normal things, about parenting things and job things. She asks how I am doing, so I perform my "Everything Is Normal" speech.

The rest of my large family laughs and drinks Guinness and toasts Sláinte (Good Health!) to each other. We are loud inside my aunt's house in a neighborhood just south of the confluence of our three great rivers. Our voices echo into the walls, and we continue animated conversations from opposite sides of the house.

When Aunt Anna Mae says Sláinte to my father, he nods and smiles, acknowledges her: "Okay, Ann." I can tell that he's on the verge of laughing.

In private, he calls her crazy and refuses to talk candidly about her illness; his pain for her so full that only laughter makes her insanity less real.

Bag Lady (2014) – My godmother's long legs and ferociousness are likely responsible for her enormous success in the pharmaceutical sales industry. On a summer afternoon, we drive through a low-income neighborhood where I once worked in college, and we see Pittsburgh's steel-gilded skyline. She turns into Loretto Cemetery where our goal is to find one surname: Stipetich. My goal, however, is one just one headstone:

Marie Stipetich. After hearing Red nickname Marie the “Bag Lady,” my father thought that his aunt was a madwoman. He believed that she was homeless, and he never bothered to ask about this “Bag Lady” aunt because it was clear that his parents thought she was “just nuts.” I’ve always wondered about her.

The cemetery’s grass is a few inches too high, and some of the headstones are crumbling. My godmother finds my great-grandparents first. Marija and Big John lay buried just a foot apart, and their headstone is surprisingly elaborate. Jesus stretches out his arms to visiting pilgrims and under Jesus’ hands are the big, bold letters, “Stipetich.” My aunt and I place white flowers on their headstone. I notice that my great-grandparents’ plot can accommodate ten other people, but not one of their children or relatives is buried next to them.

We search for Marie Stipetich, and when I ask what her headstone looks like, she explains that it is just a simple flat stone with her name on it. After thirty more minutes of walking in circles, she says, “There she is. I knew I put flowers there.” The flowers’ vase is on the ground, and she stands it upright. Marie’s grave is near the perimeter of the cemetery by the dilapidated fence, very far away from her mother and father.

“I always come here and put flowers on her grave because, when I met her, I swore that she put a curse on me.”

“What?” I try not to laugh because even the sharpest of Irish-Americans can sometimes let their superstitious, lunatic side control their reasoning abilities.

“Yeah, Anna. Don’t laugh! I swear that when I went with Olga to the hospital where Marie was dying, she cursed me. I have never seen eyes that were so hateful. She was terrifying. I even told that to your dad. I’ve had dreams about it! I’ve never

forgotten it, either, after all my years of working in geriatrics; nobody's ever looked at me like that."

I ponder her statement and think that maybe she's losing it, too, before she asks if I will say a prayer over Marie's grave. As we walk away from Marie's final resting place, I silently pray that I can help to unearth this dead great-aunt who family forgot.

Church (1990) -- Marie walks up and down the pews at her church giving out socks to "homeless-looking" people. She doesn't have much money, so when she tells Olga about this ritual, Olga thinks it is very strange that her little sister just gives things away. My family does not know if Marie's actions ever disturbed any parishioners, but church is the only place that she regularly frequents besides her workplace.

Crazed (2014) -- I am in group cognitive behavioral therapy, and all of the group members are female. They have become more like sisters in the last two months, which is why I volunteer to be the first person to deconstruct my crazed thoughts in front of the group and our two co-facilitators.

The psychologist uses the white board to map the words that come from my mouth: "leaving a night class," "returning to my apartment," "gun," "grab," "alone." The other group members tear up beside me and assure me that I am not the only one to have "those thoughts" when I'm feeling down. I do not tell them that these thoughts are constant or that I have other kinds of thoughts. The therapist asks in his hushed, syrupy voice, "What would happen if you took a bird's eye view of yourself when you're having these thoughts?"

I pause and say, "Well, I'd see a girl who was walking home from a graduate class and then doing work in her apartment." But I think:

ram the car into a guardrail or
jerk the car off a bridge or
walk just enough over the curb.

During my psychiatry appointments, my psychiatrist says that I am dealing with some type of homesickness, that I have “seen the edge” and moved on from it, that I am just anxious about graduate school. That it will pass.

Crazy (1945) -- Olga graduates from high school when she is fifteen after skipping the sixth and eighth grades. She does not go on to college. Her family nicknames her “Babe” because her short milk chocolate hair, scarlet lips, ivory white skin, and greenish-yellow hazel eyes make her one of the most beautiful women in the Southside.

In 1945 at sixteen years-old, Marie graduates from Saint Peter’s Commercial School and also does not go to college. She develops cystic acne on her face which weeps with pus. Nobody in her family or the Hunky doctors knows anything about dermatology, or else can’t pay for it, so she does not receive treatment. Because of this skin problem, she wears a scarf over her face when she walks down East Carson Street. People look at her and think that she is crazy. She turns to God for solace.

“Fine” (2014) -- I enter the Writing Center where I work as a tutor and make my way to the tutor’s lounge. I look out the giant windows on the seventh floor of the Byrnes Building at the University of South Carolina and have the distinct, intrusive urge to jump.

Moments later, when I am tutoring a client, I speak softly about comma problems and organizational strategies and MLA formatting while imagining the day that I will

choose to tumble out of the building. Even after I leave work, my little sister Nina calls from Pittsburgh to ask how I'm doing. The only thing that I can say is "fine" while I envision stabbing myself in the kitchen that night:

I take the lethal weapon—the razor, the knife, Vera's wet food container lid, scissors, nail clippers, really anything made of stainless steel—in my right hand. The blade flashes, the metal not reflective but sleek and brilliant in the light, and my stomach rushes into my throat. A rush like anger, sorrow, madness surfaces in me until the blade slashes over my left wrist. In one slick motion. Or one desperate, frantic motion. Or in chopping motions, like I am sawing at myself. In a cutting motion not perpendicular but parallel to my arm: a sure way to know that I will bleed out on the kitchen floor. The scarlet scarlet scarlet scarlet red pours from my arm, falls out of my veins in gallons. I watch it, but only for a second, because then I call my mom to tell her that I don't want to die, that I love her, before the darkness completely overcomes my vision.

Nina says that she has to go, and before I am even aware, I am at the door to my apartment.

Frantic (2011) — Anna Mae's son says to his father and my aunt that sometimes his mom drives very, very fast on the highway. On one occasion, she drives so fast that she crashes into a telephone pole in Oakland, which at the time is crowded with college students and UPMC hospital staff and day care workers and small business owners, racing ambulances and fire trucks and bikers. When my father comes home from work later that day, he raises his hands in the air and raves, "She could've killed someone!"

Her reason for speeding is that people were after her and her son.

Mental Illness (2014) -- I am on my way to teach my first class of English 101. I purposely arrive a few minutes before class starts so that I don't have to awkwardly stand in front of my students without much to say. I know that I am a young teacher, that my students might think I'll let them text in class, but I have my teacher persona locked down, and she's absolutely merciless. She wears high heels so that her students always hear when she's walking around the classroom. She gives zero fucks about giving away bad grades. I stand with her, as if she was the other side of my split personality, as my guard in front of a bunch of college freshmen and prepare for the first day of class by writing my name, the class title, and our agenda on the board.

When I start writing their first homework assignment, I think:

Tell them that you're going to kill yourself tonight

that you're going to stick your head in an oven

that you're going to jump out the classroom window in two minutes.

After I finish writing the agenda, I feel my heart beat rapidly and my vision tunnel. My chest is heavy, and I cannot feel the floor underneath me. Something in the back of my head says *sit down*, and I sit in the instructor's chair and stare at my laptop, look away from my students' eyes, remind myself that I'm not nuts, just homesick. Just homesick. Just homesick. It'll pass. It'll pass. It'll pass. I tell myself that that I'm their teacher, teacher, teacher, teacher. I play this role of leadership, of intelligence, of know-how.

But it's clear that I need the most help and there's no one to turn to.

Paranoid (1950) -- My Great-Aunt T, Red's little sister, trains as a nurse during her early twenties in the 1950s, and during nursing school when her instructors talk about

the symptoms of paranoia, Marie's face pops into T's head. She cannot explain why. T does not have psychiatric medicine training or experience—just a few educational classes—and definitions of paranoia and mental illness have changed dramatically, but she has the distinct impression that Marie is not just shy.

Even though T is very good friends with Olga, the two women never talk about Marie. T makes sure to ask Olga about her family's health and well-being at social events, but Olga never expounds upon her family members' lives except when Olga's older brother Joseph dies of alcoholism in his early forties. Red's siblings and their kids attend every one of Red and Olga's kids' parties, baptisms, Christmases, and Easters, but Marie is never present at any of these gatherings.

Rest Cure (2015) -- "She agreed to see a doctor," my godmother smiles.

"What? How?" I say with a mouthful of spaghetti.

"Let's just say it was an act of God." She has had one too many wines.

"But what happened? Did she commit herself?"

"We talked to her work. Everything's going to be okay."

"What do you mean?"

"She went to the hospital and stayed there for a week. She was evaluated and as long as she takes her meds, everything will be fine."

"Who got her to go? My dad never told me about this."

"She might be calling you soon. In the next month or so. Be ready for that. I told her that she could call you." She smiles again.

Shy (1947) -- Great-Aunt T and her father Edward visit the Stipetichs before Red and Olga are to be married. T enters the Stipetichs' kitchen where Marija and Big John

sit around a large dining room table. Marija wears a *babuška* over her hair and can barely speak any English. She softly chuckles while Big John energetically entertains his soon-to-be son-in-law and his family.

T is struck with Olga's beauty and thinks she belongs in the movies, but Marie sits on a chair in the corner of the kitchen throughout the visit and doesn't engage in any of the conversation. She keeps her eyes on the ground.

She tries to talk with Marie at Red and Olga's wedding, but Marie just turns away from her. She is younger and more boisterous than Marie, so she believes that Marie might be a little scared. Her younger sister is also introduced to Marie at a family event later in life and concurs that Marie was extremely shy, that she didn't say anything but "hello." Both of the women agree that there "may have been something else wrong."

Sickness (2013) -- When Olga is in a nursing home dying of Alzheimer's disease, she thinks that one of her hospice aides is her sister Marie, who passed away thirteen years earlier. The room where Olga lies is clean, white, and full of pictures of Red, who died a year earlier, and her large family of eight children, over eleven grandchildren, and one great-grandchild. Although at this point Olga only says the English words "yes" and "no," in her native Croatian, she calls out to the hospice aide with outstretched arms trying to reach her estranged sister.

Stipetich, Marie (1945) -- Marie's high school picture shows a smiling woman who might be just barely wincing. Marie has the same round face as Olga, the same dark hair and wide hazel eyes. Their curvaceous figures are typical of a strong Croatian woman.

Stipetich, Marie (1966) -- Marie lives alone, within walking distance of Big John and Marija's home on Larkins Way in the Southside. She never marries, does not have any children, but keeps to her work and church life. Her walk to Saint Joseph's Hospital on East Carson Street is only a few blocks from her efficiency apartment. On her way to work as a nighttime switchboard operator, she passes open bars, closed restaurants and perhaps a candy and cigar store, and she can see her father's long-time place of employment, the J&L steel mill.

Unlike Olga, Marie works to support herself, and though she doesn't have riches, she is pursuing an appropriate career for a woman in her time. She spends so much of her adult life working to connect people: a parent to a child, a doctor to a nurse, a hospital administrator to a staff person, a visitor to an infirm. And yet, she is so ostracized by her family that she becomes known as a March Hare. Her nieces and nephews don't even know what she looks like.

Stipetich, Marie (1999) -- With curled, pinned-up hair, a cute little scarf around her neck, and a purse that cuddles her side, Olga walks slowly into Marie's hospital room. My godmother follows her mother and watches her sit on a bed near an aunt that she has never met. With lean fingers, Olga strokes the only hair on Marie's head, a small wisp of grey near her forehead. Olga sings a Croatian hymn to her younger sister and gently rocks back and forth. My godmother has never heard this Croatian song, but she stays silent until her mother is finished singing the harsh-sounding syllables that flow easily from Olga's mouth. After Olga is finished, she instructs her daughter to go to Marie's apartment and retrieve some of her belongings so that she can continue to hum, sing, and whisper to her dying baby sister.

After driving to the Southside from Mercy Hospital in the Hill District, my aunt walks into her aunt's efficiency apartment and gasps. Thick, grey rolls of adhesive tape frame her windows though there does not seem to be an insulation problem. The adhesive tape is not accompanied by window treatments. For no apparent reason, the thick grey tape lines the walls. Mothballs litter the cabinets, closet, and drawers. Newspapers pile high. A lonely crucifix hangs solemnly above Marie's pathetic twin bed. She moves quickly through the space, gathering the articles of a mad person's life who should have long been a patient at Mayview.

When she returns to the hospital, she watches her mother, Marie's power of attorney, speak with the doctors who want to do more for Marie. She will die of renal failure unless she gets a kidney transplant. The doctors explain that her condition can be helped, but Olga dismisses the doctors' ideas with a wave.

Maybe Olga reasons that it is Marie's time to go with God. Maybe she wants to ease her suffering, or maybe she just wants it to be over.

Stipetich, Marie (2015) -- I discover that Marie's employer not have any record of her, even though she was awarded for eight years of service in 1966. I keep her certificate on my writing desk as a reminder. I want to prove that, in some way, she was not really as insane as people in my family believed she was. She held a job. She had her own apartment. She was living the life that a lot of ill people cannot live. If she was as sick as some of my family members describe, then surely someone at Saint Joseph's Hospital would have documented her illness and helped her to Mayview.

Too Much (1998) -- When Marie is older and retired, she resides with nuns who become her caretakers. Although there are facilities like Western Psych, Mayview, and

Mercy Hospital to treat mentally-ill people, Olga insists that the nuns take care of her sister. In fact, Olga believes that the nuns have an obligation to help Marie, and when the nuns call Olga to complain that Marie is “too much” for them, my aunt hears Olga rage into the phone that God commanded them to fulfill this caretaking duty.

Vera (2014) -- At Pawmetto Lifeline, I pick up the most haggard looking little kitten, and she nuzzles into me. The rescue shelter volunteer tells me that this cat is not a kitten, that she is actually three years old and very malnourished because she spent two years in the wild and had been hit by two bee-bee gun shots. I hug this babycat tighter. There’s so much fur missing on her hind legs and abdomen that I can see her bare skin and tiny nipples. A little while later, I sign papers for her adoption and read a medical chart that lists her hair loss under “psychological.”

When we go back home to my apartment, she sniffs around while I decide on her new name because “Magpie” wasn’t cutting it. I name her after my favorite character in August Wilson’s *Seven Guitars*. Vera. Prior to any action on stage, the audience and readers learn that Vera cut her legs so that men wouldn’t hit on her ever again. I think of the way that Wilson’s Vera challenges, rebels, fights against the powers that try to destroy her. When I observe my little Vera nibble on dry cat food, I know that this kitty and I will beat our problems together.

CHAPTER 5

IN REVERSING “KIN”

On my way to the furnaces, I was worried about The Mazda’s reliability. Red had owned The Mazda before he died, and he was scattered all over the car. There was the holy water in the glove compartment; the Rosary next to the gear shift; the sticker (“My Granddaughter is in the Army”) on the side window; that distinct old man smell. These things were comforts to me, more quirky than they were embarrassing.

Red had died years ago, and my father bought The Mazda from the estate sale that paid for Olga’s continued hospice care before she died, also years ago. We Barrys are the type of people who take pride in our lemons, who keep them after they should have long been discarded in a junkyard. We even name our cars, though The Mazda has always been simply The Mazda, quite different from our other cars, like The Lil’ Nugget, Rosie, Heidi, and Noel. My sisters and I often encourage The Mazda when we drive it because its breaks are shot; its left turn signal occasionally seizes; the air conditioning doesn’t work; it makes crunching sounds when making right turns. We have to let it know that we’re there for it and that we love it. We hope that our personification and encouragement act more like prayers than craziness.

The drive to the furnaces was and wasn't foreign to me. I went via the way to Kennywood, a local amusement park that sits right across from the Edgar Thompson Steel Works in Braddock. Because my parents, sisters, our friends, and I caravanned to Kennywood annually, I knew where I was going. There's not much in the way of scenery on this drive, just mini-malls and limestone yards and small, regional airports. It smells like plastic and cement rather than the pine of my childhood suburb. I was daydreaming about Kennywood, about riding the notorious Steel Phantom roller coaster and the quaint train ride through images of Pittsburgh history. Train riders see a goofy papier-mâché Joe Magarac, our city's Saint of Steel, bending metal with his hands. Right around Kennywood was when I really began to panic about The Mazda. It was low on gas and making the weird crunching noises, but I kept driving towards something that had long ago died.

The Mazda and I crossed a bridge and drove over the Monongahela River into the borough of Rankin. I saw siding on houses that needed to be power-washed, buckling roofs, fenced-in parks, and Fitzgerald's reified Valley of Ashes. Railroads lined pebbly streets, and small hills of gravel filled the land rather than neighborly residents and single-family houses of other Pittsburgh neighborhoods. There were businesses, warehouses, and railroad crossing signs that had long been destroyed by graffiti. I started to see small orange signs that pointed out the direction to the ruins, proclaiming "Carrie Furnaces."

In an email that I had received prior to my adventure, my dad explained that Red had worked as the General Foreman of Masonry at the Carrie Furnaces, sometimes called the Rankin Works, because they had been part of the Homestead Steel Works. The

Carrie Furnaces made iron which was then shipped to Homestead and used as a main ingredient to make steel. So beyond the fact that I was in Red's car, I contemplated my grandfather on this drive. It wasn't long before I felt assured in this place, guided by people who needed me to be there.

I drove down a narrow, pot-hole filled road with a huge concrete wall directly to my left that must have been over thirty feet high. At the end of the huge concrete wall was a tunnel which I had to drive through. Then, in front of me and The Mazda, I saw a building at least four stories tall and as long and wide as a football field. Out of this building shot an enormous pipe that looked like the length and width of a three-bedroom house. Everything else around this colossal warehouse-looking building was just a mess of giant chains, chimneys, little houses, wires, railroad tracks, torpedo-looking cylinders, disintegrating brick, and enormous pistons shooting up from the ground. All of this machinery was surrounded by a chain-linked fence and acres upon acres of greenish yellow grass. Truly, it was an apocalyptic sight, and because there was no parking lot or discernible entrance, I kept driving slowly until a soot-covered man in a hard hat with dusty jeans motioned for me to move forward.

I got out of The Mazda, thankful that it had lasted as long as it did, and noticed a few people standing around the chain-linked fence. They were my fellow AmeriCorps members and supervisors getting ready for a mandatory service project. This was my third AmeriCorps term of service, just something to occupy me between the spring and fall semester. Most of us were in college or had just graduated. A few of us were in Master's programs, but no matter what level of education, every AmeriCorps member cared deeply about the youth of Pittsburgh. This care brought us to work together that

summer in schools and after-school programs throughout the city of Pittsburgh, though often, we were asked to do a service project, like the one we were about to embark upon at the Carrie Furnaces.

After half an hour more of our AmeriCorps crew showed up in droves, and then we signed in and listened to the “Don’t Be Dumb” safety talk. We were separated into different groups. One group needed to sweep out the football-sized building because a couple was having a wedding there soon. Another group was responsible for taking out the knot weed growing rampant in the ore yard, and the third group was assigned to the cast houses where the Carries were actually located. We were given gloves and shovels. Those asthmatic AmeriCorps members were given the few available face masks. The rest of us just had to deal.

When we walked into one of the warehouses to meet our group leader, I was stunned by the cranes that reposed above our heads. They were defying gravity. They were held up by nothing that I could conceivably understand. These cranes were as big a room in my parents’ suburban home and clearly able to carry tons and tons of rocks or boulders or bricks or steel or whatever cranes carry. Other machines on the warehouse floor had rollers and chains and levers and pipes, and yet despite the apparent orderliness, the concrete floor was not completely freed from its thirty-year dust pileup. Our group leader, Brian, wore a hard hat, like the sooty man outside, as if he regularly worked in the construction business. He said that we were going to clean out the cast house for Carrie Number 6, but he wanted to give us a tour first.

Brian took us out of the warehouse building and into a grassy lot where a little one-room house stood upon what looked like a single wooden pole. I guessed that the house would tip over if a strong gust passed through. Brian explained that that little house was the hoist house, a place where a worker stood and controlled the skip car that carried a specified amount of coke into the top of the furnace.

I had heard my father talk at length about the massive scale of everything in the mill, but I also knew that he had a proclivity for myth-making, so I didn't quite absorb all that he had to say; although what I saw in front of me couldn't have been more surreal, and the fact that it was brazen in the bright May sun was even more disorienting.

Next, Brian showed us the Carrie Deer, which was quite literally the giant head of a deer. The Carrie Deer had been constructed secretly by eight artists in the late 1990s using blue and red wires and found materials from around the Carrie Furnaces site. It was at least two stories tall. Birds were sitting on top of its antlers, so this mesh of industry, antiquity, and nature looked like something out of a dream. Someone asked, "Why a deer head?" Brian answered that when the artists had visited the furnaces, they noticed herds of white-tailed deer prancing through the industrialized mess. The image stuck with them.

All of the AmeriCorps folks were impressed, shocked, wanted to know more about the Carrie Deer, but I was less than enthused. Even though I liked the idea of recycling found materials and urban art, I immediately considered what my father might say about this huge deer head in between two historic furnaces. The Carrie Furnaces themselves were monuments, useful and yet also artistic products of a long-forgotten era,

an era that my family members helped to create, and the humungous deer head right in the middle of it all just didn't fit.

Brian then led us into the stoves: three pillars of steel that rose high into the sky. They were, again, monstrous. Hundreds of feet high. Functioning as the lungs of the furnace, the stoves blew hot air into the furnace's chambers to melt iron ore, coke, and limestone, thus producing molten iron. Only one of the stoves was needed to keep the furnace hot, so as one was working, another stove cooled, and still another stove warmed to prepare for replacing the hot furnace. Chain-links as big as my neck hung down from the stoves' peaks. Brian told us that at one time workers had to pull and push these colossal chains to operate the stoves. Pipes that cleaned out air and dust rested about a foot above my head. They would have been just inches away from workers' heads.

Brian asked us to follow him away from the stoves and into the cast house to see Carrie Furnace Number 7, which had been in the process of decomposing. In the 1980s, he explained, when the steel and iron mills were shutting down along the Monongahela Valley, United States Steel sold whole furnaces and parts of its mills, machines, brickwork (basically anything) to other companies. This was the reason why we were standing in a room with only two walls rather than its original three. One of Carrie Number 7's walls had been shredded, and piles of brick lay inside the cast house. We were at eye level with the black belly of the furnace, but its esophagus and throat were outside of our view. When I snuck outside and around the cast house to see if I could catch a view of the furnace's throat, I saw baby trees growing from the furnace, which made it hard to imagine how this machine was once awakened.

Brian wanted us to start working in the cast house for Carrie Number 6, so we followed him back through the stoves, although we started noticing little white figurines everywhere. They were in the shape of cowboys, of women huddling together, of children playing, and they couldn't have been more than six inches tall. Brian explained that the guy who runs the Carrie Furnaces, Ron, once let a different group of artists use the stoves' space as an exhibition for their artwork, and one of the artists really wanted his little figurines to stay. Even though this artwork was slightly strange and unsettling, it wasn't as attention-seeking as the Carrie Deer. The figurines looked like they had been placed amid the pipes and chains by children, something that might help them find their way back like breadcrumbs or glass slippers. They gave the Carries a feeling of occupation and not abandonment. They were something small that I appreciated.

Piles of dust at least a few feet high nestled behind Carrie Number 6. Similar to Carrie Number 7, Carrie Number 6 was immense. There was a whole circulatory system of troughs and tributaries that started at the belly of the furnaces and moved throughout the floor. These troughs were once regulated by men who used pulleys and levers to guide the 2,700 degree Fahrenheit molten iron from the furnace to molds. Quite literally, there was no wall opposite the furnace. Iron would run from the glory hole, through the tributaries and then cascade beyond the wall-less floor. I walked over to the edge of the wall-less floor and looked beyond where only railroad tracks and grass and huge piles of dust beset the ground. The floor upon which we stood wasn't very sturdy, like it was made of random pieces of metal forged together just so that men wouldn't fall through. Rust had eaten through stairs that led down to the railroad tracks and grass.

All of us had never seen an iron mill let alone stood in an iron mill's cast house. There was an overwhelming amount of spiritual energy in the place, like these blast furnaces had once been temples, like there once existed men who worshipped ancient gods whose spirits dwelled within these primordial incinerators, like there were female priestesses and oracles calling to higher powers in these sanctuaries. Like Joe Magarac was their anthropomorphized god. However, the gods, their myths and legends, and the men and women who tended to them had long ago perished, and with their deaths, so vanished the knowledge about how these people had lived.

By that point in the day, it was 10 o'clock, and we were asked to sweep away the foot-high dust piles from around the furnace, to dig out the crap from the troughs, to move scrap steel and wooden work benches so that the area was safe for visitors to walk across the floor. These efforts seemed a little dangerous, like we'd fall through some crack in the floor or we'd find something that we wouldn't want to find, but we were thrilled to be playing house in such an old and intimidating mansion.

Once we started sweeping away the dust from off the brick around the furnace, the dust spiraled into the air. In a certain way, the scene was beautiful, sort of like little diamonds floating in the air we breathed. After a few minutes, though, the dust grew to be so thick that it choked us. I coughed and sneezed, and my eyes were getting irritated. I hated to think what was actually in the dust, and I imagined carcinogens and toxic chemicals flooding my lungs. Death by 100-year-old cast house, the cause of an early death. These nightmare-daydreams persuaded me to remedy the dust situation by removing a layer of clothing and crafting a makeshift facemask over my mouth and nose. Pretty soon, my fellow AmeriCorps members were doing the same.

While I was monotonously pushing a broom back and forth, I looked for signs of life, for anything that my grandfather would have touched. I explained to some AmeriCorps members that my grandfather was the General Foreman of Masonry for the Homestead Works, and consequently the Carrie Furnaces, and that he might have laid the brick around the furnace upon which we stood, or at least commanded someone else to do it. My friends seemed impressed, and some of them shared stories about male relatives who had worked in the Pittsburgh mills or the mines in central Pennsylvania. I listened to their stories, tried to see the faces of their relatives, blackened, dusted, smoke-covered. I had never been interested in industry or textiles, but knowing that Red built the floor upon which the economy and industry of our city flourished was enough to make me feel like I had a religious duty to uncover his brickwork.

When we completed sweeping the cast house floor, a few of us left to take a short water break. We tiptoed down the rusted metal staircase that led to greenish-yellow grass, and we laughed because our hands and foreheads and elbows had turned to ash. The sun felt like relief. The May skies were blue and wide. Some of us were already coughing and sneezing out black shit. I appreciated the way that I could inhale fully and the way that my eyes didn't feel as irritated and itchy when surrounded by the cool air of the outdoors. I knew that we had to return to the cast house momentarily, but the sky and the environment had changed for me. It was no longer apocalyptic. It was a respite from the dungeon of the cast house.

When we resumed our positions on the cast house floor minutes later, Brian wanted us to do some shifting as jobs were nearing completion. I volunteered to jump into the troughs, which were at least two feet deep, to help my fellow AmeriCorps

members dig out the dust and dirt and sand around the glory hole. The troughs had been so neglected that they were thick with debris. Other Corps members said that they'd help and brought over a wheelbarrow. They tilted it in such an angle so that I could hoist shovels of grey gunk into it with ease. Small knobs and screws and nuts littered our archeological endeavor, and we made jokes about the treasure that we might find. We talked about how we would have died if the iron was actually spewing out of the glory hole, how we couldn't imagine working in this inferno, how our jobs serving the low income, at-risk youth of Pittsburgh were not as physically demanding or as risky as the jobs that our ancestors had to endure in order for us to get to where we are today.

After lunch, our group was asked to help the knot weed group in the ore yard, which stretched the length of at least two football fields. I was thankful that we didn't have to return to the cast house and could instead battle the elements of nature rather than the elements of industry. We were told that the invasive knot weed plant was impeding visitors from seeing the magnitude of the ore yard, but more importantly, that the knot weeds' pervasiveness was a safety concern because its roots hid bits of scrap steel and industrial rubble, so we had to remove as much of it as we could.

I had experience taking down invasive knot weed during my second term of AmeriCorps service. With the help of ten middle school-aged girls, a non-profit group and I coordinated a service project in which we removed knot weed from a trail along the Allegheny River. Knot weed is hollow but thick, so it is easy to chop down but also slightly overwhelming because it can be so dense in a small area. It needs to be completely gutted because it grows very quickly and kills other plant species, so we were given shovels and knives. One guy used a saw.

I dug my heels into the soil and hacked away at the knot weed. Once I got into a groove, the movements were fluid and simple: steady my feet upon the ground, swing my arm, and whack. Stalks fell easily. Watching my friends pull out the thing that threatened the authenticity of our industrial spaces, the landscape of our collective historical memory, was rejuvenating. As I was thinking about soil and invasiveness and letting things remain, one of my AmeriCorps supervisors thought that time might pass more quickly if we played a game while removing the knot weed.

I hated this suggestion. I just wanted to be alone. I knew that I had been playing games for my entire adult life, and standing upon the ground where my sires worked tirelessly made me feel a deep sense of guilt for the time that I had wasted extending my youth through graduate school and contract programs rather than full-time, investment-returning, family-providing income. I thought about how games remove us from the reality of the present, how they give the illusion of time fast-forwarded, how I never really liked games. I wondered if my father would appreciate the artistic figurines and the Carrie Deer, if my grandfather would have participated in a game in an effort to ignore the four-letter word in front of him, but I already knew the answers to these wonderings.

After a few more hours, we finished all of the tasks that Brian and Ron needed us to complete, and they were thankful. In this last part of the day, I lay down on the grass just outside the warehouses. It was uncomfortable, like crabgrass, and it was sort of pebbly. There were creeping black ants crawling around my head, but I didn't mind. I put my makeshift facemask over my eyes and let myself feel the warm sun and the inevitable exhaustiveness of accomplishment. My fingers pressed upon the sandy soil

contaminated with PCBs and sulfates, and I knew that this scorched, chemical-laden earth was indeed my home.

My friends lay beside me, laughing like five year olds at the gross body fluids emptying from their noses and throats after spending hours in a derelict blast furnace. I thought about the way that age makes us decidedly unembarrassed about the matter that comes from us, through us, out of us, about the people who make us.

There was a time when the sight of my father embarrassed me. That was over a decade ago when I was in middle school and attending school dances, when my father looked more like a surly version of Mr. Clean and less like a sprightly Winter Warlock. At the end of those school dance nights, my father would roll up in our mini-van and venture right into the school looking for me. He'd shout out my name once he saw me grooving away in the cafeteria, and I'd scurry from my friends. I didn't understand why he wasn't like all of the other parents who stood patiently outside of their cars, preferring to stay as far away from middle school drama as possible.

I rested on the Carrie Furnace grass thinking about my father's accomplishments, his strengths, his weaknesses, and I wasn't the least bit embarrassed of him. In fact, I knew that he needed to see the Carrie Furnaces, that they might revive him from the stupor and haziness of losing both his parents in less than two years.

For Father's Day just a few weeks later, I presented Dad with tickets to tour the Carrie Furnaces. His reaction was familiar. He claimed that he had wanted to go to the furnaces in a distant sort of way, like he was only mentioning his interest because I had already purchased the tickets.

On the weekend after Father's Day, my dad drove The Buick as I sat in the passenger seat. Like The Mazda, The Buick was the other car that my father had purchased from Red and Olga's estate sale. Even though Buicks are known as old man cars, they really do ride smoothly, and I knew from experience that we needed a smooth ride on the way to the Carrie Furnaces.

Dad was not happy after we drove across the bridge over the Monongahela River and landed in Rankin. He questioned my directions at every turn. He focused on the graffiti and the houses with buckling roofs, on the warehouses which did not make the neighborhood look very welcoming. Eventually, we drove down the narrow street with the concrete wall immediately to our left. He asked skeptically if we were in the right place because he didn't remember this thin one-way road. I told him that I knew where we were going, and he just sat silently and dodged the potholes. I figured that he just needed some time to adjust to his memory.

Dad was one of the youngbloods hired by United States Steel to lead experienced workers, so he had been to the Carrie Furnaces once before as part of his training process in 1981. The goal of the training visit was to show how iron was made so that the youngbloods would understand how to produce steel in the open hearth furnaces at the Homestead Steel Works.

As Dad drove slowly around the potholes, he and I saw an older gentleman with no front teeth picking raspberries from the bushes. Dad laughed: "Look at that guy! He's got the right idea." My father beeped the horn at him in a friendly sort of way, as if to encourage him. I started to scold my father because I didn't want the man to become

frightened and fall or feel offended, but the older gentleman just smiled toothlessly at us and waved. My father chuckled, and we drove towards the tunnel.

We parked the car in the same lot where I had parked weeks before, although the grass looked healthier. My dad declared, “Oh, yes. I know where we are now.” The Carrie Furnaces stood erect in front of us, and we looked around tentatively for signs of life. I could tell that the silence made him nervous, so we headed beyond the chain-linked fence and into the warehouse where I had been introduced to Brian. I signed us in for our tour while my dad wandered near cranes and forklifts and roller things and carcasses of other dead machines.

I then heard him chatting with some older men. When I walked over to where they were standing, Dad introduced me to Chuck, who was wearing Kerry green pants, and Marvin, who wore a hard hat. Chuck and Marvin were friendly, unlike my father’s typical gruff friends from the VFW, and Dad explained that they had been engineers at the Carrie Furnaces. We exchanged the pleasantries of acquaintance before Dad remarked excitedly, with a huge smile on his face, “Anna, Marvin’s father was a General Foreman of Masonry at the Edgar Thomson Works in Braddock, and you know my dad was the General Foreman of Masonry at the Homestead Works, so they would’ve crossed paths.” He was so excited to get this news. All of the men nodded tacitly, without smiling, and so did I. My dad sheepishly changed the subject: “So Chuck is wearing his greens.” I didn’t specifically know what he meant by “greens,” and Dad detected my confusion: “They’re fire retardant clothing. We’d wear our greens, which were our pants and jacket and then the snood underneath our aluminum fire suits.” Dad looked like he was getting anxious, perhaps shy, so before conversation could go anywhere else, he

thanked Marvin and Chuck for the small talk, and we departed from them. Once he and I turned away, though, Dad looked longingly back at them, and his bleary eyes showed the symptoms of remembrance. Perhaps he was thinking of Red.

I decided to point to things and ask my dad about them so that he wouldn't remain nostalgic. He explained that his main duty as a foreman was to instruct laborers who manned the gigantic steel cranes roughly the height of my body. These cranes were fastened to the warehouse's ceiling and moved above men's heads at a pretty constant rate.

Dad described his workday like "playing chess" but with hundreds of tons of scrap, iron, and steel. He was just a twenty-five year old kid at the time of his employment. Even though he dreaded the day that he would fuck up on his assignment resulting in a worker's injury or death, and even though the dangers of the mill were ubiquitous and overwhelming, he conceived of himself as a mere player in a formidable but life-giving game.

I continued to ask questions about the machines around us, wanting to hear my father talk feverishly about these piles of steel, give them names and personalities and duties and wills. He answered my questions and clarified: "You see, Anna, my dad never did this. He was in maintenance. So was my grandfather Big John. They were around these machines, sure, but they weren't responsible for them. Me and Uncle Pat did stuff like this, although Pat did stuff even more complicated and nuts than what I had to do. I don't know how he did it drunk all the time."

We heard Green Pants Chuck's voice echo that the tour was starting soon, and everyone in our tour group, mostly elderly couples, strolled over to the front of the

warehouse. Hard Hat Marvin and Green Pants Chuck introduced themselves as our tour guides and asked if any steelworkers were present. I could tell that my father was nervous, like he guessed that he might be asked to speak, but he obligingly raised his hand. Besides my father, Hard Hat Marvin, and Green Pants Chuck, only one other person was a former steelworker. This woman had been an engineer for the electric furnaces at some other mill. My father was the only one of the four ex-steelworkers present who worked in production, and when Green Pants Chuck and Hard Hat Marvin were finished with introductions, Dad whispered into my ear, “These people are shiny asses.”

Hard Hat Marvin talked about the history of the Carrie Furnaces, how the first furnace was originally built in Ohio but then sold to the Fownes brothers who were interested in producing iron that could be sold to steel companies. The furnace was called Carrie after the Fownes brothers’ female relative, and it was deconstructed, shipped, and then reconstructed on the Rankin site before another furnace was built. Years later, in the time when steel production was transitioning from individualized mills to integrated works wherein all aspects of production were completed in one facility, Henry Clay Frick and Andrew Carnegie bought the Carrie Furnaces because they didn’t have an iron works for the Homestead plant. Frick and Carnegie updated the Carries and built five other Carrie Furnaces on the site.

Green Pants Chuck then asked the group a question, “Who knows the ingredients used to make iron?” My father raised his hand and answered, “Coke, iron ore, and limestone.” Hard Hat Marvin passed around a piece of coke, and I studied this ebony, lightweight, shiny substance, noticing its similarity to coal. He passed around limestone,

which was chalky, pearly, and hard, like it could be used to sharpen something, and finally, iron ore. The iron ore was reddish, sort of orange-y, and its color rubbed off on my hands, the only ingredient to do so. The hue reminded me of South Carolina's soil. I didn't necessarily care about the steel and iron-making processes, but I did like touching the raw materials that, when casted together, made many things in this world that we value: our homes, the buildings where we work, our vehicles.

Green Pants Chuck and Hard Hat Marvin led us out of the warehouse and alongside Carrie Number 6 to show the group the exterior of the blast furnace. Hard Hat Marvin spouted off numbers and measurements that furrowed everyone's brows a little. My father stood with his hands behind his back, his holey, V-neck t-shirt looking quite raggedy, and his baseball cap turned backwards like he was an extra on a 90s sitcom. He was listening to Hard Hat Marvin, but he was also thinking pretty hard about something, probably imagining his father at this site in a hard hat and his greens overseeing the movement of something, the labor of someone.

My father suddenly interrupted Hard Hat Marvin: "You know, it's interesting and stuff to learn about this furnace, but I don't know if you all can really imagine what it was like. He flipped his hat to the front of his head and used his arms to explain: "This whole area was incredibly hot. Over 100 degrees in the summer, and everything moved. Everything had a tremor. I was here in 1981 when this mill was still going, and I'll tell you what, I was scared to death of these blast furnaces. They were loud and hot and they shook." The people in the group, including myself, looked wide-eyed at my dad, like he had just illustrated for us a picture that we could not see, like he had showed us a portent.

It started to rain, and we were moving toward the Monongahela River, toward the ore yard. Green Pants Chuck talked about the crimson crane over our heads that moved the length, width, and depth of the ore yard, making mountains of reddish clay. I listened and watched my dad. His body language showed impatience, like he was considering disturbing Green Pants Chuck's lecture with another personal anecdote. I wanted to hear my father speak about atrocities, about men's limbs being torn off and heads splitting open as if this scene was the set of a gladiatorial sporting event, a video game, or a TV show; although, the Carrie Furnaces had already been the set of a TV show, though, because they formed the backdrop for *American Ninja Warrior* just a few weeks before AmeriCorps' mandatory service project. I wanted the real-life drama, and I'm sure that I wasn't the only one who was curious about casualties.

We had walked the length of the ore yard by that point, and I showed my father where we had removed knot weed before we saw humungous elevated railcars. Hard Hat Marvin explained that workers unhinged the bottom doors of these railcars and kept even the cars' weight distribution of coke so that they wouldn't tip over. If a weight distribution error occurred, then the consequences would be deadly. Dad whispered to me that this miscalculation was how a guy's head got decapitated on his first day of his training in 1981. His head was "pinched off" between the swinging railcar not long after he misjudged the weight distribution. Once the skip cars, or little wagons controlled by the hoist house, received the appropriate amount of coke, they were lifted to the top of the furnace and emptied into its mouth.

My father suggested to the group that a man had to "think like a rat" in order to work safely with coke and the elevated cars. He had to veer from hanging cable lines, to

learn how to live among pools of water that made this coke cargo dump look like a sewer. Dad's suggestion wasn't difficult to imagine. We were already in a place with little light, with enormous railcars swaying slightly over our heads, with drafts of wind coming at our feet through small archways in the concrete walls around us. Wires and dirt and coke littered the floor, black as ever, unstable, groundless even though we stood on bare earth. By this point in the tour, most of the group was quite solemn, and I, too, was learning to pay my respects.

Green Pants Chuck and Hard Hat Marvin escorted us to the Carrie Deer, and its soft lines, its doe eyes, its pretty blue and red wiring just didn't match the environment. My father pretended like it wasn't there and instead asked our tour guides about the hoist house. In all fairness to the Carrie Deer's artists, seeing white-tailed deer amid all the iron and rust and chains and pipes and decaying industry would have been strangely beautiful and sort of extraterrestrial. I still wondered, though: what about the ghosts who had inhabited this space even before the deer? Weren't they just as beautiful? I wondered if it was fair that their workplace became an attraction for tourists just because of a giant deer head.

When we walked up into the stoves, Green Pants Chuck and Hard Hat Marvin told us about temperatures and parts per million and the do-dads required to heat the furnaces. My dad interjected with a comment that silenced side conversations: "I was here before. What I remember is that it smelled like natural gas. Just natural gas everywhere. Scared the shit outta me."

After examining the stoves and the little white figurines, we entered the cast house for Carrie Number 6, the one that I had cleaned out, the only one that lasted. I

wanted to show my father the work that we accomplished, so I pointed to the cleaned-out glory hole, the brick that I had swept, the things we had to move, the vast amounts of dirt and dust piles that we had to abandon to the corners of the cast house simply because we couldn't push them any further. My father nodded at me and walked around the furnace, quietly and patiently listened to our tour guides. Again, Hard Hat Marvin gave a dissertation about numbers, about volume and heat, about the chemicals inside these machines, and I daydreamed about the men who kept the blast furnace alive, men like my father who did not see a machine when they looked at the old relics of steel production but the sweat and blood of dead men.

Green Pants Chuck insisted that the furnaces were kept alight until the whole mill closed down. The only other "cold" time was when the refractory brick inside of the furnace needed to be replaced about every two years. My father interjected with a story about Red. As the General Foreman of Masonry, Red supervised the construction of scaffolding within the blast furnaces once they were cooled and in need of replacement refractory brick. During one of these relining endeavors, a crane took bricks to the top of the furnace, about 100 feet in the air, and one of the bricks (which was a few feet wide and could be up to five feet long) dropped from the crane. It plummeted to the floor, bounced back up, and smacked Red in the head. My father's voice started to crack like he was getting nervous, and he turned tomato red as he sometimes does when talking in front of strangers, but he continued on with this story. The brick put a hole through Red's hard helmet, and he was forced to go to the mill's infirmary where he needed to receive a bunch of stitches. My father's eyes became teary when he recalled his father walking through their front door that night with a big, bloodied bandage around his head.

When my dad was finished speaking, the tour guides thanked him for sharing, and they let us amble around the cast house on our own.

Dad talked about how Red was the youngest foreman at the Homestead Works, how all of the other men in his position were either mechanical or electrical engineers. He was the only one in management with just one year of college experience. Someone asked about the turnover rate in the mills, and Dad explained that it wasn't high at all because mill jobs had terrific benefits, and they were never dull.

Someone asked him about the difference between blast furnaces like the Carries and the open hearth mill that was at Homestead, and Dad explained that blast furnaces made iron and open hearths made steel. Rather than a furnace, the open hearth was quite literally a kind of hearth. Workers threw scrap steel and other alloys into the hearth before the molten iron was poured into it. They let it cook for about ten minutes before they had to "blow out" all the steel. He explained that there wasn't necessarily a glory hole like at the Carries wherein molten iron poured out of the furnace, but tapping steel required dynamite. Dad said "they'd charge this thing and it'd just blow up." He explained that the "blower" would sound a horn as a three minute warning, and the tempo of the horn would get faster "so that you knew you had to watch out because shit might fly around." Then part of the wall would "just blow up" before a rush of molten steel flew out of it.

Once the other people from our group left my dad and I to ourselves, I asked him if Grandpa had to work in the heat, or if he only worked on cold furnaces. He explained that Red sometimes "had to do a hot job where they would get into the furnace if it was 3,000 degrees." He explained that they had to wear these wooden shoes and stand on a

platform to complete the refractory brick lining. This practice seemed incredibly dangerous, and when I expressed that sentiment to Dad, he assured me that doing a “hot job” only happened in emergency situations when “the roof fell in, or something.”

The more that my dad spoke about his time in the mills, the more I understood, the more I appreciated, the more I knew that this dust and grime was my home, my antibodies, my origin myth, my kin.

At the end of the tour, a woman approached my father and thanked him for his tenure as a steelworker. As a typical Yinzer, my father waved away her compliment in a gesture of humility. She shook his hand, and her eyes were red and puffy. He looked like he was going to laugh at her, but I knew that he had been deeply touched by her gratitude, the kind of gratitude that these men do not normally receive. He went on to call himself “just a proud mill Hunky,” and I wondered if he knew the origins of that word, the way that it probably shamed Olga and Marie and disgraced Big John and Marija, the way it would have humiliated him if he grew up in a different era. But like any reclaimed, re-appropriated word, a “mill Hunky” like my dad was strengthened by the knowledge of such difficult days gone past, and the men and women who brought each other out of those days.

I looked for Ron, the guy in charge of reviving the Carrie Furnaces, and I introduced myself and my dad and the story of my family’s history with the Carrie Furnaces. A short, earring-gilded tan man, Ron asked, “Mat, would you be interested in coming back and guiding tours some weekend for us? We’re always looking for ex-workers to do this.” My father laughed a little bit and became a tomato once again. He turned away from Ron’s question, but I interjected for him before he could turn down the

offer: “My dad loves talking about the steel industry.” Ron responded, “I don’t know. He seems pretty shy today.” Our other group members heard our conversation and shouted, “If you gave a tour, we’d come back!” Dad just laughed again.

I guessed that Dad was self-conscious about his technical knowledge of the furnaces because he wasn’t an engineer. Hard Hat Marvin and Green Pants Chuck were able to give specific and scientific data. My dad just told stories. Ron offered him his card anyway, and my dad took it. Ron added, “Before you leave, you might want to go check out that torpedo car. It’s got beautiful refractory brick inside of it—the type of thing your father probably did. Hell, he might have made that! It’s truly a lost art form.”

On the way to the torpedo car, Dad walked in front of me, marching quickly like he wanted to get out of there. He informed me that a torpedo car was used to carry molten iron from the Carrie Furnaces across the Hot Metal Bridge to the Homestead Works. The mixture of molten iron and water results in a disastrous explosion, a conflagration of fire and heat and water so horrible that it would take down the bridge and probably the surrounding area. These torpedo cars were lined with refractory brick and made of steel so that the molten iron could not escape, and the Hot Metal Bridge—one of only seven made in the world—had walls of refractory brick six feet high so that there was very little possibility of a calamitous explosion.

After we walked through six inch high weeds to get to this torpedo car, my father stuck his head in its opening said that I should, too. The air inside was cool, and I saw golden bricks lined perfectly next to each other. The individual bricks were carved so precisely that they could have been a wall at Machu Picchu. It was uniquely beautiful

though I might not have cared about this brick if I hadn't known its connection to my grandfather.

We walked back to the car in silence and waved goodbye to our docents once again. I reflected on having just stood atop a floor that Red may have rebuilt with his own two hands, on looking at a furnace whose guts were surgically removed and then fixed by him, on feeling the coolness of a torpedo car because of his refractory brick. My father was also silent as we left the makeshift parking lot and turned out of the tunnel towards the toothless man near the raspberry bushes. The mill was my father's connection to his past, and seeing his father's masonry work, one of the few tangible items that he has left of his dad, might have required emotional processing, so I didn't want to say anything. I just hoped that he felt connected to his father.

Dad took a different way home—not past Kennywood but through Homestead—because he wanted to drive through The Waterfront, the shopping complex that grew from the ashes of the Homestead Steel Works. We drove around Ulta, Hollister, American Eagle, and P.F. Chang's, and Dad pointed to ghosts. The red cranes above men, railcars chugging past us, open hearth furnaces that gave off 3,000 degree heat, vats of steel swaying above our heads, the gated entrance. What had once been the mightiest manufacturer of armor for submarines and tanks and warships in the country was now relegated to our new American Dream: conspicuous consumption. Dad indicated the only memorial to Homestead Steel Works: a handful of smokestacks, the only living remnants of Pittsburgh's too-soon-forgotten past.

While driving through the borough of Homestead, Dad pointed out abandoned buildings and explained that they were once warehouses that had popped up as ancillary

industries to the steel mill. Weeds grew out of these condemned places. Homestead had once been booming, a cultural hotbed and desired neighborhood, but it fell to ruins after 1985.

Dad saw a corner bar that looked familiar, and he remembered that Red had taken him there to eat breaded shrimp and French fries when he was a little boy. My father recalled the place as being “fancy—where rich people went out to lunch.” I had a feeling that this memory was colored by a child whose father barely spent time with him, because breaded shrimp and French fries didn’t exactly sound like a fancy restaurant’s meal.

Most of my father’s recollections of Red are peppered with words like “asshole,” “cheap,” and “crazy.” He remembers having to pick up a bucket of rocks from the garden before being allowed to eat dinner, of being beaten with a 2x4 after one of his sisters got into trouble with a boy, of being punched in the stomach by his father. I nearly cried at the thought of my burly, slightly overweight, bald father as a small child eating French fries with his dad, imagining that he was being sophisticated, and trying so desperately to be all of his father’s good qualities but none of the bad.

CHAPTER 6

TO YINZER (IN 59 STEPS)

I have not adopted the accent that my mother and father just slightly espoused from their coal and steel-born parents. Perhaps Mom and Dad's accents weren't strong enough for me to fully internalize. Perhaps my elitist interest in canonical literature since childhood forced a prescriptive implementation of the English language. Perhaps I just thought Pittsburghese was ugly. My Pittsburghese only comes out when I am drunk or angry. "Towel" morphs into "tahl." "Well" becomes "wool." "Down" and "around" become "dahn" and "arahnd." "Really" turns into "rill." Then there's the whole jag thing. Jagoff, jag-o, jaggerbush. We have our own nouns: soda is "pop," Iron City Beer is "Arn City." Even whole phrases are completely changed. To have an open front zipper on your pants is denoted by the warning: "Ay, Kennywood's Open." To be instructed (typically in childhood) to clean up your room might go like this: "Ay, Go redd-up yer room." I have said some of these vernacular terms with sincerity, most of them with mockery. Though never have I said the infamous Pittsburghese phrase: "How 'bout dem Stillers, n'at?"

When I was growing up, I thought that Pittsburghese and the Western Pennsylvania dialect made an otherwise intelligent person seem completely incompetent.

Then, throughout my college years, Pittsburghese became something of a fascination, especially after meeting people from Virginia and Mississippi and Massachusetts who didn't speak like my family members. I don't mean to infantilize or exoticize people who speak Pittsburghese. All of the people dearest to me speak in this way, and I do too sometimes. My grandparents certainly did; select aunts and uncles still do. My parents sort of speak in this way, sometimes ironically, sometimes subconsciously. After having lived in South Carolina for three years, coming home to my parents' accents is, truly, something to look forward to.

The man who made the Yinzer accent famous was the voice of Steeler Nation, Myron Cope. A legendary Pittsburgh color commentator for thirty-five years, Cope gave exciting broadcasts, and he's responsible for the creation of the Terrible Towel. For a 1975 playoff game, Cope asked Steeler fans to bring in a "yellow, white, or black dish towel to cheer on the Stillers." Like a command from God, his voice charged the city to give the Steelers luck and encouragement, to fight and to hope. The Terrible Towel command worked, and it is still used to represent, as Myron might say, "the pahr of still and Picksburgh's hard work."

I remember hearing Cope's voice—harsh, brash, and full of that crackly smoker sound—cheering on the Steelers as I drove with Dad pretty much anywhere whenever I was a little girl.

It was difficult for me to understand Myron's accent as well as Pittsburgh's love of the Steelers, especially when I was a teenager. I listened to my friends talk about Monday night's Steelers and Baltimore Ravens game and Ben Roethlisberger's relationship status, and I'd think: why does everybody care about them so damn much?

My peers had recognized their black and gold-bloodedness early in their lives, but I was and always have been a bit of a skeptic.

Notice, too, that I use the pronoun “them” whenever discussing the Steelers as if to suggest that the team is separate from me. Most Yinzers, including my dad, say “we,” as if the Steelers meshed with their bodies, becoming the flesh of their flesh. Even though I cringe to propound this truth, I’ve learned throughout young adulthood that the Steelers are the heart of Pittsburgh life, the great connector between class, race, and religion.

Seeing a Sunday parishioner wave a Terrible Towel in church on a game day is by no means uncommon. Pittsburgh ministers in Catholic churches, Episcopalian churches, and Hindu temples have prayed for the Steelers and their victories. At Saint Peter Parish, mostly comprised of white members, the late Reverend Bill Beaver wore a Steelers jersey beneath his vestments. On Sundays at East Liberty Presbyterian Church, a predominately black church, Reverend Randall Bush wears a black robe and a gold stole. He even once wrote an acrostic style prayer that echoed Psalm 119, and the first letter in each line spelled “GO STEELERS.” Pittsburghers’ love of the Steelers might resemble idolatry, but this is how we’ve always been, aggressively radical in our devotion to football ever since I can remember and long before that.

Whenever I was in elementary school, probably about the third grade, I walked out of the girls’ bathroom and stared at a poster on a cinderblock wall. The poster showed photos of black men, which was why I stared at it for a good while. I grew up in a very white suburb of Pittsburgh and could count on one hand the amount of black people living in my neighborhood. There were five: the Moore family. Brittany was my age,

and we were good friends because both of us were quiet, book-loving good girls. When we were in elementary and middle school, I'd walk to her house, and we'd play with her Pooh Bears. Mr. Moore brought us popcorn and gave us popsicles. Other than the Moores, I don't remember seeing black people at the grocery store or in the mall or at the movies.

The men on the poster outside of the girls' bathroom did not look like friendly Mr. Moore. They had stern, unsympathetic faces. They were the 1997 starting Steelers lineup, which I knew because of their black and gold outfits. I questioned why there was a poster of the Steelers just outside of the girls' bathroom, but I reasoned that everyone was supposed to like the Steelers, so why not?

The only player who I could name and identify was Kordell Stewart. He played quarterback from the late 90s into the early 2000s and was the object of my father's hatred on most days because he was such a "hot and cold player." My dad screamed at Stewart through the TV because he would be excellent one game and then throw interceptions the next. Only decades later did my father reflect upon Stewart's football career and Pittsburgh's antipathy of him. He said: "I felt sorry for the guy sometimes." The late 1990s were not great years for the Steelers, though at the time I didn't know or care about that.

I only know about the high and low points of Steelers' history because of what I know about religion. Football and faith, specifically Catholicism, are intimately connected in Pittsburgh. Pittsburghers are so fanatical about football that they have coined the most famous Steelers' play (and probably the most famous play in NFL history) the Immaculate Reception.

The Immaculate Reception happened in 1972 on the Sunday before Christmas. Dad, Aunt Anna Mae, and Red were decorating the basement with pine tree boughs and listening to the AFC divisional playoff game between the Steelers and the Oakland Raiders on the radio. This game was the first playoff game at Three Rivers Stadium, and the Raiders were winning 7-6 with only twenty-two seconds left in the game. As my father picked up tinsel to give to Red, who was standing on a footstool next to the Christmas Tree, the announcer proclaimed that Terry Bradshaw, the Steelers' QB, was struggling to hand off the ball to John "Frenchy" Fuqua. Frenchy caught the football but was hit by Raiders' lineman Jack Tatum, causing the ball to jump out of Frenchy's hands, touch Tatum's shoulder, and fly back fifteen yards. Red cursed at Frenchy and stepped down from his stool just as the announcer exclaimed that Steelers' fullback Franco Harris made a shoestring catch. Red stopped yelling at Frenchy, and he and my father ran to the radio. With five seconds left in the game, the announcer shouted that Franco was running ten, twenty, thirty, forty, and finally forty-two yards into the end zone. Red yelled, "Been waiting forty years fer this!"

However, officials took time trying to make a call about the play. The main concern was whether or not the ball had actually touched Tatum, and because there were no instant replays at the time, no one truly knew if the play was legitimate because it had been so fast and so ridiculous. If the ball did not hit Tatum, then the play would have been illegal, but if it did hit him, then the Steelers would have won the game. After a long fifteen minutes, officials eventually agreed that the ball bounced off Tatum's shoulder, making the play legal and clinching a Steelers' win.

To this day, Tatum remains firm in his conviction that the ball never touched him. The Raiders even refer to this play as the Immaculate Deception, but regardless of nomenclature and opinions, the sixty-yard scoring play led to a Steelers victory of 13-7.

Why name this play the Immaculate Reception, then? Well, the pun is quite good, for one, but Pittsburghers tend to inflate the divine with the elation of a big win. The Immaculate Reception takes its name from the Immaculate Conception, which is the Catholic belief that the Virgin Mary did not have original sin. Catholics believe that Mary was conceived in the normal biological way, but she was made sinless by God in the womb. In the same way that God prepared the world for the coming of Jesus Christ with the Immaculate Conception of Mary, the Immaculate Reception prepared the Steelers for a decade of unparalleled victories in the NFL.

Although the Immaculate Reception is often cited as a turning point for the Steelers, the real miracle happened when the Steelers' hired Chuck Noll as head coach in 1969. Chuck Noll rebuilt the Steelers from the ground up through his draft picks, and he started with defense. Noll chose "Mean" Joe Greene in the first round of the 1969 draft. In the next few years, he selected Terry Bradshaw, Franco Harris, cornerback Mel Blount, and linebacker Jack Ham.

In 1975, when my dad was a senior in high school, the Steelers appeared in Super Bowl IX and defeated the Minnesota Vikings. Pittsburgh reveled in the glory of that win. The next year, when my dad was in college, the Steelers won Super Bowl X against the Dallas Cowboys, and they became just the third team in NFL history to win back-to-back Super Bowls.

This happened to be the time when Pittsburgh's steel mills, just like the Steelers, were decently successful. The Homestead Works steelworkers were making 85 percent more than the average manufacturing worker in America, so there was an immense amount of pride in Pittsburgh sports as well as its industry.

The Steelers won these Super Bowls because of Chuck Noll's re-structured defensive line, which was spearheaded by the Steel Curtain. Four players constituted the Steel Curtain. Dwight White, nicknamed "Mad Dog," was a fierce defensive end with a missing front tooth. Ernie "Fats" Holmes, who referred to himself as being "stone crazy" and sported a haircut shaped like an arrow, was one of the toughest defensive tackles in the league. L.C. Greenwood was an aggressive lineman who wore golden shoes with a black Nike swoop and was repeatedly fined for playing in these shoes. "Mean" Joe Greene, whose college football nickname carried into his NFL career, was incredibly fast and strong, making him the Steel Curtain's unofficial leader. He'd tell the other players that they could go out on the field and "kick ass and not get into trouble." The Steel Curtain was arguably the best defensive line of all time.

Three Rivers Stadium hosted many of these early Steelers' victories, and my father and Red attended a few games together. Dad says that everyone drank and bellowed loudly, that the fans were ridiculously alive. He remembers being a skinny kid in high school and sitting next to blue collar old men who were smoking cigars and swearing. Later in the 70s, he remembers being a beefy college student cheering on the Steelers alongside steel mill workers and his father.

Starting in 1979, United States Steel began to lay-off employees who had not been given any warning. Over the next few years when my father was entering the

industry, he witnessed experienced men being laid off. However, the Steelers were still the winningest team, and their grit, resilience, and resolution helped a city to deal with its mounting unemployment rates.

The Steelers even re-worked the meaning of their iconography during their decade of championships. Originally, their tri-colored, three astroid logo meant “steel lightens your work, brightens your leisure, and widens your world.” Quite a propagandic statement. However, by the end of the 1970s, their three astroid logo demarcated the three ingredients used to make steel: yellow for coal, red for iron ore, and blue for scrap steel. This shift seems to represent a memorialization of steel rather than a celebration of its benefits for residents. It is a shift that strives for residents to remember their common heritage rather than rejoice in their changing economic industry. In this time of looming economic collapse and professional sports victories, Pittsburgh seemed to be a place of resurrection, of triumph after a descent into economic hell so that even without steel, a legacy of strength was bound to remain.

The Steelers won a third Super Bowl in a second match-up with the Dallas Cowboys in Super Bowl XIII and beat the Los Angeles Rams in Super Bowl XIV. They are the only team to win consecutive Super Bowls twice. These Super Bowl wins in 1979 and 1980 helped residents re-nickname Pittsburgh from the “Steel Capital of the World” to the “City of Champions.” The Steelers were omnipotent and unstoppable, which was what Pittsburgh had always been and what many residents felt it would continue to become.

Supernatural powers are suspected to have helped the Steelers during their most winningest decade. The Steelers held (and continue to hold) spring training at Saint

Vincent College in Latrobe, Pennsylvania. The Benedictine nuns, who cooked for the unstoppable 1970s players, prayed for the athletes. A long-held myth in the city is that the divine influence of the nuns' prayers helped the Steelers clinch four Super Bowls in six years.

Of course, we Pittsburghers tend to be superstitious, and this fantastical theory is shot down by what happened in the 1980s. The Steelers failed to make the playoffs in 1980 and 1981. In 1982, they hosted a playoff game at Three Rivers and lost. Their offensive line wasn't as formidable as it had once been. Some of the key defensive players were retiring, and so too, did residents of the city feel like letting go.

Just after the 1981-1982 recession, United States Steel laid off 153,000 workers in one year. The Homestead Works laid off groups of workers just a month short of qualifying for their twenty-year early-retirement pensions. My father was laid off in 1984. The unemployment rate in Pittsburgh's metropolitan region rose anywhere from thirteen to twenty-three percent by the mid-1980s. The metaphor Dad uses to help me understand this enormous number is, naturally, related to football. He says the number of people who were laid off was "as many as could fill Three Rivers Stadium." Other mills in the Monongahela Valley started to shut down, as well as towns outside of Pittsburgh in central Pennsylvania, Ohio, and West Virginia.

Ancillary industries also locked their doors forever. Bars once open for twenty-two hours a day (only vacant between two and four a.m.) closed. Restaurants, stores, community centers were locked up. Pittsburgh lost sixty-one percent of its workforce once the mills shut down, and those residents who stayed started to lose hope for their future, their city, their sustenance.

When I speak with my father about the unfortunate loss of Pittsburgh's steel industry, like a true Yinzer, he says, "That's not sad. That's the way it is, n'at. You gotta adapt."

The year of my birth (1988) was the worst campaign for the Steelers since 1969. They had a losing season of 5-11, but despite playing terribly, their popularity increased. The Steelers are the embodiment of a historically blue collar city's identity, which makes them one of America's favorite teams. After the steel mills closed down, many residents left Pittsburgh for jobs in Texas, Florida, and North Carolina, among other states. Even my father and mother nearly moved to Ohio in the mid-1980s.

That exodus caused a fan base to convert and encourage non-believers, increasing the Steelers' popularity because, as my father says, "Those jagoffs were from here." Steeler fans are known as Steeler Nation because they've proselytized in England, France, South Carolina, and other cities, states, and countries. I've seen Steelers fans on TV at the 2008 Summer Olympics in China waving Terrible Towels. Because of this loyalty, the Steelers have sold out every home game since 1972.

In 1991, Chuck Noll retired, and he left the Steelers as: the fifth winningest coach in NFL history, only one of four men who coached the same team for twenty-three years, and the only coach to win four Super Bowls. The Steelers hired the youngest head coach at the time, Bill Cowher, who was later nicknamed "The Chin." The 38-year-old was also the youngest head coach to lead his team to a Super Bowl in 1995; although, they ended up losing to the Dallas Cowboys.

The year 2000 was the last season for the Steelers at Three Rivers Stadium. My father, Gwen, and I went to games at Three Rivers Stadium just a few times before it was

imploded. Nina was too young to enjoy watching football, and my mom never really liked sports, particularly the Steelers, so they never went with us. Dad got tickets from his employer, just like his father had gotten tickets from the “guys at the mill.” Gwen and I ate fruit salad and pulled pork sandwiches and drank hot chocolate in club house seats while he talked with adults and drank a beer or two.

Years later, I asked my father about his favorite player. “Jam Ham,” he answered, then swiftly, “No, Greg Lloyd. Kevin Green.” He kept going with these inscrutable names until I expressed that I had no idea who these men were. He then said, “They’re all from the 90s. We went to the Super Bowl but didn’t win.” I would’ve seen these men play ball at Three Rivers. A little later in our conversation, I asked him why Pittsburghers worship the Steelers (implicitly looking for the reason that I do not). He responded, “That’s the way it is.” And I was still left grappling.

The Steelers Nation loves its team with the kind of fierceness that Pittsburghers typically show their children. Jerome “The Bus” Bettis was a halfback since 1996 and a fan favorite. I can remember the city’s sadness on his last day at Heinz Field, the stadium that replaced Three Rivers. During Bettis’s ten years of playing with the Steelers, he was something of a saint in Pittsburgh.

Conversely, when certain players didn’t perform well, Pittsburghers put them in time out for a week or more, scolded them, shamed them for poor behavior, and collectively decided the best course of action. My father is and always has been particularly harsh about Ben “Big Ben” Roethlisberger. When someone in my family mentions Ben’s name, my dad snarls, “He sucks.” This sentiment is one that more than a few Pittsburghers share.

Not a lot happened for the Steelers in the early 2000s, except that they won Super Bowl XL against the Seattle Seahawks. This fifth Super Bowl win occurred during my junior year of high school, and my father was elated for weeks afterward. It was their first win in twenty-six years, and Pittsburgh hosted a parade Downtown on the following Friday. When I arrived at school that day, my high school was a ghost town. There were barely any students in my classes, but the more pronounced absences were my teachers. My dad had encouraged me to skip school that day to go Downtown, but going to a football parade sounded mega lame. He couldn't understand why I didn't embrace Pittsburgh's glorious resurrection.

The Steelers' journey to success had been a long one. Before the fifth Super Bowl win, before the Steel Curtain, there was simply a man and a race track. Art Rooney grew up on Pittsburgh's North Side. An lucky Irishman, he won approximately \$33,000 at a race track in Saratoga, NY in the 1930s, and with a fraction of that money, he founded a football franchise, naming it the Pittsburgh Pirates, just like the city's MLB team.

The team played at Pitt Stadium, the home of the University of Pittsburgh Panthers, and at other stadiums in other cities because competition with college football and professional baseball dwarfed Art's Pittsburgh Pirates. Having been around since the 1870s, baseball was by far the more popular sport. Even Red recalled liking the Pirates more than the Steelers when he was growing up because the Pirates had won the 1909 and 1925 World Series games.

In 1940, Art changed the name of his team to the Pittsburgh Steelers to reflect the communal heritage of Pittsburghers. The team survived World War II when Art merged

the Steelers with the Philadelphia Eagles to become the Phil-Pitt Steagles in 1943 and then the Chicago Cardinals to become Card-Pitt in 1944. Once the war ended and the players came back, the mergers ceased, but the Steelers still weren't all that good. Even though Red played defensive end and offensive tackle for the Central Catholic High School football team, he said that people didn't convert to football until the 1970s.

Art Rooney, who earned the nickname "The Chief," eventually turned the Steelers over to his son, Dan Rooney. During Dan's tenure, he helped to minimize the racial discrepancy between white and black coaches, among other notable accomplishments. Dan and Art Rooney were inducted into the Professional Football Hall of Fame, and in 2003, Dan Rooney gave the title of Steelers' team president to his son, Art Rooney II. The success and reputation of the Rooneys is widely recognized. They are patient and consistent, concerned with diversity and equality within the NFL. The Rooneys have become Pittsburgh royalty akin to the Heinz and Mellon families because they developed a dynasty that came out of a bet and hard work and family.

The Rooneys are Catholic like many Pittsburghers. Art Rooney, Sr. reportedly clutched a Rosary on his way to the hospital after suffering a stroke. So it should be no surprise that the Rooneys are not the only people profiting from the Steelers' fandom. The Sacred Heart of Jesus Catholic Store in the Bloomfield neighborhood of Pittsburgh sells Steelers Rosaries. Nuns handcraft the little gold and black Hail Mary and Our Father beads, and they report that keeping a sufficient stock of these Rosaries is sometimes an issue. They maintain that the Rosaries are used to pray for the city, which is probably true, but there's clearly one aspect of the city that is underscored above

others. I've never come across an object that so perfectly entwines Pittsburgh, its devotion to football, and its connection to the Catholic Church.

And the Steelers needed prayers when Bill Cowher resigned as head coach in 2006 to care for his wife who eventually died of cancer. Faced with Cowher's resignation, the Steelers hired the youngest head coach in the NFL, 34-year-old Mike Tomlin. Tomlin was the Steelers' first African-American head coach; although black athletes had been hired to play for the Steelers in the 1930s and then to coach in the 1940s.

By 2009, Mike Tomlin became the youngest coach to win a Super Bowl in NFL history. I vividly remember this Super Bowl win because I was a college student living in Oakland at the time. Just minutes after the game's end, some friends and I walked up to Forbes Avenue near the heart of Pitt to check out the commotion that we had heard from my apartment. We walked up there only to watch our city crumble. Street signs were torn down. Garbage cans were catapulted into the night air. Glass storefronts shattered. There were hundreds of kids streaming onto Forbes and Fifth Avenues. Pitt students hung from telephone poles; they set couches on fire and punched each other. When we saw police move onto the scene, we left quickly. There were eighty-three people arrested and fifteen fires started that night. The Steelers (and Pittsburgh) had a Super Bowl ring for the thumb, but the aftermath was apocalyptic, like a strange and horrific divine rapture.

In 2010, a year after the sixth Super Bowl win, my father and I attended a Steelers game. I don't remember details except that my toes were numb by the end of the first quarter and that the fans were out of their minds. At one point, Dad offered to buy me a

hot chocolate, and when he came back with the Styrofoam cup, the brown liquid had already cooled. The whole time Dad seemed very nervous though not necessarily about the game. He kept asking me if I wanted to go home. I told him that I was having fun and tried to stay quiet about my freezing extremities. I tried to be tough and enjoy that moment with my father.

By the time I turned twelve years old, I knew that I could not connect with my father about some things, so I signed up for softball thinking that he and I would have some sport over which to bond. Within a few practices, I was relegated to the right-fielder position, and if you know your softball, then you know that the right-fielder position is reserved for the least-skilled girl in the game. Even after I quit a year later, I still liked sports in a quasi-genuine, quasi-pandering sort of way.

When Dad, my sisters, and I attended games, I asked my father observant questions about certain plays, players, and the progress of the game. Dad answered my questions with emphasis, clarity, and focus, like he'd been waiting for his little girl to be interested in sports all her life so that she would seem more like a little boy. Even at this young age, I knew this. I could sense it. I wasn't attention-starved as a child, and I knew that my father loved me, but he never pursued explanation of details. He never asked if I was struggling or happy, what I was interested in, or what I was reading. He never asked if I felt like I knew him, so I needed some validation that I did, and recreating his experience of watching sports with Red was my best shot.

I grew up watching the sports-centered interactions between Red and my dad every Sunday after church. On weekends, when my mom was working, Dad drove my little sisters and me to mass. My father's 1987 Mazda truck smelled like sweat, and he'd

listen to Myron Cope explain stats about the upcoming Steelers game no matter how desperately we begged to listen to popular music. We usually arrived late to church, so we sat in the back pew where we couldn't see over torsos covered in Steelers jerseys. My father would not sing or even hum the hymns, but I watched other dads bellow our faith's songs and hold their children's hands. Those fathers wore pressed buttoned-up shirts and khakis. Their hair was slicked back showing their youthful, clean cuts. My father stood stoically in his ratty t-shirt and bright orange shorts on the outside of his black sweatpants. His rotundness, his large glasses, and his bald head made him look older than in his early 40s.

After we shook peoples' hands to offer the Sign of Peace, Dad whipped out a bottle of orange-scented hand sanitizer. We would plead that he was being rude, but he'd shush us and squirt the orange goo onto our little palms. The parishioners in our pew sniffed, like they smelled something that didn't quite belong. I blushed, looked down at my hands, and then at the linoleum floor. Something that didn't belong. Indeed, church is where I learned shame. When my father, Gwen, Nina, and I walked up to the altar to receive the Eucharist, Christ looked down upon us, broken, bleeding cerise, and yet I didn't understand that I should have pleaded with Him to forgive me for my shame.

After the priest's benediction, we headed to my grandparents' house. Olga asked what we had learned at mass, and we were required to recite salient points from the priest's homily and then listen to Olga's lesson about praying the Rosary or visiting the Stations of the Cross. Dad retreated to the basement where he chatted with Red. I can remember only a few times when I was allowed to enter Red's man-cave. Each time, Red and Dad were sitting in the dark and staring at a small TV, engaging each other with

only grumbled syllables about if the Steelers may or may not win later that night. I'd eye the Terrible Towel on the wall and the old Steelers bobbleheads proudly displayed along the fireplace mantle. I'd soak it all in, trying to analyze the fascination, the binaries, the separation, but ultimately failing to understand fully.

After we left Red and Olga's house, Gwen, Nina, and I spent the rest of the afternoon playing with Barbie dolls and plastic play food before Mom came home in the early evening. Dad retreated to the basement for the remainder of the night and yelled at the Steelers while drinking chicken beer.

I have very few memories before the age of eighteen in which we, as an entire five-person family, spent time together in one room of our home. All five of us preferred certain rooms where we tended to our rituals. We knew that my father did not want to chat after he came home from work. His excuse was that he had spent eight hours talking with "idiots" on the phone at work, so he didn't feel like being social. On occasion when I was in high school, I'd sit next to him on his couch in the basement and ask questions about the game on TV, but he would only reply with one-word answers. The shame gurgled up in me as I let him be, feeling like I shouldn't have intruded into his sacred place. From upstairs and for the majority of the night, we heard him yell at Bill Cowher, Kordell Stewart, Jerome Bettis, Big Ben, Mike Tomlin. He'd resurface around 10 p.m. and instruct Gwen, Nina, and me to hit the hay.

My father is a true Pittsburgh Dad, which is such a common cultural and social trope that we Pittsburghers even have an online sitcom dedicated to the subject.

Pittsburgh Dad was started in late 2011 by Pittsburghers Curt Wooton and Chris Preksta and boasts a viewership of twenty-one million people. Wooton, who plays the Pittsburgh

Dad, put on his father's glasses while on a lunch break one day and started doing impressions while Preksta shot video from an iPhone. They didn't imagine that the show would be such a hit, so much so that Ben Roethlisburger, Jerome Bettis, and Hines Ward have even done cameo performances.

In 2012, *Pittsburgh Dad* released an episode called "Going to Church." When I watched this forty-three second-episode, I immediately detected my dad in Curt Wooton. The script goes like this: "Now, yinz guys, hurry it up! Quit fartin' arauhnd. I ain't tryin' to walk into church lookin' like a bunch of jagoffs. Jesus don't like it. No, you ain't takin' that videogame with you. What do you want to get struck down by a lightning bolt? And I told you to put a shirt on with a collar on it... or your Steelers jersey. All right, so you guys know the procedure, right? After communion, meet Mom and I in the back of the church so's I can beat the rush-hour traffic. No, Deb, God don't care what your hair looks like. No, we're not leavin' the TV on for the dog." The *Pittsburgh Dad* walks out of the front door amid fake audience laughs. In a separate online interview, Preska made a claim that I have long observed. He said that Pittsburgh parents are always yelling at their kids, even if the content of what they're saying is nice and sincere and gracious, the form of it is just shouting.

My father and I are the only members of my family who enjoy going to the movies alone, though our recent tradition, especially after my twenty-fifth birthday, has been to go to the movies together. We plan ahead, look up critics' opinions, check out the theatre options. He's a little pickier than I am, but one night we had to choose between *Concussion* and *The Revenant*. He wanted to see *The Revenant*, but I was more

interested in *Concussion* because it was filmed largely in Pittsburgh. He conceded, and we found the story of Mike Webster to be startling.

Webster had been an integral part of the 1970s Steelers; although, before his death, he sold his Super Bowl rings, lost his family, his finances, and his mind to chronic traumatic encephalopathy (CTE). Webster was the first man to be studied by Dr. Bennet Omalu and the first person to be diagnosed with CTE. The story of Dr. Bennet Omalu was also compelling. Dr. Omalu, played by Will Smith, is a forensic pathologist who discovered CTE and struggled to be useful and effective as a foreigner in Pittsburgh, a place that simultaneously embraces and destroys him.

To my great disappointment, the film wildly irritated me. It wasn't just the acting or the choppy plot sequence or the lack of thematic focus, but rather the way that Pittsburgh was portrayed to a national audience. Some of the only landscape shots dramatically highlighted the grungy Carrie Furnaces as if that derelict monument solely fills up the entirety of Pittsburgh's skyline, as if Pittsburghers' collective identity is still singularly manifested in rusty, pre-WWII furnaces and men hustling over pig's skin. My father noticed my observations, too, but he was more skeptical about the depiction of players with CTE. As we were driving home, he questioned if steroids could have impacted certain players' head trauma, perhaps making CTE more likely, but I contested his claim. Of course I knew that he wanted to defend the NFL. We argued about the NFL's response to CTE until we arrived back home, and ultimately, I vowed never to watch the Steelers play again.

Weeks later, when I was talking with my mother on the phone, I heard Dad in the background shout emphatically when the Steelers beat the Cincinnati Bengals and made

it into the 2015 playoffs. I sighed and rolled my eyes, resigning to the fact that I will not ever feel comfortable about Pittsburghers' affinity for the Steelers. Even so, it's important to recognize that the Steelers made people who felt distant from their faith, their families, and their identities feel connected to something; however, the effects of that fandom, such as the unyielding euphoria and depression, the problematic othering, the approval of violence, causes a kind of radical, fundamentalist fanaticism that we Pittsburghers can't expect everyone to buy into.

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