What do you hear when you think of a rattle? From the jingle of a baby’s toy to the faint rattle of a last breath, the warning call of a snake to the erratic rattle of a terrified heartbeat, being rattled you to the core is an experience that could originate from without as from within. In this issue of Memoryhouse, our contributors explore the theme rattle in a variety of creative nonfiction pieces, transcribing moments when things started shaking and coming apart in eerie worlds both real or imagined. From the innocuous sensations that make up our surrounding world to the volley of perceptions and interpretations that we have formed and attributed to them, we hope the pieces in this issue unsettle, flummox, unnerve and otherwise perturb you into considering your status quo in a different light.
## Table of Contents

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Title</th>
<th>Page</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>too many kittens</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>daun daemon</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>out of the cradle</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>luanne castle</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>the type of courage that only comes with</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>motherhood</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>holly day</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>doris and me</td>
<td>12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>pam munter</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>auspex</td>
<td>18</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>rory nevins</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>a hollow song</td>
<td>22</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>brian rihlmann</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>my bones rattle with a crimson rage</td>
<td>24</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>megha sood</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>of the body</td>
<td>26</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>terri mccord</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>lung tissues</td>
<td>27</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>holly day</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>racine song</td>
<td>28</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ed ruzicka</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>a snake</td>
<td>30</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>kaci skiles laws</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>i find you</td>
<td>35</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>jen bradpiece</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>the holy land</td>
<td>36</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>oren oppenheim</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>waiting</td>
<td>38</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>steve ablon</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>he is risen</td>
<td>39</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>shannon elizabeth gardner</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>voices beneath the winds</td>
<td>40</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>keith moul</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>cemetery</td>
<td>41</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>terri mccord</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>god’s eyes on the root cellar</td>
<td>42</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>kelly dumar</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>biddy mulligans blues club</td>
<td>45</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>helen valenta</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
memoryhouse is a quarterly student-run publication that curates the personal narratives of the uchicago community and beyond through creative writing and visual art.

to learn about joining memoryhouse or submitting work, please visit chicagomemoryhouse.wordpress.com

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founded 2012, alida miranda-wolff
too many kittens
daun daemon

she had too many too often, my cat, sometimes a handful were left, two or three we couldn’t give away, two or three that grew older

when she went into heat yet again and grew ponderous with life, Daddy roared about stuffing the kittens in a bag, tossing them in the river

when Daddy wasn’t home, Mama said we could take the kittens to a place in the country, where they would live on a farm with kind people

we drove down bleak roads, blackberry brambles curling over the ditches; atop hills far from the road, small houses sat like forgotten tombstones

when we stopped, Mama took my box of kittens — Petula, Barbie, Ringo — set it on the road, ripped off the tape, got back in the car, and began to drive

I scrambled into the backseat, looked out the rear window and watched the kittens tumble out of the box, their pink mouths opening and closing

they grew smaller and smaller until I could barely see them anymore, fading into the dusk, dissolving into the scenery like ghosts

Eavesdrop while searching for dimes and Nickels rattling deep inside Dad’s recliner Damned if I didn’t remember things adults couldn’t Listen and cache was what I’d always done Ever further back my mind accumulated it all Silhouettes on window shades, tadpoles in the creek Silty and cryptic it flows past my neighborhood Loose pedals under bare feet, grassy scabby knees Yellow dandelions, an ant traveling fast underneath Red wagon sluggish behind, my friend’s feet braking us On my plastic mattress I jumped and held the bar Crying to be lifted and set down upon the rug Kings and princesses set in motion with ogres In my head, searching for the dream under my crib Nothing there but snap-lock beads to fit together Germinate like memories each one with the other.

out of the cradle
luanne castle
the type of
courage
that only
comes from
motherhood

I close my eyes to the things I’ve always seen the corners
the extra shadows in the darkening room, the furtive movements
of things that I won’t admit are there. I close my eyes to them
and flip the light switch on
announce loudly that there is nothing there, the room is empty
there are no monsters in the closet.

I close my ears to the rustles and groans that I know
are more than just the house settling, the wind blowing
the gentle scratching of tree limbs against the frame of the house.
I close my ears to so much more than rats scurrying through the walls
the tiny click of a spider methodically cocooning its prey
to the whispers I have always heard but now must fervently deny.

holly day
When I was a little kid, I had a secret that I never told anyone. I was going to become a legend. When I went to the movies or listened to records, I knew I could do that. It wasn’t until I went off to college that I discovered not everyone wanted to be a movie star. What was wrong with them, anyway?

More to the point, I knew exactly which movie star I wanted to be: Doris Day. Her first movie was mine, too - “Romance on the High Seas.” There was no doubt that hers was the world in which I wanted to live. It didn’t matter that it wasn’t real. She was everything I wanted to be. She was perky, clever, talented, attractive, social. And that voice – so warm and personal, the intonation perfect, the diction crystalline. The studio publicity department had dubbed her “The Tomboy of Warner Bros.” and boy, could I relate to that. She reassured me I didn’t have to be frilly and feminine to make my way in the world and be accepted. There were no role models remotely like me in my real world. I had to find one by buying a movie ticket.

To find out who she was when she wasn’t playing a role, I went to the only available source – movie magazines. I figured out when they’d hit the stands at our local Rexall Drug Store and I was there that day right after school.

I studied all the movie magazines, and imagined myself in them, their glossy pages promising insider tales of domestic bliss and unparalleled happiness. A star’s toothy, beaming face on the cover was a model for me to practice that exact grin in the mirror. It was all demeanor, after all, a life of illusion. I was in training.

By the time I was 13, I was ready to explore this seductive world in person. My best friend, Jacque Weiss, and I would head off to the Brown Derby in Hollywood to have lunch with the movie stars. It took a while to save up to be able to afford one of the cheapest things on the menu, the Cobb salad. But it was a sure place to see movie stars and possibly be discovered. When we sat down, I’d ask the waiter if there were any movie stars there today and there always were. I tried not to stare, to stay nonchalant and blasé about it all. Once, I asked Jacque to go outside to a nearby phone booth, call the dining room and ask for me. When the waiter brought the phone to my table after announcing my name, I pretended it was a call from my agent.

“Oh, I can’t possibly come to the set now. I’m having lunch at the Derby.”

I felt very special, like a real celebrity.

After lunch, we’d walk by the Capitol Records tower on Vine Street, just a short block away. It was thrilling to stand outside, imagining what was being recorded inside.

On the way home from Hollywood, we’d get off the bus in Beverly Hills and walk the four blocks up to 713 North Crescent Drive, Doris Day’s house. I hoped Doris would come out but she never did. These were the years long before stalking became an issue but, in retrospect, we weren’t too far from that – merely lacking the malevolence.

During my early teen years, our neighbor across the street went to work for Capitol Records. When I heard this, I knew fame was just a matter of time. Before this, the guy had been cleaning swimming pools for a living. This only confirmed my belief in the serendipitous magic of success in Hollywood.

After he’d been at Capitol for just a few months, the guy’s wife casually mentioned that he had a new job. He was now working for Marty Melcher, Doris Day’s husband. What?! In fact, they had socialized with the Melchers on several occasions at their Malibu beach house. She described Doris
playing volleyball on the sand and their having barbecues together. What? What?

She might as well have spread a line of cocaine in front of an addict. My neighbors were hanging out with Doris Day, my neighbors - people who knew of my strange affinity for all things Doris. And yet they did nothing – I repeat, nothing – to facilitate a meeting of any kind.

And then, lightning struck! Just before my 15th birthday, my parents called me into the living room and told me as a present, they had managed to get me two tickets to the world premiere of Doris Day’s latest film, “Teacher’s Pet” in Hollywood. I couldn’t drive yet, and I most certainly didn’t want to go with either parent, so they recruited the older son of a family friend to go with me. In 1958, premieres were a very big deal - Klieg lights, cameras everywhere, live television coverage, fans screaming in the stands. And I’d be strolling into the theater on the very same red carpet that Doris would be walking on minutes after me.

Robin was a gangly, humorless 18-year-old boy with a dusty old beater that seemed to match his personality. I convinced him to park it a block away, but when we stepped on to the red carpet, everyone screamed, thinking I was somebody important. I waved and smiled, finally able to use “the look” I had practiced in front of the mirror. Robin was completely mortified, wanted to go inside and sit down. Uh uh. I was holding out for Doris to get there. And arrive she did, dressed in a long, sparkly white gown with a matching fur, flashing her megawatt smile. There she was, no more than 20 feet away from me. I accidentally bumped into Clark Gable trying to get a better look over his shoulder. That brief glimpse in the forecourt would be the last I saw of Doris that night.

I was getting tired of hearing my callous neighbors talk about the wonderful times they were having with Doris. I decided to take matters into my own hands.

Her birthday and anniversary with Marty Melcher were just a month away. I had read in a movie magazine that she loved Tootsie Rolls, so I bought a big box of them and wrapped it up. Nick, my off-and-on boyfriend, and I took the two buses it took to get into Beverly Hills and made the long walk up Crescent Drive.

I took a deep breath and rang the doorbell. There was a long wait. I almost turned to leave, with mixed feelings of disappointment and relief. The door opened and I recognized her son, Terry, from movie magazines, just a few years old than I was. I told him – announced it, really.

“We're here to give your mother a present for her birthday and her anniversary.”

“Wait a minute,” he said, abruptly closing the door. I figured he wouldn’t come back. This was a pretty ballsy thing to do, after all. She probably turned away a lot of unwanted fans and...then the door opened and...she stood right there. “Hello. Terry said you were here.

I'm having a dress fitting.”

She was taller and thinner than I thought she'd be. She didn't seem to be wearing makeup so I was able to see all those freckles she complained about in interviews.

“Sorry to bother you, Mrs. Melcher. I read in a movie magazine that you liked these.” I thrust the box out in front of me and she took it. I was hoping I wouldn't faint, throw up or turn into a pillar of salt.

“That's very nice. Thank you.”

I realized my face had likely frozen into a startled mask and forced it into a big smile.

“Happy birthday and happy anniversary!”

I think she might have smiled back, but by that time I was nearly catatonic.

I don't remember the walk back down Crescent Drive. I felt as if I had been administered propofol.
This had been a major goal of my childhood, really, and I had made it happen. We had actually met, had a conversation. Unbelievable.

Well, you know, we all grow up and move on from our childhood dreams. In time, I realized what I wanted wasn’t fame but the opportunity to make a life as a creative person. I would have been an unlikely avatar for Doris, anyway. My personality leans well away from uncomplicated and sunny. She gave me a love for singing and music, though, and a fascination with the movies.

There was a moment of karma before it was over, though. Much later in my life, I had been traveling around the country, singing with a jazz trio. During a performance at the Cinegrill in Hollywood, a large group from the International Doris Day Fan Club came to see me. Out of that show came a CD, quite amazingly recorded at Capitol Records, where I had lurked as a teenager. It was called “Sentimental Journey: Celebrating Doris Day.”

In the album notes, I thanked her for helping me get through my childhood and adolescence. After considerable goading by my record producer, I reluctantly sent a CD to Doris, to a post office address never thinking it would actually get to her. Imagine my shock when she wrote to me on her personal letterhead a few weeks later. It had every appearance of being a fan letter. She was “so very grateful” for the tribute, she said, and “loved the arrangements.” She complimented the musicians and backup singers, some with whom she had recorded. “And you,” she added, “are very, very good.” It still brings tears to my eyes. After all those hours listening to Doris Day in my bedroom, now she was in her house listening to me. Even in my most outrageous fantasies I never could have conjured this outcome. It was miraculous.
Crouched on the sidewalk, heels off the ground, tilted forward to counterbalance the textbooks stuffed into my backpack. Dead bird. Too close. I had not thought much before crouching down for a closer look — if I had, I suspect I would have realized that I did not want to. But standing back up is a production when you are weighed down by a backpack nearly half your own mass; the bag imposes an artificial arthritis, leaving you groaning like your grandfather did when he emerged from the lounge chair in his living room. Dead bird, pristine as if it had merely chosen to pass on — like it rolled over on its back, made its best beaked attempt at a saint's smile, and hacked up its soul, vomited it up and choked on it. Dead bird, second of its name.

It was after school, sometime near the end of my senior year. I had barely used half the textbooks that anchored me beside the corpse. They still give you all the paper. Teachers make you drag it all back to school in the last few weeks, ostensibly to return them so that they can weigh down generation after generation until their unopened pages turn to dust and their contents to superstition. You only take them out to return them. But teachers, equally afflicted by encroaching summer, are rarely ready to take the books back on the promised day. This is how a decades old literature textbook, a calculus book from 1976, and a chemistry book from the Eighties came to pin me down in the dead bird's sidewalk mausoleum.

The principal was retiring that year. We were his last graduating class. There was a farewell assembly for him that day. That's where I saw the first dead bird. We were marched out from our classes, fished up from the sea of year-end lethargy in which we comfortably drowned. Down three flights of stairs, through hallways segmented by newly constructed steel doors, dragged along by the growing crowd and by a promise of celebratory ice cream broadcast over the morning announcements.

As a reward for their circumstantial punctuality, the underclassmen were directed to form a fleshy extension of the school's hallways, a vain effort to assure that none of the upperclassmen strayed on their way to bleachers. I passed them without meeting their eyes. I was hoping to spot some of my friends who didn't share fourth period with me — by then, we had all messaged each other our locations, but the school's aura acts the same on cell service as on pupils. The messages sent arrived five minutes after we had already found each other in the crowd.

I led my friends up the dusty steel bleachers and toward a more secluded spot: top row, behind the band. When I came to where I wanted to sit, I looked briefly down, and turned back to my friends.

“There's a dead bird here.”

That first one was small, and just as pristine as the second. A sparrow, maybe. The one I found on the sidewalk after school was larger, a plump robin. I don't know. I am not much for identifying birds. Perhaps I know so little that I misjudged the birds as corpses — for all I know of the world, they could have been asleep. Or frozen in fear of me, struck by thanatosis at the approach of a high-schooler. Imagine for a second, that when they were out of sight, those birds had jumped up and flown away; that they had gone on, sung out to be loved, and murdered smaller creatures as if all was right with the world.

We sat about fifteen feet away from the bird. I was in the middle of my friends. We joked about the poor freshmen still standing in two lines in the heat. My buddy craned his neck to get a look at a cute girl in the band. A few other guys were idly scrolling on their phones. More people filled in the space, those we knew and those we half knew building a semi-conscious web of sociality. The band began to play. No one sat within five feet of the dead bird.

I didn't think much of it when I first announced the presence of its absence. I had snapped a picture
of the dead bird before finding a place to settle beyond its eerie proximity — something was notable about the thing, enough to take out my phone for the photo, but not enough to create a full thought. While my friends and I watched the promenade of retiring teachers — a prelude to their retiring superior — walk down the human aisle, I held my phone: still open, icon of the dead faithfully reproduced. A few minutes into the walkout, I realized why I had photographed the bird.

When I see dead animals — not something I like to make a habit of, but carrion can be hard to entirely avoid — I see them killed. A rabbit taken by a fox, pierced by teeth. Something dead on the road, turned to bloody slag. The bird on the bleachers, little dead sparrow, was unruffled. To be dead and look alive seems a human fabrication. If you are lucky you learn about death from a well-dressed grandfather sleeping in a casket. We still are shot or torn apart or squished on concrete, but the generic image of our dead, our aspirational corpse, wears a suit. The sparrow in the photo on my phone may as well have worn a suit and lay embalmed, waiting for the viewing. I looked over at the little grey thing as the principal walked out to polite applause. From this angle it looked more animal. Dead feather ball, avoided by two thousand teenagers, probably diseased.

One of my friends giggled at the true believers, captains of the pep team, who were eulogizing the principal. The PA system briefly shorted out. Dead bird. Someone played a farewell song on an unmiked acoustic guitar. We all strained to hear it (Dead bird slips from my mind; the sitting band sweats). The Principal thanked us. We were told to leave in an orderly fashion, section by section (we all stand at once), and to walk safely to the table where they are distributing ice cream (we stampede, but with little zeal). We all passed the dead thing. They marked my hand with a black marker, which did not wash away for three days, and tossed me one of the drab ice cream sandwiches stocked in the cafeteria. I ate it, but with little zeal.

We all returned to fourth period.

The school day ended. Thanks to teachers and substitutes who had forgotten their checklists, I had failed to return most of my text books. That semester, the school had denied my application for a parking permit in the school’s lot (no reason given). I had to walk four blocks to where a kind lady let me leave my car in front of her house. I was playing public radio on my phone. I didn't have earbuds, but I was walking far enough away from any other students that I could just play it out loud. The end of as segment explained that the President had ordered troops to the southern border. Stocks were up, despite uncertainty about tariffs. There was a sound-bite from a boy my age who had survived that week's shooting. I looked down at the sidewalk.

Lo: dead bird. Second of its name.

I crouched beside it. I took a photo of it. I was too close for too long. It may as well have been wearing a suit, not a feather out of place. Its eyes were closed. The radio was still playing, but I wasn’t listening. I considered the fact that I didn’t know any prayers to say for it. I didn’t know why it died. At first, it was just a surprising object. The flash about prayer was some type of mechanical response, it was no proof of transcendent empathy; I was more concerned with why I had come across two of these things in one day. Maybe there was an epidemic; maybe it could affect people. Canary in a coal mine. The ancients used birds as omens as dice as fortune tellers. Two dead birds. Or it went the other way. The bird caught it from us.

A group of girls were approaching. I realized that the radio might bother them, and then realized that I was blocking the sidewalk. I made the effort of standing up, teetering under the weight of my bag. I continued walking toward my car. Behind me, the girls crowded around the dead thing; I heard one say something indistinct, distressed. Maybe after they left the bird stood up and flew away.
a hollow song

brian rihlmann

As a bottle
spins to a halt
mid-street
flipped like a tiddlywink
by a passing tire

I walk over
and pick it up—
vodka
the cheapest
like I used to buy
every morning
gag at the first swig
to my empty gut
but the shaking stopped

Its plastic body is flattened
cracked
its crushed lips
will never again
sing a hollow song
in the breeze
my bones rattle with crimson rage

megha sood

The sharp wind
grazes my tongue

like your disagreement with
how I live my life
your pointy misconceptions
about how it has been traded for things
to give you little pleasures
at the expense of my happiness
an exercise in vain

the black metallic taste
my unspoken truths
sit at the back of my throat
mulling in obsidian time
resting precariously on my forked tongue
slithering and infusing that deep
sense of fear in the roots of your hair
as they stand on the back of your neck

I fear the day my shredded truth
will drip and taint your soul
your pristine soul,
and your rambunctious gesture of owning everything
will crumble like a house of cards
in your phony wonderland

your ramshackle leash around my neck
hasn’t choked me enough
to knock the wind
out of my chest
those broken rods
though pounded a million times
by your sheer ignorance
hasn’t given in yet

You,
with a smirk on your face
think I have caged my heart
but I have given it armor

against your vulture beak
as it tries to pry the truth from me

my bones rattle in a symphony
with crimson rage.
this body is mine
this body is not an apology.
of the body

terri mccord
Photograph, Columbia State Hospital for the Insane (1821-27) South Caroliniana Library

What appeals is the forethought,  
is the light to the right,  
and the open window’s bright shaft  
that shines the dark  
and xylophones the bottom  
wrap of steps. How many  
descended or ascended?

I imagine a photographer  
who took to the body,  
eyed the underside  
of the concrete curve  
as upper vertebrae,  
became rapt with the architecture  
of a rattled backbone,  
elegant skeleton—  
paid homage to creation  
and left out what was unseen.

lung tissues

holly day

geraniums start small and are  
easily inhaled, take root  
in the soft flesh  
between joints.

if kept warm enough  
they can overwinter in most parts  
of the body, grow comfortably dormant  
wait for spring.

in summer, their thin  
stiff limbs  
crumpled flowers and  
paper-dry leaves  
keep me from sleeping  
rustle in my dreams.
r Racine Song

Ed Ruzicka

The aluminium door is a cataract of ice. Backyard bird bath leans off like the last incisor in grandpa’s gums.

This is the Saturday dawn that rolls in steel grey down blocks where factories stand abandoned.

All that concrete, metal, grime left vacant without boom, grind or scuttle. The whole complex hollowed out for the security guard to pad, jangle the music of his keys through sheets of shadow.

Workers are at home in half-lit houses where talk radio blares. Kids drift by with ear buds.

The youngest nestles next to her mom on the couch where she braids rough doll hair and sings her songs of Jesus.

Not much takes place between the pops of beer tops. On the muted tv screen that leaping mountain range the Dow Jones graph has been all year flashes up. But that is so far removed -

an imaginary slope where some rich uncle might keep a time-share chalet, toast by fire logs.

You can find me here too, another lost Waldo, tucked-in down a cul-de-sac in the jumble of asbestos-sided homes.

Bring me a tall glass of water. Crush me a palm-full of Ambien. This blanket is not big enough.
I can see what is left of the snake flapping. The day is a profile view of sunny side up on the horizon. I'm feeling guilty because it was me who killed the snake.

The snake is hibernating beneath some boards when I send it buzzing. It is slow to move as I fall back into the shadows of the barn where the light from the door is dust and where I lose my footing on a piece of plywood and land. Something in the back of the barn bites my hand. I pull away but see nothing and unlatch the side door to run.

"There's a rattlesnake in the barn!" I rush through the kitchen door. My grandma is sizing up biscuits with a tin can.

"You're bleeding! Did it bite you?" She grabs my palm to look, pressing into it—searching for venom?

My sister, Shannon, comes in the same as me, "The snake is getting away!

"Did you see her get bit?" She asks Shannon.

"No."

"What kind of snake is it?"

"A rattlesnake!" Shannon and I shriek in unison.

We all see the single mark in the soft spot under my thumb. I wonder if a snake can be single fanged. Can snakes bite with one side of their mouths? Do they lose teeth? Was it a snake that bit me?

"How are you feeling?" My grandma asks me. "Is it hard to breathe? Are you dizzy?"

"I don't feel any different, a little shaken is all." I say. I'm more concerned about her seeing the snake.

"I'll be damned!" My grandma grabs a two by four propped up against the barn's rigid exterior and is already raising it up above her head. We are behind her with contorted expressions and hesitation, watching as our seventy details surrounding the incident with the snake. I remember it like I remember the day my sister was supposed to watch me at the trailer park. I was three, and she was nine. There was a snake that time too. Maybe it was on the outskirts. I was probably somewhere I had no business being, but I can't remember, and the snake had kittens. I loved kittens.
year old grandma smashes the snake's head to mush.

December 4, 1997

There were steps. It was a porch like ours. The voices on the playground were distant and fading. He was taking me to the kittens.

I stepped over the threshold, the gap between the trailer and the boards. The door shut behind me, and it was darker inside. The snake bent down, and his smile was gone. He lifted up my dress in the foyer.

December 3, 1997

It is twisting, and she is still smashing.

“How is it not dead?!” I yell because I want it to be over.

“It’s just the nerves! Stay back!”

She backs away too to watch. All that is left is a spinning noodle.

December 4, 1997

There was a noise, another man, older shirtless, coming from somewhere. My dress fell back to my thighs. The snake turned to stand.

The two men began yelling, and the door opened. The man with no shirt shoved me onto the porch and shut the door.

I ran.

December 3, 1997

The snake is still twitching but less than before. My grandma lifts him onto the board and hangs him up on the barb wire fence.

I look through the open door and see where the snake had been sleeping. I look towards the back and see the piece of plywood that I tripped over.

I point, “That is where I fell.” We all go in, Shannon and I creep behind my grandma and look past her. We don’t see anymore snakes. When we are closer I do see a nail sticking straight up through the plywood. I look down at my palm.

“There, that is where I fell. It wasn’t a snake.”

December 4, 1997

I couldn’t tell anyone what happened because I didn’t know how. It must have been a week later; a bit of it slipped out to my grandma.

I can’t remember what I said but that everyone was mad. I had to go see a doctor that time too.

The snake never did bite me.

My parents had walked me around the trailer park pointing—There? Is that where it happened? What about there? I couldn’t remember.

I saw my own experiences had failed to relay the proper messages. I saw fear could be useful for running. It could also be a nuisance, and an agitator that leads to more flailing that has no purpose but to mislead the mind away from what really happened.
i find you

jen bradpiece
-A Love poem for my favorite hedonist accomplice in Crime, JQB-

Living in unraveling time,
I waste with you.
In time beyond facts,
perhaps cigarettes
have given up their poison.
In bodies that remind us
we are dying,
we take our hedonism seriously.
Living in the broken clock
our limbs are minutes.
In the space of time our nails
curl into seconds.
In the seconds we share
between ice cubes melting,
we condensate on tumblers.
We tumble through time
in the late of news stories breaking.
The fragments of story press mosaics
across our broken backs.
We peel the impression left
on sheets across the morning.
As my travels continued, I would encounter devastation among the living. In the middle of my journeys, while en route to the kibbutz collective community of Maale Gilboa, eighty miles outside of Jerusalem, for a weekend getaway, I had an hour stopover in a northern town, with the two friends I was traveling with. At the very least, I had become adept enough at figuring out the many convoluted bus systems of this country to plan out a far-flung trip like this. During the stopover, my friends and I sat in a drab, nearly colorless open-air bus station. It was mainly a sidewalk built around the roadway with little waiting areas for each bus platform, lined with small shops, some of which seemed like they had been closed for years. I noticed a soda machine on the side with its front panel sliced open; this really seemed like a place people would pass through and leave, and that no one had invested any real care in it for years. A frazzled woman clutching a shopping bag ambled over and asked us for money. We declined, although I'm not sure if I came across as polite or heartless. After she walked away, another woman sitting nearby said something to me in Hebrew. I could only make out scattered words. Latet? Tza'ir? Her tone sounded sharp, judgmental—but maybe I was reading too much into it. I exhaled. She must have meant that I should've given the other woman charity, didn't she… I tried to forget about it, but then the first woman came by again. I gave her a twenty-shekel bill, and she thanked me (maybe she blessed me too?) before walking off again. I didn't feel much better. Right away the other woman snapped at me in Hebrew, and I still found myself unable to get what she meant. I admitted that I was American and having trouble understanding her, and then she took a breath and switched to a hesitant English. That woman is an adult, she said. She should be supporting you, someone who is young—not the other way around. I didn't know what to think. The first woman had seemed to be in need, and I had some cash on me to spare; on the other hand, perhaps this second woman had a point. I apologized for misunderstanding her, and we made small talk. I tried to move on from the whole thing as we wound our way up the mountain towards Maale Gilboa by bus.

…I felt as if I had been told I was a child, or worse, a dumb American, thanks to both my language difficulties and my own drive to please—because I had thought by giving the charity, I'd be following both women's wishes. I still did not belong here, still a stranger in this strange land who could not comprehend how things worked in this land. And the entire encounter, the vending machine; the woman asking for charity; the woman telling me not to give; it all painted an overcast picture of the place I spent an hour in. I wonder if this town was ever opulent, ever elegant; I wonder if those who had founded this town had hoped it would become a prosperous place, because I could tell this area had turned into something very different. And it had perhaps not fulfilled the promise that it was supposed to strive for both…
There are six of us
eating at the round table
at the hotel down the street.

My father can't taste his food,
is not hungry anymore, takes my hand
to balance his steps to the table.

He says he can't hear the conversation,
can't see the food on his plate.

    He orders mini pancakes,
gives them out to the rest of us like silver dollars,
breaks off a piece of bacon, a piece of sausage.

Says he has lived too long and
is waiting, just waiting.

My mother’s jacket has fallen from her shoulders.

He reaches out, his hand trembling,
lifts it back over her.

That is what he is waiting for.
voices
beneath
the winds

*keith moul*

In a room locally well used, moods echo, enrichment and revel prevail. Fierce wind rattles all the old sashes.

Occupants of this comfortable place, know well what approaches each day, but they spend no words to disclaim it, no movements to avoid it, no weapons to disarm it: they believe they are of it, part of the disturbance of the soil, tree, the clouds that rush by alarmingly fast.

Voices rise a bit, to ceiling height, but no voice can rise above persistent wind.
After midnight of All Soul’s Day, I try to fall asleep. Rain rushes through blackness beyond my open doors. A breeze blasts my shingles, pelts my screens.

Grim rain filters dawn. I walk the dogs along the river, where all night rain blackened limbs and branches. Hardwoods shoulder the river, glorified under gray sky.

I cross the un-mowed meadow. Framed by walls of maple, oak and beech, it’s lit like a festival of fire. I run down the thorn strung footpath of the meadow onto the grounds of the now emptied state mental hospital.

Stop. Here, half-hidden among the bracken, stands the wreckage of a stone foundation. And, hanging from branches, gaily, as if goblins trimmed the trees, someone’s made a Day of the Dead ritual, hung a gallery of Ojo de Dios – yarn strung sticks of orange, turquoise, red and blue, maroon and purple. A dozen or more sprinkle shrubs and leafless branches, some strung up like eyeless dolls, dangling in effigy.

A hole gapes in the ground like a shallow, waterless well. The bright-strung ornaments dangle across this root cellar, four or five feet deep. One could stand up in it, or kneel among the juices drunk and broken glass and hear the gurgling of some distant beast, and see unintelligible words, graffití. Then – boldly – on a blackened rock, hand drawn in white strokes, a symbol sprung like an evil root, a swastika.

Spooked, I rush away as if what I’ve seen can harm me. The dogs follow and the way beyond is toward the dead hospital, past painted red windows like bright shuttered eyes.

Soon enough, I stop to catch my breath and shiver under the clock tower, a clock no longer counting, across these stormed acres.
Chicago, 1962. My father had a white Ford Galaxie, that in my child’s mind, was enormous, with big white wings jutting out. My father lived in a townhouse that must have really stuck out on that street of endless tall apartment buildings. Because there were few single-family homes, there were no garages. Not one single place to park in the entire hood.

But my father had parking: an enormous plot of land behind his house. Without any grass, like a section of dry dusty land lifted out of some small Texas town, it was where he parked his white Ford Galaxie. The plot of land was large enough, and long enough, for about four cars.

Crummy a neighborhood as it was, it had one jewel: Biddy Mulligans, a jazz and blues club. It was a small building with blacked-out windows. You could tell just walking by it that it would be very dark in there, with all the attendant suspicious activity. It was, in a word, cool.
And consequently, because it was cool, it was jammed on weekends. The parking situation in the neighborhood, bearably dismal during the week, became bleak.

The lot where the Ford Galaxie was parked also backed up to the Biddy Mulligans’ alley. And so, as desperation fuels desperate acts, the patrons of the blues club became creative: spotting the enormous plot of land that bore no warnings (my dad was also cool, and never thought to put up "No Parking" signs) they parked there. This only created a problem when my father, for some reason, had to leave. (Where would he be going, I wonder, after ten o’clock at night?) I don’t know where he went, as he generally disliked leaving the house after dinner, but leave he did at times (might he be going to buy my little brother an ice-cream cone to face the summer heat?)—only to find his way out blocked by a Studebaker or a Thunderbird.

I picture my father standing there, in his light tan jacket, shaking his head, and then making his way through the alley, up to Biddy Mulligans, to push the front door open. How I wish I could have been there when the door opened so I could see in, gaze at the ladies in tight cocktail dresses, and the men with their wide, colorful ties of optic patterns. Certainly, a rush of ice-cold air was let out into the sticky night from the ultra-cool interior. I picture the doorman, looking quizically at my father this first time he pushed the door open; wondering why he was dressed so casually.

My father stood in dark interior of the club. The women turned from their icy Gibsons to glance at him, then turned their attention back to whoever they were talking to. The air was thick with all kinds of smoke: cigars, cigarettes, marijuana. I like to think it all stopped—the music, the talk, the bartender with his glass shaker in hand, the sound of the ice cubes being mixed, as my father and the interior took in one another. The smoke hung in the air a moment. Then my father spoke and the smoke circled through the air again, gin and ice were shaken together, the music reached its highest level. The doorman had to cup his hand to his ear to hear what my father said: “Excuse me, but someone has parked his car behind me and I would like to get out. Thank you.” And then the translation: “Some cat has his ride in the wrong place—you got to move it, man.”

Someone, a tall man, I think, in a turquoise suit jacket, separated himself from the round table at which he was sequestered, made his way to the front, nodded at my father, and they both went out into the night. Perhaps one of them remarked on the temperature that hot night in 1962, on the presence or absence of wind, at either the rise or decline in temperature. That night, these things mattered, because they were in it, they felt it, the warmth of the night filled them and they remarked on it, because they were so alive in it. Perhaps they stood there a moment, taking in the warmth of the night; the man loosening his tie a bit, my father unbuttoning his jacket. In the ebony night outside the club the air filled them. Perhaps they smiled as they took it in. Soon the man would return to the club and his friends would make room for him at the tiny table; soon my father would return with ice-cream for my brother, but in this moment there was just the two of them; the city a jewel only for them.

The man got into his Impala, his arm out the window as he backed up. Later, he said to my father and then drove away.