

# The Five Stages of Writing a Story

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## I. Denial

A mother, a daughter, a son, and a priest walk into the funeral home.

The daughter thinks this could be the beginning of a really bad joke, fodder for a story she will write about another daughter's life. The mother, drowsy on Valium, sits with her purse in her lap like she's come to the wrong place, like she's waiting for a cab to pick her up any minute now. The priest hands the son a stack of prayer cards. He sorts them into piles on the table, Jesuses to his left, Marys to his right, some random martyred saints in the middle.

In the center of the table, there's a row of miniature caskets that look large enough to hold newborns. The daughter reads the gold nameplates on the caskets—Renaissance Rose, Ambassador, Moonstone, Truman. She pulls Moonstone toward her, tries to open the lid.

"Those are just models," says the priest. "To show actual color and detail."

"As if the dead—"

The daughter feels the weight of her mother's foot on top of hers.

Just then, the brother pumps his fists in the air. "Saint Francis for the win!" he shouts.

"Oh, honey, that's wonderful," the mother says, clapping like her son just won the Pulitzer.

"What he means," the daughter says, "is that we'll take the Saint Francis cards."

The priest frowns, scratches his bald head with a pen. It leaves thin blue lines across his scalp like a cluster of veins.

"And who will be writing the eulogy?" the priest asks.

Head lowered, the mother turns to the priest, ready to confess a mortal sin.

"My daughter is a writer," she says.

The daughter pretends not to hear this; it has been edited from this scene, which now, because truth is stranger than fiction, also features the mortician who used to be her high school boyfriend. The daughter smiles at the ex-boyfriend/mortician, waves weakly. She picks up her mother's voice again.

"Truthfully, she doesn't have a novel yet, even though I've begged her to finish one before I die. But I'm sure she can manage writing a eulogy for her own father. You can do that for your father, can't you, dear?"

The priest glares at the daughter like she's something he must deflect—Lucifer, a prostitute, kryptonite. In fourth grade, he placed her in detention for writing a story that featured an evil priest as the antagonist. And just yesterday, when he visited their home, the daughter sensed that he had come out of priestly duty, not because he believed her father deserved the same rites as every other Catholic.

"I presume you understand," the priest says, pausing, "the—how shall we say it?—the delicate nature of this situation. Shall I put your name down for the eulogy?"

*Thou shalt not say shall, the daughter wants to say. Thou shalt not lose thy father at age thirty. Thou shalt believe this is a fictional account of another daughter's life.*

Instead she says, "Of course."

The ex-boyfriend/mortician interrupts, asks to see the daughter in the hallway. In high school, she called him Tom-Tom. They got drunk on Little Kings Cream Ale, groped each other in the backseat of his orange Nova, plotted their escape from Cincinnati, and promised not to repeat their parents' mistakes. She stifles a laugh, remembering how he kissed her like he was slurping a milkshake through a straw.

Now, standing close to him, the daughter checks him out. Tom-Tom's chin has permanent acne scars, but the rest of his face is doable. And although his suit looks expensive, there are grease stains on his lapels. Drive-thru lunches, she guesses. Whatever Tom-Tom had once been – the car guy, the stoner, the slurper – he seems to have graduated from it, but, today, the daughter prefers the past to the present. She straightens her posture, gives a bright smile, wishes she would've remembered lip gloss. A voice inside her tells her not to flirt. Another voice tells her she can do whatever she wants because she is the one with the dead father. The voice says maybe this relationship with Tom-Tom is worth bringing back from the dead —*ha ha ha*.

"What's up, Tom-Tom?"

Tom-Tom blushes from the neck up, loosens the knot on his tie. "Does your family need help? I can be good in a crisis."

This is too big, she tells him. Too *her family*. It feels like the words are coming from outside herself.

"I haven't seen you since we graduated from high school. Married?"

She picks a few stray white hairs off his suit jacket; dog, not cat. "No. You?"

"Yes."

"Children?" she asks, now feeling miles away.

"One. A boy. You might remember my wife. She was a year behind us. Denise Carelli?"

“Sure, very sweet,” she lies.

“I didn’t know you were a writer.”

“According to my mother, I’m not,” she says, then punches him lightly on the arm. “I wrote about you once. I mean, I wrote a character loosely based on you.”

Tom-Tom raises one eyebrow, a thing he used to do to make her laugh.

“It was this awful, sentimental story. Heavy with metaphors that linked car parts to broken relationships. Do you still have that orange Nova? We could go to Lake Isabella. Just like old times.”

Tom-Tom looks toward the door, his face serious enough that she wonders if he’s considering it.

“I told my wife I sold the car, but it’s sitting in Rusty’s garage,” he whispers. “Sometimes I hang out there. Glory days and all that.”

This is good, she thinks, this reliving of the past. She can almost smell her Love’s Baby Soft perfume, see her discarded cutoff jean shorts and Bruce Springsteen tee shirt, *Born in the U.S.A. Tour*, on the back seat of the Nova.

She looks in the room and sees her brother reshuffling the prayer cards. The priest is drawing more veins on his head while her mother chatters on, probably confessing another family sin.

“About the eulogy,” Tom-Tom says, moving closer to her.

The daughter’s past self wants to make a proposition too good to refuse, but the gentle pressure of Tom-Tom’s hands on her shoulders says, Let’s be friends.

“We have examples if you think it’d help.”

She shakes her head no, thinking god yes, let me steal whatever I can. She’s never been able to write about her father. Whenever she’s tried, fictional or otherwise, he’s emerged as too heroic or monstrous or postmodernly paradoxical, but never in a good way. There is so much she doesn’t know about her father, doesn’t know if she has right; not anymore. To think about the difference between what she should say and what she could say makes her feel like she’s swimming and swimming underwater but can’t reach the surface. She rests her head against Tom-Tom’s chest, finds her breath.

“I’ve got this,” she says to Tom-Tom finally. “How hard can it be? Eulogies are the greatest fiction of all.”

## II. Anger

Neighbors drop by your house with casseroles. You smile politely at the unidentified mush in the containers, nod at their condolences. You ask them questions about your father. Was he funny at their progressive dinner parties? Did he ever do something outrageous? What was he

like before you were born? But the neighbors all tell you the same thing—he was a nice man, such a quiet man, always kept the yard looking perfect. You audition it in your mind: *Neighbors remember him for his grass-cutting skills. His precise edging! No grass blade left behind!*

What else do they know? It feels like all the stories they tell you are meant to hide the ones they will never divulge.

Even though you hate your brother Patrick a little for hiding in the basement (though you can't understand why, of all places, he's hiding where you found your father dead two mornings ago), you assure the neighbors Patrick is doing as well as can be expected. Sure, he's grand. Yes, it's a shame he quit playing hockey. Yes, like father, like son. Definitely loves anything topped with cornflakes, thanks again, *please tell me something to write about my father.*

In the kitchen, you stare at the blank page of your notebook while your mother rearranges the Tupperware in the refrigerator. Each time the phone rings, your mother stops, stands by the answering machine, and listens to your father's voice tell the caller no one is home right now. You think your mother hasn't looked this ragged since the decade of miscarriages she experienced between your birth and Patrick's.

"Do you want me to return those calls for you?" you ask.

"I'll get to it," she says. Your mother pours bleach on the countertop, begins to murder the Formica with a dishtowel. "What I should be doing is digging up the peonies in the front yard. Your father never liked them. Too many ants."

You press your fingers to your temples, thinking. After a long silence your mother asks you to read what you've written.

"It's still up here," you say, tapping your forehead. "Do you have any ideas?"

Your mother waves the question away, slaps the cloth against the kitchen table.

"For the love of God, May. He was your father. He was my husband. He loved us. What else do you need?" Her voice is savage. You duck your head, waiting for the slap of the dishtowel across your face, but instead she moves back to the counter.

You begin to write the word "love," but it feels too much like revising history, too much about another father who used that word as freely as breathing. Instead you draw a few fat peonies in the margin, then leave your mother to sterilize the rest of the house.

Little has changed in your old bedroom. The walls are still the same pale lavender. On the shelf above your bed, shabby paperbacks are stacked haphazardly between your spelling bee trophies. You scan the spines. Blume, L'Engle, Keene, Hinton. In Patrick's room, you know it's still hockey trophies and posters of The Great One and framed photos of the former great one—your father crouched down in front of the net, face obscured by the cage of his goalie mask.

You tap your pen on the white dresser, let your mind roulette through memories.

The times you went fishing at Lake Isabella with your father, before Patrick was born. The times he called you Trout and you heard it as Doubt. How your father, on the anniversaries of your mother's miscarriages, brought her yellow roses, followed by months when you'd find him alone in the basement smoking cigarettes. How he told you he gave up his hockey career because you were born.

How, when you were younger, you made up lies about him. Once you told a girl at summer camp that your father was a pilot. Another time, an architect. Or when you told Father Kramer that you had two sisters and a brother who lived in another country. When your mother and father found out, they took you to see the priest. What May meant to say, your father explained, was that her mother had three miscarriages. You protested, told the priest that, technically, they did live in another country, called Limbo. Father Kramer made you write the ninth commandment on the blackboard one hundred times, told you that making up stories led to bigger sins.

The time your father taught you how to ice skate, explained that learning to fall was as important as learning to stay upright. This, you realize, is a lesson you still need to learn. Also, those times you looked through old photo albums for proof that your father was once a different man. White tee shirt tucked into jeans rolled at the cuffs, prankster smile, tanned, muscled arms around your mother's slim waist. In the photos, he is a foreigner, this handsome man with his head tilted toward the sky.

The times he never read anything you wrote.

And the summer you turned thirteen. How he left for three weeks, your mother furiously scrubbing the floors on hands and knees. You were convinced it was your fault, tied to your new training bra and how your father seemed to avoid you, no longer looked you in the eye. You wanted to tell him you didn't want to wear the thing your mother had forced upon you, saying it was time for modesty around men. You cut your own hair with your mother's sewing scissors, botched your bangs something awful, hoping you'd look more like a boy to your father when he returned.

When he finally came back, he seemed no different except for the large Band-Aid near his wrist. It was nothing, your mother said, so much nothing that she made you swear on a Bible that you would never speak of his disappearance or the Band-Aid to anyone; she knew how much you loved to tell stories. Weeks went by, and one late afternoon you carried a lawn chair into the backyard and sat next to your father. He'd just mowed the lawn, and the air was sharp with grass and sweat and hamburgers on the grill. You studied your father's black hair, how it shone blue when the sun hit it. You ran your hand through your own cropped hair, wondered if it had the same shine, if you could still pass for your father's son, despite the bra.

He moved his arm toward you, offered you his cigarette. "Go on. You're old enough."

His arm was free of the Band-Aid now; nothing but a jagged scab, smaller than a minnow, remained. You wanted to peel off the scab, touch the new, pink skin growing underneath. You wanted to know where he'd been, why he'd left you. Something wicked moved through you.

“I don’t want it. Mom says it’ll kill you.” Then, under your breath, you whispered, “I hope it does.” You didn’t know where it came from, this ugly thing you said, but you felt lighter for letting it go, like you weren’t holding your breath anymore.

“What did you say?”

You shrugged.

You felt the chair jerk suddenly, your father pulling you toward him. He grabbed your shoulders, shook you hard enough that your head knocked against the back of the chair, ash from his cigarette dusting your arm.

“Look at me,” he growled. “Look at me right now and you tell me what you just said.”

You felt your bra straps digging into your skin underneath his hands. His eyes searched your face, and then suddenly he was hugging you, whispering, “Don’t do this to me, Trout.” You didn’t know whether he was talking about what you said or your refusal of his cigarette or the thing you also hated, your terrible bra that made you his daughter, not his son.

You sat like that for a while, his hands gripping your shoulders, the smoke from his cigarette circling around you. Finally, he let you go.

You turned away, said nothing more. When you heard your mother call you inside for dinner, you left your father sitting alone. You never spoke of it again, rarely spoke at all.

Now, you drill the tip of the pen into the top of the dresser until it snaps. Your father is not a linear story. He is a jumble of memories, some that make sense, others that you wish you could bury and forget.

You try again.

The time he told you that you were the only one who could make him laugh.

The times he tried to kill himself.

The time he—

### **III. Bargaining**

Downstairs, May’s mother revs up the Electrolux. It reminds May of the weeks after each of her mother’s miscarriages, how she vacuumed for hours, the metal canister following at her heels like an oversized bullet. How she scrubbed the empty baby’s room until May thought the walls would bleed, always moving about the house with a trashcan, furiously throwing away everything in her path, while her father hid in the basement. A clean house is the sign of a clean life, her mother always said.

In her parents’ bedroom, her father’s blue robe is a deflated balloon draped over the back of his chair. The sports page from two days ago sits on the nightstand. She scoops them up, rescues them from the Electrolux. His wallet sits on the corner of the dresser where he always left it,

but his watch is missing. May cringes, knows that it's still keeping time somewhere.

When she steps into the walk-in closet, her father's clothes, all freshly laundered and pressed, look like they're waiting for him to return at any moment. It is a strange kind of refuge, this place filled with his things that still smell like him—Aramis on top of butane and newsprint. It feels like the only safe place to think. She runs her hand across his shirts, stops at his old hockey jersey. She hangs his robe next to it. On a hook at the back of the closet is her father's fishing hat, sun-faded and threadbare around the rim. May puts it on her head. It is hard to believe the father who took her fishing when she was a little girl is the same father she must write about by tomorrow morning. She sits on the floor, pulls his briefcase toward her, says a silent prayer: *If I find something that will help, I will never write another story with characters loosely based on people I know as long as I live. I will get along with my mother. I will become a nun.*

In the briefcase, she finds the following:

- A white handkerchief, folded and clean.
- A to-do list scrawled in pencil on a yellow sheet of paper. On the list are 23 items including: remodel basement, catch a tarpon, take family to Ireland, ride in a hot air balloon, go to doctor, see Patrick play in the pros, quit smoking.
- Her school picture from seventh grade.
- Several hockey team photos, Patrick always front and center.
- A flyer titled "Small Cell Lung Cancer."
- Her parents' marriage license and some insurance papers.
- A half-empty pack of unfiltered Chesterfields and his butane lighter.

She lights a cigarette, feels like an archaeologist on an excavation. After reading the to-do list twice, she puts it in the pocket of her jeans along with the cancer flyer. Next to her father's shoes, a stack of *National Geographic* magazines. May tries it out: *He was the kind of man who waited for National Geographic to arrive each month, who dreamed of traveling to exotic places.* She shakes it off, doesn't think it's true.

On top of the stack of magazines is the famous Afghan Girl, now an adult. Her haunting, sea-green eyes are the same, but her face is weathered. May flips to the article and reads: "Her name is Sharbat Gula, and she is Pashtun. She is 28, perhaps 29, or even 30. No one, not even she, knows for sure. Stories shift like sand in a place where no records exist."

"Tell me about it," she says to the woman's face.

She hears a knock and nearly drops the cigarette dangling between her lips.

Patrick. His eyes are frog-puffy and wild red.

"Dad will throttle you if he knows you're in here."

May waits for Patrick to realize that he's still speaking in the present tense. Instead, he crouches under her mother's blouses on the other side of the closet.

“What are you doing?”

“Writing.” May drags on the cigarette. She holds her cigarette out to Patrick.

“Jesus, no,” he says, frowning. “Have you written anything yet?”

“It’s not that easy.”

“You have writer’s block or something?”

“Fuck off.”

“I don’t know what you’re worried about. You can write whatever you want.”

“That’s the problem.”

Patrick stretches. He is a series of thick squares, a cartoon robot whose bulk is meant to be underneath goalie pads and catch gloves.

“He wasn’t a bad man, May.”

“I never said he was.”

Patrick reaches above her and touches the hem of their father’s jersey. “You didn’t have to,” he says, now far away, imagining, May supposes, himself back on the ice, their father watching him from the bleachers behind the penalty box, how it could have been.

Finally, Patrick sits back. “You’re not going to mention *It*, are you?”

“Jesus, Patrick,” she says, exasperated. “You think I’d put that in the eulogy?”

“I’ve read your stories,” he says.

The truth of it zips through her, how often she’s relied on real life. “Those were different.”

Patrick stands, towers over her.

“I swear he was better—before you came to visit,” he blurts out.

“What does that mean?”

Patrick grimaces, his face twisted with pain. In Patrick’s face, she sees her father’s; the three accordion pleats between his eyes match her father’s exactly. It is so hard to look at Patrick now.

“I know how you are,” he says. “You’ll turn him into someone he wasn’t. *It* was an accident.”

“You really believe *It* was an accident?”

“*It* was.”

“How about you write the eulogy, then?”

“You’ll change everything. That’s your problem, May. You spend all your time making up stories. You don’t even know what’s real anymore.”

Patrick slams the closet door. Her father’s clothes shiver. When she looks down, that damn Afghan woman is still staring at her, judging.

“You knew, didn’t you,” May says to the woman. “You’ve known about *It* all along.”

#### IV. Depression

May flops on her bed. She hasn’t changed clothes, hasn’t eaten. She writes one sentence—it is bad—and then doodles peonies and fish and dark, puck-sized circles in her notebook. She crumples page after page of failed starts and tosses them to the floor, the blue carpet white-capped with paper balls.

Her mother rolls the Electrolux into the bedroom, eyeing the flotsam. “How’s it coming?”

“Fine.”

Stepping around the paper landmines, her mother sits on the edge of the bed and runs her hand along the comforter that had been May’s, then Patrick’s, and is now back on May’s bed. The fabric is tattooed with faded logos of hockey teams no one would remember except her father – the Calgary Cowboys, Regina Capitals, Alberta Oilers. Her mother pulls a loose thread, wraps it around her fist, and tugs until it breaks free.

“I’ll mend this later,” she says absently.

“Don’t worry about it. I don’t live here anymore, remember?”

“It will give me something to do. Without your father, I’ll have nothing but time on my hands.”

May stares. The whole scene is ridiculous. Her childhood room, the Electrolux. She traces her pen over a peony, wishes it would magically rearrange into something profound.

Her mother points to one of the fish. “Did he ever tell you why he called you Trout?”

May shakes her head. The name had always been there, like a birthmark.

“After you were born, your father was terrified to hold you. He said you were like a slippery fish and he feared he’d drop you. When we brought you home, you cried a lot. More than we expected. One night, I’d had enough—”

Her mother paused, then smiled weakly at May. “I mean I was exhausted, so I handed you to your father. You stopped crying immediately. He held you all night. After that, I could barely pry you out of his arms. He told me he was too afraid to let you go.”

May begins writing.

“Don’t put that in the eulogy. Your father would be embarrassed.”

"I can't do this," she says, dropping her pen. There wasn't one version of her father they'd ever agree on, yet she is expected to capture the only version everyone should remember forever.

Her mother pats her shoulder. "Just make sure your father sounds like a wonderful man. And make us sound like a good family."

May pulls the blanket up to her chin. Another memory knocks around, the one she's been avoiding. If she had known that it would be his last night, that he would finally succeed at doing *It*, maybe she would've paid more attention. When her mother had called asking her to visit, she thought nothing of it.

Come watch the Olympics with your father, she had said. Patrick is putting in overtime at the printing plant. Your father could use the company.

She found her father where he always was, in the basement watching hockey. Finland was annihilating Russia in the semifinals. May sat cross-legged on the floor, her back resting against her father's recliner.

He tapped her shoulder and pointed to the screen. "Stay-at-home defenseman. The best kind. Gets no glory, though."

"Uh-huh," she said, scrolling through email on her cellphone.

When her father grunted, May looked up, saw the defenseman deflect the Russian's shot. The grunt, she knew, meant *that could have been me*. Or should've been Patrick.

"How about a cigarette for your old man?"

She shook her head, frowned. "You stopped smoking, remember?"

He turned back to the TV and ran his fingers through his thinning hair. The sweat-soaked rows of silver strands reminded her of the gills of a fish. Finland pressed. The Russians stopped the shot. May's father touched her arm. When she half-turned to him, he shook his head. Her father's face was gray and withered, a decaying mushroom. He was sicker than he let on, she was convinced of it. A couple of months ago, he'd quit cold turkey. When she asked her mother about it, she mentioned he'd been to the doctor but nothing else. May was certain he was keeping something from them, but he brushed off any questions about giving up cigarettes, said it was his time.

He clutched her shoulder. "I've made a mess of things, Trout."

May couldn't recall the last time she'd heard him use her childhood nickname. She looked about the room. Every surface dusted by her mother, the *National Geographic*s fanned out on the coffee table in chronological order. The basement didn't seem a mess to her. Behind him hung a fading picture of his old hockey team, along with his stick and skates, the blades rusted, the leather cracked and blistered. Often, she wondered why he kept these things, why he felt the need to hang on to his could-have-beens.

“Trout, I want you to know I—” he started to say, then stopped, his grip tightening.

May waited. Waited as she had so many times before, waited for him to say the words she had always longed for, but then, as always, her father shook his head, defeated.

“Trout,” he said again. “Just this once?”

As Finland shot and scored its fourth goal, she sprinted upstairs to her parents’ bedroom and opened his briefcase, the place where he used to keep his cigarettes. Downstairs, she knelt next to him, lit the cigarette, and passed it to him, the smell of butane comforting her. Maybe he wasn’t sick after all. Maybe this, too, would pass.

Her father inhaled, kept the smoke in his lungs for so long that it seemed to May as if he’d never exhale again.

The next morning, when her mother found him in the basement, found the mess he’d made, May said nothing as she wiped down his chair, mopped the floor, while her mother waited upstairs for the coroner to come. May searched for the ashtray and the cigarette butt. They were both gone. As if they’d never been there, as if she’d imagined it all.

## **V. Acceptance**

As I stand before them, I tell the only story I can, the one I want to be real.

This is our father: I am standing with him on the banks of Lake Isabella. Between us, two fishing rods and a tackle box. He threads a red-and-white bobber onto the fishing line. His white undershirt is spotted with sweat, his arms tanned and strong. The lake is quiet, nearly empty of boats. It is too hot for the fish and too hot for me, and the trees are too far away from where we are sitting to provide any shade. But it is Sunday, and this is what we do every weekend in the summer. In all our Sundays here, and there have been many Sundays, I have never caught a fish, though my father catches many.

He opens a Styrofoam cup filled with worms. “Go on now,” he says. “Pick one out.”

This is the part I hate most, hooking the worm, and he knows this but doesn’t yield to my pouting. I find it cruel, killing one thing to catch another. I dip my fingers into the cup and pull out a cigar-fat worm. Half of it is dead, its skin the color of ash. “Sorry,” I whisper as I push the hook through the worm’s rubbery skin. My father does the same, quickly and unfazed by the pain I believe the worm must feel, then casts his line. When he nods at me, I swing the pole to my right and then pitch it forward, releasing my thumb from the spool too late. The bobber lands a few feet from the water’s edge.

“I can’t do it,” I tell him.

He shakes his head, tells me to try again. When I cast my line again, the bobber hovers above the water, then drops short of my father’s line. He smiles and rubs the top of my head with his hand.

“Never say can’t,” he says.

Now we wait, stare at our bobbers. I don’t like fishing, don’t like it at all, but I will never tell my father this, would never want this time with him to end. Once, while I was spying on them from the landing at the top of the stairs, I overheard him talking to my mother. He confessed he was worried about being a good father, said it would be easier on him if I were a boy. So I fish in silence, hope that I can be what he wants me to be.

Sometimes he keeps the fish he catches, and I turn away as he raises the mallet to strike the fish on the head before placing it in the cooler. Just as often, he releases them. I am too afraid to ask him why he keeps one fish and not the others.

There is a tug on my father’s line, and the rod curls. He turns the handle and raises the rod above his head, snaps it back toward him. He talks quietly to the fish.

“Come on, little one,” he says. And then the line goes slack. When he reels it in and checks the hook, the worm is gone. He opens the cup and hooks another.

It is then that I feel the downward pull, the tightening followed by the slow unspooling of the reel. I have been here before so many times, assume I will lose the fish as I always do, but I grab the handle quickly, and when my father sees what is happening, he tells me to pull back on the rod. The spool keeps spinning, and I lose more line. He stands behind me, wraps his arms around me, and places his hands atop mine. The brim of his fishing hat casts a shadow over me as he leans down, his face near my shoulder now.

Don’t let go, I think, feeling the strength in my father’s hands. Don’t ever let go.

He snaps my right arm quickly, and I feel the fish reverse, see the hook latched into its silvery skin as its body crests the water.

“That’s it, Trout,” he whispers. “That’s my girl.”

Together, we reel in the fish, his hands moving mine. My father holds the fish above me like a trophy. The bluegill dangles and spins on the line, graceful aerialist in a fish circus.

“You did it,” my father says.

He guides my hand, gently now, around the gills of the fish. I feel its rapid heartbeat, its feathery scales pulsing against my fingers. We stand like that for a while, me and my father holding the fish, feeling its life in our hands.

Instead of reaching for the mallet, my father nods toward the water.

“Let her be the one that gets away,” he says.

I bend, place my hand into the water. Let her go.

The fish shimmies through the water, then disappears, as slippery and elusive as the truth of a person can be. How the minute you think you’ve captured it, it slides back into darkness.