

THE RIVER TOOK HER

Georgie Fehringer

THERE IS THE FEELING in the pit. But then again there is always the feeling in the pit. It doesn't bubble though—not the way they taught you it would. Not the way you've heard that it would from your friends or your cousin's best girl or your uncle on those incoherent nights.

No, it is slow like molasses.

No, the first hint is just an emptiness, a slow growing void.

It starts with the coffee creamer. Subtle, right? You've always liked yours black and there should be no problem if you can learn to keep your things to yourself. But then it's the pink lemonade. The first and the second batch with and without the seltzer water, watermelon vodka, triple sec from the cardboard box. And you are stirring first just the punch and then later, the pot. There is the skin on the kitchen floor with a loud thud and many moments on the porch, though they have all become the same. They've all become not so much a blur, but one endless moment swinging in the half hammock back-and-forth-and-back-and-forth, punctuated by the back pain. Which bothers but is nothing, not when compared to the pit.

So you are sitting but really what you are doing is avoiding. Across the kitchen and through the double door, out in the open, you are avoiding the game just straight up. And you say, *I wouldn't mind playing, no really, I really wouldn't mind playing, I wouldn't mind but I don't want to have*

to come up with anything, no, I really just don't want to be the one doing the asking, I'm all answers. You want to be all the right answers. But when you retreated from the hiding, from the avoidance, and you placed yourself on the living room rug, you are all the wrong ones. And you never even got the chance to ask, never even had the chance to begin, because it's never the coffee creamer. It's you on those incoherent nights. You with your inability to just. keep. things. to. yourself. It's funny you'd even think it would be the coffee creamer, *ha ha*, you say to yourself, *ha ha*, as she walks away out the door and doesn't look back. Which we know is the formula. Which is the recipe followed right down to a T. And you feel the pit much larger than before. Before, it wasn't much more than a gnat landing again and again, but this is stirring. This is the pot, and there you are. There you are with your stupid fucking face and your stupid fucking answers stirring shit up like you always do.

And then it's the pit for you. You might as well have asked if butter was a carb. You might as well have said silver hoops are your thing. Because if there ever had been a time to lie, maybe it was this. Maybe it was now. Maybe it was after you said truth and realized you really really meant to say dare. Because then it's all pickle juice. It's the small cups all lined up 1-2-3, in quick succession, just like old times. Just like before. When he would start acting unhinged. Like a door out of its frame. Like a barrel roll down the driveway. And you'd follow the formula. You'd make it your aim to disappear if not in person than in every other way possible. And you'd do it so damn well. You'd do it exactly to a T. That's the way you'd save you from the wall. Anything was better. Better, then, was those little cups in quick succession 4-5-6. Time both shrinking and expanding; the more you are there for it, the less you will know. And there is the pickle juice and the chips in the lemon press and it's silly, isn't it? Because it's all just a joke.

Because it's always just a joke and they think it's going to be one but really it will be 7-8-9. And isn't that news to you? Isn't it still news to you each time; each time it is news to you as you rinse the burn away. You the incoherent barrel roll. You the tornado siren. You the door off the hinges.

Cause it's a straight line. It's always a straight line from 1 to 10. From the stir to the pot—from the kitchen floor to the hammock—from the cup to the throat—to the burn and the blur.