

TRIPTYCH

KYLE DARGAN

3. Bridges Building

We put a sign in the window that said “soul brother.” We were not the only ones who did that. It was supposed to identify an African-American business. Some of them were saved, but some were burned.

~Virginia Ali (Co-Founder Ben’s Chili Bowl)

The earth is a beautiful place.

Watermirrors and things to be reflected.

~Gwendolyn Brooks, “The Third Sermon on the Warpland”

Tear from the river a swath of its flesh. Cut that flesh into squares. Severed from their water, the tesserae will atrophy—slowly curing hard and dark. This is where bridges begin: Composed of what they must span: Here, a spectral bleed from bank to bank—blue to black, reaching. Banks as boundaries. Boundaries as boulevards. In a city, a street can bridge estranged worlds. Marry Riots to Riches—Power left to dance alone. We are building a bridge of water on a street that burned—charred, money-bandaged and embalmed. Though there is no smoke today for our bridge’s water to quell, it will arc over U Street. We will climb it and observe what once smoldered, now smothered. On this “View Street” Bridge, anyone can rise above history’s sea of windows, watch as the new soles stomp out panes. But trim those shards into glinting squares, and they will tile the next bridge, The Refracting Bridge, the bridge that, like a giant eye, flips all surrounding light and renders the street’s ahistorical face familiar.

THIS IS THE PLACE YOU WILL ALWAYS BE LEAVING

DANIELLE EVANS

This is the place you will always be leaving. You will leave and leave and leave—cities, lovers, employers, a country— but that first open door will always feel like the only crime. You walked out of it and took something with you that might not have been yours anymore, and you have clutched it in your fist ever since, felt it slicing into your palm and squeezed harder.

Officially, you do not exist anymore, not on paper—five years after you walked through that door, you crossed a border, which makes you lucky, that you were not detained, that you did not die gasping for air sealed into the side panel of a moving cargo van, that you did not get stuck in the maquiladora zone and disappear to turn up later in pieces like thousands of other girls, that you did not trust the wrong man to deliver you and have to fuck strangers and pretend you liked it in order to stay alive. You are lucky: you are on the other side. But you have been here long enough to know that there is no other side of anything, only parts of a whole, spinning on an axis two beats faster than you can walk. You will never get back where you were going.

You take three buses to work every morning and sometimes you love the city and sometimes all you notice is the absence of green, and on those days you miss the scenery and when you get to work you are sorry you didn't pay more attention to the outside, because inside you do manicures all day, which means a lot of the time it is your literal job to watch paint dry. The nail polish has delusions of grandeur. Mermaid Tail. Tropical Rainforest. French Grey-viera. Mexican Chocolate. The customers make small talk. Once, one of the regulars picked up the Mexican Chocolate bottle and tapped it twice and asked if it reminded you of home. *No*, you said. She asked you what color did, and when you shook your head, asked about where you were from. *It's a small place*, you said. *You wouldn't know it.*

Country Marriage

Michael Kimball

My father never would have been born if his mother's first marriage hadn't failed and he always said the odds against him being born were large. In the family story, my grandmother's first marriage was to a man whose last name nobody knows. I've looked for it in the public records, but there never was a marriage license filed for Ruth Everett, and I suspect it may not have been a real marriage. It could have been what was called a *country marriage*, an unofficial and not uncommon union often found in poor communities like the one my father grew up in.

**

This family story is sketchy in other ways. It is believed the young couple lived on a farm outside the small town of Mason. Supposedly, that farm sustained them through their first year together, during which time the young couple had a child, my father's half-sister. Not long after that, the man walked out of their little farmhouse, leaving my grandmother and their child on the farm. The man didn't come home that night or for many more nights after that. My grandmother didn't know what to do besides take care of the baby and wait for the man to come back.

**

One day, late in the afternoon, my grandmother was looking out the kitchen window when she saw two figures walking across the back fields toward the farmhouse. It was the man, her husband, but he had another woman with him—and then there was another man at the front door, a county police officer who handed my grandmother an official-looking document. Supposedly, she was too upset to read what the paper said, but she could tell it was signed and stamped. She had to vacate the premises or be arrested for trespassing. She was allowed to take her clothes and anything else she brought with her to the marriage, but that man and the other woman kept the baby girl. The county police officer walked my grandmother out of the farmhouse, off the property, and she didn't see her child again until more than twenty years later.

**

There was always something a little unbelievable about this family story. It's difficult to believe it happened that way, but I never heard anybody tell a different version. It was the kind of family story that wasn't talked about much and, when it was, it was done in a kind of whisper. We were told we shouldn't repeat any of it.

All we knew was that something pretty bad happened, but nobody was quite sure what. It's possible that even my grandmother didn't know exactly what had happened. Whatever it was, it made the story of my grandmother's life seem confusing and incomplete and she passed on something of that to my father.

**

There is no record of a divorce for a Ruth Everett in the public records of Livingston County. Supposedly, the marriage was annulled and my grandmother moved back into her childhood home with her parents.

**

Years later, my grandmother met my grandfather at a country dance. We were always told my grandfather was a good dancer and my grandmother looked good in a gingham dress.

They got married about three months after that and my father was born about six months after that. We were always told my father was a small baby—that he was premature and nobody expected him to live. Because of this, my grandmother wouldn't let anybody else hold her baby boy for the first few months he was alive. She thought she just had a few hours and then maybe a few days to keep this baby. Everybody was surprised when my father didn't die.

**

The doctor called my father a miracle baby and some people in my family came to believe my grandmother's arms had special powers. My father claims to remember these first few days of his life and, in particular, how tightly my grandmother held him in her arms.

**

I'm pretty sure none of that about my grandmother's arms and my father being premature is true. I have his birth certificate and his birth weight is listed as six pounds, twelve ounces—a pretty healthy weight for 1939.

**

I have a cracked photograph of my father as a newborn that is a kind of family portrait. My father's parents are standing outside in front of their rented farmhouse surrounded by weeds. My father's mother is holding him against her left hip, but she's leaning her upper body away from him and looking at the camera in a challenging way. My father's father is standing next to them, but he is leaning away from them too—his eyebrows pinched and his upper lip raised in that universal expression of disgust. My father is making two fists and he is wailing at the bright sky above them. None of the people can get away from each other, but they have created as much distance between each other as they can.

**

Godnaught

Reb Livingston

the wretched pie chart of facts rankles the bookbird, there are odds
and there are conventionals, girls against apostles, they win every
time, a smoke screen without a name, you can't smoke here, straight
up skunk, total smokeho,

Dear Infernal Grouse, please fly off the tips of God, smoke on the
shingles, smoke in the chamber, please keep your smoke from the
doorway where the protagonist enters,

you are invited to a smoke-in for God,

Monopoly for smokers, you smoked my battleship, the cherub's
smokeless flames burn your bums down to butts, again,

lung cancer gets in your eyes,

you are forever plucked,

AMBER SPARKS RE-REPOSE

“A good tree cannot bring forth evil fruit. Neither can a corrupt tree bring forth good fruit. Wherefore by their fruits, ye shall know them.”

