

# **New Appalachia**

Senior Paper

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## Make it New

Everyday in Appalachia we mine old images from the horizon  
 seams that wrap our region round, the cross beams of cross eyed  
 grins where teeth splay out like splinters, the wheelbarrows spilled  
 over with the slag of ain't and y'all and yonder, the slime of our moonshine  
 gathered in drips on the face of the rock, our poverty sharp

like the point of the pick, clutching our shovels tighter than we clutch  
 our cousins, our quick drawling to pistols and our fists and our brawls  
 echoing round the low ceilings, knocking loose the tiny shards of redneck  
 and hick that lodge in our lungs in layers, choking us like the flannel  
 and overalls that blanket the region, like the whole folk scene doused  
 in the splash from one backward strum of a banjo.

These images are old, we are old with these images. "Make it new,"  
 Pound once said. I always did reckon I'd be quick in a brawl,  
 but the one time I hit a boy with my tin curious George lunchbox  
 because he whistled too loud, and his elbow almost broke I thought  
 my intestines were about to boil up through my hollow throat.

The only mining I've ever done was in the mud at the quarry  
 where my friends and I would sneak over the bank and bury  
 each other in the landscape, not banking on how our mud  
 ridden forms were old news to the watchmen. When we finally  
 got home we were sent straight to the shower to shed until

we were fresh like the suds that boiled in the creek when boys  
 poured in detergent upstream at the barn dance, spawning laughter,  
 dead fish and a sick feeling in my stomach that fiddled amid the jig  
 of music. And while the banjo is still new to me, when I sit on the back porch  
 and practice slides, pull-offs and hammer-ons, listen to the motors

of the nearby interstate hum beneath the forward backward strum  
 the clawhammer style requires, I hear old songs growing new in the crooks  
 and mistakes of my thumbs, the invitation to come along, grow old  
 in these images: coal will meet renew, old mud will meet new feet  
 and the stream will wash clean, come along grow gnarled in the new growth.

## Appalachia Alchemists

The alchemists who quenched their lives in trying to transform other elements to gold now sleep, their failure decomposed in the steaming cauldron of peat, the finite casing of their flesh streaked by caustic vapors, eyes creased by a caustic lust. I grew up in the region among alchemists who can take the chopped off tops of stalks that are grown by the sun, send them through copper tubes, and pour out the moon into jars. I saw stills up in the hills when we went horseback riding and happened on the barrels crackling with rust, felt I could see the ghosts of old men with long beards and lopsided jaws and the heavy hang of a secret, but now I know friends with the rig raised up from the carpet of tiny one room apartments. Like everywhere else that has liquor, we drink when we are sad or glad or bored, let the still elixir warble down our throats like the speech of silver flutes until we see our sorrows and our future ringed by some strange distortion of the moon.

Meanwhile our chemist kin, the alchemists of old must be contented with transforming themselves to dust.

## 422 Vance Avenue

A young woman with a traveling hat and study seams  
linking the stiff fabric that cinches cotton limbs sits  
in the North facing room where I one day will wake

to Appalachia mornings and lie still, count each board  
on the wall and each vine on the curtain before I wiggle  
my covers free, slide down the stairs to howl  
down a bowl of cereal and pour myself onto the lawn.

She removes her gloves and folds them on her travel  
chest, opens the door and walks slowly down to greet  
the other guests, with breakfast made by an older woman  
in an oven that has long since been stripped and scrapped.

Passes her day with a humid stroll down the street  
a long jaw with the tired old man in the porch swing,  
letters to her brother and betrothed who are both  
overseas, learning the world definition of war.

I pass my day playing war with the spindly shoots that grow  
from the apple tree, playing scout among the thin  
dogwood limbs that won't bear my weight much longer.

After dinner the young traveler walks back up the stairs,  
removes some clothes from her trunk and sits by the window  
to wait, watching the patient glaze of light drip through  
the pines like fat spreading drops. Eighty years later  
I creep to the sill and trace the fat drops of glass,  
the dash of the train behind the trees, watch the maple  
claw the dusk and listen as the leftover hum of bees  
is recycled into the drone of my father's rising snore.

## Woolly Adelgid

Maybe they came over like Columbus, on ships  
Sunk their invasive teeth into the prow of hemlocks  
and commenced their rape of the natives. And now  
they move against the land with the back and forth  
leisure of the tide, nest in almost every crevice of every  
eastern hemlock, ravage the xylem and leave it collapsed.

I used to play on a rope swing that hung  
from the giant tree that probed our front  
lawn, I would seize the splintered nylon  
and crawl as far back around the wide trunk  
as I could and balance on a lump in the wood,  
my hands shoved in the slats and then let  
go, fly through the air. When I was mad

at my family I would imagine I could climb  
up into the top of that hemlock and hide  
like the story of my aunt who had gone missing  
when she was five, only to be later found far  
up in a pine, having watched them search for hours  
beneath the canopy of her tantrum.

But now wherever I see the hemlocks I see nets of white  
specks cast over the green needles like an affliction  
of snow, settled on the evergreen and beginning  
the slow scalp back to the brittle grey brown bone.

## Ladyslipper

She is a fecund sleeper  
I still remember the first  
time I slinked in the woods  
to see her and watch her  
breathe, convinced  
I could smell three hundred and sixty  
days of bone boiled to the blood  
of her bloom, the heat  
in my face high as I extended  
a shaking finger to feel her  
fine, strained veins, the cool  
pause of her waxed  
skin gaze. I shivered  
imagined myself caught  
in the same pink shroud  
lodged in brooded thoughts  
beneath the paws  
of wolves and the snout  
of bears, the long claws  
of badgers, the thick  
hide of frost, the frantic  
digging of our dog as she  
tracked moles and plotted  
holes across our yard  
The hoarse voice of rain  
as it scratched down  
through starched leaves.

I stood up and took a step  
back. Three days later  
when her face collapsed  
down the mast of her stem  
like a brown worn out sail  
I thought about casting off,  
going with her to listen  
to my fears as they would sound  
lapping against my sides.

## Billy

He walks down the highway early every morning,  
Walking on the thin cement balance where the sidewalk  
Doesn't reach, his tumbleweed hair spilled from beneath  
his trucker hat, wearing a backpack and yellow timberland boots.

When I go with my father to the feed store,  
Billy helps him load the truck with hay.  
Even though it's a chore I enjoy I stand to the side,  
otherwise Billy makes comments like "she sure  
is growing up pretty." Or I move inside the store  
with the gritty cement floor and wander among  
the halters with color muted by dust, ointments  
that have congealed, candy bars that have expired  
and wait for my father to come in and pay, with Billy  
by his side, talking slowly about nothing and I stare  
at him from behind a shelf piled with fertilizers,  
his still, wide eyes and mouth that is too red  
probably only thirty two but looking over forty  
and having that long look of alone about him,  
I try to imagine him saying "I love you"  
to someone and I squirm. My father gets his bill

and looks around, "Where did she go?" and I  
emerge from my hiding, avoiding Billy's eyes  
and move quickly to the truck. As we drive  
away, with my father complaining about the rise  
in the price of hay, giving me his assessment  
of the quality of the bails, I watch Billy, who is  
watching us leave, standing in his flannel  
by a sad batch of hanging mums. I store him  
in a heavy feeling, a homogenous bag of feed.

## Lake Junaluska

The sun was splitting thick lengths  
of bright light across the windshield.  
Early summer driving into the east  
and the old rambles of rain  
dried to a foggy stain that made  
it hard to see even when she was  
focused on the road, but the flat  
color of her lips begged to be fixed  
with the golden stick in her purse.

She was five minutes late to her  
boyfriend's nephews' birthday, and still  
ten minutes away, she had done  
her eyes up fine without drifting  
over the yellow tines  
that speared the winding  
country road and now just a straight  
shot across the bridge and a  
slightly curved path to make on the lips.

We dug her out of the wet mass of metal  
and the curious flicking of fish and I  
had to listen to the mascara that trailed  
like her final scream beneath the glass  
that flecked her eyes, what spooked  
me was the iris, how it said nothing at all.



## Alone

I rode horses into the hills where one time my Appaloosa spooked to a still and we both stared at the space in the waxy green laurels where a hand had disappeared. I heard the sound of crunching leaves fade into the pound of blood in my ears.

Another time at cross country practice I was on a long run by myself somewhere in the region of the forest behind the detention center. I came across a caved pile of rocks, a soiled sweater and a smiley face sticker stuck on the stones.

And once more when I was riding alone, my father had walked up the other path and agreed to meet me down in the field, and I was riding through the heavy woods, thinking how I felt like I was in the part of a fairy tale right before the monster leaps out when I rode by a cabin and a dog came out and barked, its ruffle up as if it had something to guard, someone inside to warn. I gave my horse a quick kick and we hurried on.

These times are when I feel nothing like the independent mountaineer who is rumored to live here, safe and content with his burly beard and sturdy ax, even he looked out over the thick trees of his home and sometimes wanted them all to be plowed down so everything would be leaked with sun, and nothing would be hidden.

## Railroad

Who hasn't seen the ribs in the railroad or stood  
in the middle and looked out to where it falls off  
and tried to put some longing on their face that  
matches the sound of a train whistle leaking  
down the spine of the rails. Every kid in my  
hometown has put a penny on the rails and watched  
Lincoln's face blotch despite the dire  
warnings that the wheels would derail and all  
would be lost. We loved to put our tiny  
fingers on the place where the smashed  
metal had made the rail hot. And I don't know  
about the other kids but I thought about  
hobos all the time and loved to look carefully  
and quickly at the people who came from the tracks  
to walk by the depot, to see what they carried  
in their eyes and imagine what was in their dirty  
grey packs, even though they might have been people  
like my dad, collecting not too rusted spikes  
and cursing at the Styrofoam cups.

I played games in the woods beside the railroad  
and the slow cars that crept from the mines of coal and pines,  
I invented men who were princes and eloping  
from factories or prisons in the east, with orphan  
girls off to seek their fortune and gypsies leaping  
out of the woods, with ballads of railroad bulls,  
and a whole lot of other bull that I was blind  
to the story behind, the men who were chained  
to the tracks, not knowing my figures were imagined  
alongside the ghosts of suffered lives  
who worked on that line where cars now  
move slowly into the setting sun and  
come back empty with the sound of metal  
ice skating on metal, which is a sound scarier  
than the startle of any whistle, it sounds  
like the scream that would issue from a lopped-off  
head if a lopped-off head could scream.

## Hay

The rain could not wait and the bail would not budge from between the rails of the truck, a feathered rim of excess bulged over the edge. My boss pushed and I pulled, I jumped and she tugged and the bale stayed put, lodged

in its throne. She went to get tools and I stared at the spiral, shoved in my hand and found it dense, ten times my mass of dead silent grass that grabbed my wrist and held it captive amid the pasture before it had

teen raveled, the arid wind of high August, purple tints that drifted back and forth on stalks like stale puffs of smoke. My boss returned with a heavy metal spear and I quickly removed my wrist and

stabbed the rod in, the bale reared high and settled on the ground. Later in the day I sat at home and watched the rain drive against the window droves of vultures displaced from their duty.

The plink of angry beaks rose against the glass like the plink of scars the hay had scratched on my arms, that reminded me of the dense hay that stored an image deep in its ravel, a script that read what Archimedes once said, "Give me a lever long enough and I can move the world."

## Ideal Dialect

In my research lab I make samples by mixing  
gas on a vacuum rack, and though each reactant  
is kept in its separate location, they bleed  
into each other over time, probe the seamless

corner of each container. They desire escape,  
want to caper up the chimney of the vents  
and plait their repulsions, attractions, intermolecular  
interactions into every strand of wind.

Dialects are kept in the likes of one of those  
isolated vessels, like Southern Appalachian phrases,  
keep the sample pure, keep the stopcock sealed.

If I open the valve just a crack the sample  
will leap back into the battering havoc of its kin,  
y'all will drawl out and caper beyond the  
South, ditch conventions, amble in convections,

and kiss the canvas of every hide stem and scalp  
slosh in the ocean, talk to the tide, waltz with  
*ustedes*, sleep with *vous tous*, argue with *tutti*  
*voi* and weep into *wewe wote*, leave them all

with a breezy grin and rise into the dense  
humid clouds, condense down into a single  
drop that will trace down your nose, let it leak  
into your mouth and speak with the taste

of sweet tea, fried okra, and the heady cornbread  
bubble. I will remain here, waiting for your word  
to wheel through my ear when I am stuck in my  
sterile sample of words, needing to react, needing to bind  
and rise with the sound you will send.

## Asheville Amendment

A group of women stood downtown in Pack Square,  
 their iris tips barred against the onlookers  
 who stared and licked their pupils round the  
 nipples, tightened the focus of camera lenses  
 against them. The crowd giggled then left the women  
 to hang against themselves, clot in the breeze.

I spent the day of the topless protest at the  
 University, certain I supported them, but not  
 certain to my skin, maybe just certain down  
 to the extent of no bra and a thin undershirt  
 not sure of how to support them, if I should  
 have attended, stood by fully clothed and held up  
 supportive signs. I felt I would have stood by  
 and watched the other faces that stood by  
 and watched, fully clothed in their expressions  
 of glee or dismay. I would have just stood  
 by with my fists balled at my side, angry  
 I was past the age when you can hit someone  
 in the face and just be sent home for a day.

Once it was yolk funneled down a starved  
 throat, once it was ties that ribbed a starved  
 cage, once it was wallpaper that patterned  
 a starved mind, once it was starved eyes against  
 a fairy tale time that would never be our own  
 the bedside stories that showed young  
 women fully robed in princess clothes.

And now it is trying to decide which body  
 can be bare to which extent, only on the beach  
 or in the town square? Our real bodies pressed  
 against the thick tide of thinned images, the real  
 world telling us they want us naked only  
 on the screen or the slick page of the magazine  
 our real shaped bodies holding real naked  
 babies, or putting them on pause while  
 we wait for our own birth, for our water  
 to burst and the naked being to spill  
 proudly forth, robed in dimples and ribs, wrinkles  
 and rolls, getting to unfold from our skin, the joy  
 of tapping an egg against the rim of a bowl  
 and hearing it crack, watching the swim of the yolk.

## **My Four Failures at Starting Fires**

The first time we dragged seventy pounds of shit into the woods, none of which helped us to keep a flame. We ate cold hot dogs over burned leaves. Later women camped nearby emerged from the periphery and showed us the spark hidden in the hemlock resin, and helped us coax the cold flicker to thick coats of flame.

The second time we tried several structures before the girl scout queen intervened on our teepee shaped failures and built a friendly blaze up a square frame of sticks. We scowled at its persistence. The third time we couldn't find much wood and quickly gave up, my friends got lit up, and I munched on cold graham crackers in the damp skin of the dark quiet tent.

The final attempt was a diverted disaster. The sun had already withdrawn its gaze from our campsite on the ridge, where the wind patrolled in slick gusty leaps, blowing out any spark with a high shriek of laughter. A passing man paused in the final miles of his hike to help us make the spark turn to fire, which we tended through supper and apple cider before yawning and covering the flames in quilts of dirt, watching the orange eyes of the coal slowly flicker closed. But later lying in the tent I heard gleeful whispers-

We leapt out and dashed barefoot across the frosted ground, grabbed the last of our water and doused the flames that had revived, the flames that had tried to giggle down Cold Mountain, sneak across the ground and tickle our cold sleeping sides with such violence we would have cried in the rising shrieks of our own smoke ridden laughter.

**Grief**

I am no good at grief. When my  
Grandmother died I was horrified  
by the sprawled pleats of her skirt and the  
slack sounds that drained from  
the spasm of her mouth.

I was no better when I woke  
to the slope of my mother's  
expression as she sat on my bed  
in an early clip of February,  
my father holding her hand  
and my aunt in Africa dead.  
Later that day I played pick up  
sticks at school and tried  
to decide if grief was the gold pink  
in the east sky that I dragged  
my mother outside to see as proof  
of heaven, or if it was cheap sticks  
colored in cheap dye snagging on cheap  
carpet played by kids who called  
each other cheats, or if grief  
was the cheat that took  
what dawn should have inspired  
and sucked its blood, stuffed  
It with something cheap and gave  
it back to me so I could hold  
it close, hoping it would leave.

### **For the First Corey**

Cancer like a tarantula, women  
strung across hospital beds  
bundled in thick webs of gauze  
and sprawled i.v. tubes,  
their eyes thick and glossed.

I recall the flick of eight  
thin legs on the back  
of my neck when  
you took your last  
breath, the threads  
of silk that filled  
my mouth like heather  
spoked with frost.

### **New Corey**

A pregnant friend nearby reads the obituary  
with a sigh and puts her hand  
on her belly, crossing out Rebecca,  
Louise and Martha in her mind  
to put my name down beside the soon  
to be alive new being, being new again  
in the tiny outrage of a clenched diaphragm,  
the thick rust to be wiped from the tiny new fist.



## **Tithing**

Like the hand that puts  
dollars in the plate a hand  
reaches in me each month  
and demands thin tissue  
slices from my womb,  
the ruffle of the bills  
and the clink of iron  
spilled among the hair  
raising hush of voices,  
the holy gurgles of  
plumbing pipes and the  
velvet carpet of tile  
patterns, stalls on stalls  
stretching into the continuum  
of a pew and the stains  
on the glass of my eye  
as I curl round myself.

Like the women we read  
about in Southern Appalachian  
history who would strike  
up into the hills in early  
March to collect the greens  
that kept iron in their leaves,

I take slow release ferrous  
and link to them by the reach  
to retrieve the metal and the greens  
back from the plate, the understanding  
that thieving is surviving, monthly  
bleeding is the oldest form of tithing.

## Short Walks in the Night

We took short walks, always when the sun  
had passed the scope of the pine tree perforations,  
always down the street past the emptied mailboxes  
and through the iron gate, down the path  
that moved beneath the bow of the trees  
and the press of the briars, the forest  
hardly hemmed from its old sprawl  
before the clusters of houses, the interstate  
and the roads of our tiny town whittled it down.

our feet scuffed the stones, our hands fastened  
to the dogs and their sniffed tabulations of the piss  
and perfumes of the forest and the creatures  
that burrowed round the roots.

Past the gazebo, moss and asbestos rotted  
to a moon green on blue stone, past the manor  
house with the one light and the one car  
it had once been the finest building in town.

Our bodies fastened to the dim brown of the rocky path  
by feet that moved in measured slowness  
the pupils of star light staring down on us,  
the sound of stones moving on the ground  
our breath drawn in again and again  
my father beside me, stiffening and old  
my mother's hand growing closer and closer  
to the paralysis of rhododendron limbs each year,

What protection could they offer anymore?  
No longer the forms that could leap down the hall  
in an instant, and dissolve the nightmare into the rapid blinks  
of fireflies, the monster under the bed into a lullaby?

Up the hill, the lights planted themselves  
in more frequent intervals, the falling of our feet lost  
that echo feel, we passed back into the dim sigh  
of our neighbor hood and its curtained windows  
and at home we took our coats off with leisure  
and locked the thin wooden door.

**Mr. McCool**

The old man lived just over the fence  
of forsythia that lined our lawn, he used  
canes that fastened to his elbows and grew  
tulips, sometimes my mother would take  
me down our driveway and up his lane  
that was marked by a weeping cherry  
and two old grey blue wagon wheels  
like the old grey blue paint of his house

inside it was all amber light, mustard  
yellow carpet that snagged the old  
cigar smoke, his wheezing laugh and  
a sad story about a beautiful woman  
with curly brown hair who laughed  
from a frame by his arm chair.

I grew old, not old like caught by the canes  
on my elbows or my eyes folding in, old like  
caught in the mirror, caught with how to line  
the folds of my eyes, caught in an awareness  
of how eyes folded on me. My father told me  
often that Mr. McCool could hear me practice  
and ask if I would come over and play. I planned  
to take my French horn, play a few tunes and he  
could tell me about the days he played the same  
instrument in band, by ear until he got caught  
and kicked out, he could tell me about growing up  
by his mother's apron as she cooked for the timber  
camp that is now old interesting history. Our stories  
could link at the elbows and go on, I could bear  
his weight like two sturdy steel canes.

But they took him away and I am sure he is dead,  
the grass back up around his grave like the trees  
back up on the mountain. My parents called and said  
that the other night our dog wouldn't stop barking,  
and the next day they found the tiny grey blue house  
was ransacked, even the circuits ripped from the walls.

## Euthanized

The tongue lolled out as expected but the simple spread of the body threw me, the composed stretch of flesh over muscle gut and ribs, so still right after the last choking gasp as the diaphragm extinguished its final

residue of breath, and the legs that had bent to lay the horse down straightened and stiffened and wound cool strands of cricket and wheatgrass sound around them like a spool.

The stethoscope and empty plastic vials with drops of pale fluid sprawled around us, the vet lay a blue dish towel over the eye and the mother was the only one who cried, the daughters stood by with faces too young

to grieve, and the father so equipped in the facts of life that it didn't even stick to him, he was all words, and matter of facts, and pats of comfort for his wife.

I stood back and stuck to the creak sounds in the moments after death had made its final check on the vital signs, and harvested its due from the ribcage, and thought of the day when I too would be briskly frisked by the quick stiff, movements of death, the catheter still in my neck.

## Miners March

When we made the fifty mile march to commemorate the first time  
the men left their mines and grabbed guns and marched, we paused  
for lunch in a field where they told us you too stopped en route  
to the top of a mountain. We sang songs that sounded like bluegrass  
Kumbaya and I tried to feel your ghosts, covered in sweat like my  
sweat but it felt too heavy and hot, too weighed down by kumbaya.

There must have been one moment on the march, amid the artillery  
of troops and the brigade of indifferent trees when you felt like me  
the time I stripped naked, took a shot of tequila and took off around the block  
of my neighborhood at night, made it half way through the sprint  
and became completely winded, slowed to a jog up the backstreet,

Stumbled inside and puked Chinese food into the sink and hung my  
limp neck and heaving breaths low among those glazed chunks of chicken.  
They beat you back and you had to return to the mines, the right to  
unionize not granted until a decade later, but it is the decade before

When you first stepped out your door and began the walk with the  
other firm faces you saw in the street that makes me think you too  
knew that thrill of being naked, not naked like standing in front  
of a room full of people, not naked like the worth of the company script  
or the children who shifted to starve, not naked like the holes

In your clothes, but naked with the body shook awake beneath you  
in the licks of night, the dry tongue of dawn after thirty minutes  
of sleep behind a tree, naked like the thick voice of momentum  
whooping against the skin when you first stepped out the door  
naked like the heel punching the ground, like open, like let go.

## Amelia

I think digging a grave would be romantic, only because the only one I have ever helped out with belonged to my bunny. She had her head chomped off by a dog one night while I was sitting inside, upstairs

in a warm living room light, playing monopoly with my father and sister. And then there was a strange noise and we were outside, and my sister was crying and my father kept saying "Don't look, don't look."

I wonder if you had your head chopped off by the sudden flat handed smack of the salt water on the glass, if the propeller blade warped back into your flesh, or if the impact diffused your motor from your skull.

I worry about getting my own head chopped off when I stand beside the poised blade on the macadam, when I fumble the wheels off the runway and try to listen to the clipped conversation with the communication tower

and feel like a bumblebee buckled into a static cavern with my wings removed and placed far back where I can't feel them, dials and dials refracted in my insect vision that can't make sense of instruments.

No one could make sense of what happened to you over the Atlantic, but if I could find your body I would bury you in the air, instead of having you stare down at the sand, huddled close to Old Frank (which must be

at least a little awkward, has nearly a hundred years been enough time to sort out the bones and the blades and the blame?), I would have you stare at the scape of clouds, and teach me how not to care about the whistle

that I have to hear each time I practice a stall, pulling up the wings until the speed beneath is too slow to support the craft, and it plunges and I pull the controls back and recover the plane to a steady pitch

and although my instructor patiently critiques my technique, I am just so thrilled to see the trees moving beneath and not toward me, I get distracted by the sound of my breath. I would like to not be this scared, I would like to be your flapper

styled hair tucked into your pilot's cap. But I can only shovel this propeller through the sky one flight at a time and pretend that I am preparing you a grave, where you can sleep with the blue ridge lapping beneath.

## Missing

Remember that time when I was missing  
right before we moved to North Carolina,  
and my parents, my sister my grandmother  
and my uncle went up and down through  
my grandmother's house, casting shouts,  
looking out in the garden and under the beds,  
before they found me on top of my rocking horse  
which they had strapped to the top of the car.

The time we played hide and seek at the party  
and I stayed lodged in the bushes long after  
everyone else had been found and even  
for a little while after the parents And the dogs  
had come out to search around, before I  
stood up and announced "Hey, I'm here."

And the time we stayed at the chicken house  
and I first got properly drunk and kept escaping  
the people guarding me to run out to a tall pasture  
breathlessly chanting "I want to be a bail of hay."

The recent time I left the party to lie down in the yard,  
and my friend stumbled on me curled in the grass,  
laughed and dragged me back to the people.  
To this day I defend my conscious decision  
to go take a nap, I just wanted to be missing.

**Redneck**

For me the word meant the kids  
who hung out in the basement  
of my high school in Carhartt jackets  
and smoked in the woods behind  
the track, the boys who drove  
to school with the confederate flags  
on the hoods of their cars the day  
after my sister's opinion piece  
which advocated the ban of the  
flag was published in the high school  
paper. They arrived early and stood  
in front of the cloaked hoods of their cars  
and watched her walk up the stairs.

It was easy to be angry at them,  
seated at home at the dinner table  
in the evening and listening to my  
sister tell the story, I could see  
their still, mean eyes and knew  
they were monsters of men inside  
their thin beards and the thick texture  
of their heavy jackets and camouflage  
pants, the thick texture of their heavy accents.

I didn't think of what happened after those boys  
left the parking lot for class, what they spoke  
of while they smoked or didn't smoke,  
if they doodled in the margins of their  
notes like I did, if they thought homeroom

was just as big of a joke, I never thought  
of what happened next, if they drove home  
and did what exactly with those flags,  
did they fold them in their sock drawers  
or hang them up on walls? They must have  
had supper with their mothers  
maybe picked the stalls of horses  
like I did most days after school,  
all of us sifting shit from sawdust  
in the plastic tines of a pick, our  
necks bent and focused on the task  
of sorting what needed to be kept  
and what needed to be hauled away.



## Blue Ridge Burial

"I wouldn't buy you a coffin," my father once said, without laughing or looking up from the pan where the peppers hissed against the eggs, "I would build you one."

I neither stirred nor laughed but looked outside, where a recent rain had stripped the last leaves from the trees, slapped everything in a wet gather on the ground. The horizon huddled in close.

I stared back at the skins of the peppers which had begun to sag, the egg which had begun to bloat and imagined my father huddled on the back porch, neither laughing nor looking up from his somber occupation with the planks, the air swarmed with sawdust and snow and tiny markings on the pine like the tiny marking my parents made on the wall frame in the hall every month when my sister and I were growing up.

We talked about something else while we ate, but even while my fork was moving to my mouth, I saw myself buried, my hair fanned out in spokes, my skin like a clothe on the table of bones, the feast of tiny mouths.

After dinner my father left the kitchen and I cleaned the dishes, and as I watched the scraps of food and strands of ketchup siphon from the ceramic in suds, I remembered the mummies, the pharaohs of old who despite being enclosed in sarcophaguses of gold, tucked in by curses and a massive raise of earth, were later disturbed by curious hands, laid out in eternal wakes beneath the shrouded light of museums. I wiped my hands and walked down the hall, warm and well fed and knowing I would be wrapped beneath the whittled down peaks of the Blue Ridge in a coffin custom made from pine, ready to rot into the clay and one day be disturbed by the poke of curious roots excavated piece by piece, and laid out in the broad gasp of leaves, placed on full display in the sun.