

## Portraiture

As a child, Genevieve visited the rambling house Mrs. Indigo Burns had transformed from modest farmhouse to Whartonian retreat along the creek, just downstream from Main Street. In the dark, cool living room, tucked into the corner behind the barrister bookcase, hung Indigo's portrait. Book in hand, Genevieve would settle herself in the emerald Eastlake chair and consider her great-great-grandmother's countenance: below the great thundercloud of hair that swirled around her head, Indigo's eyes were a steady blue-black interrogation. Her thick, singed eyebrows winged toward her temples, giving her the aspect of being perpetually about to desert the frame, and her skin darkened away from the portraitist's spotlight. It had been painted soon after she arrived in Amador, though her history prior to that event was obscure. Her age was a subject of considerable debate, especially as she seemed to defy the usual pattern of physical deterioration: she had a certain timelessness about her.

Indigo had three daughters, who each in turn had three daughters, who also each had daughters, though in diminished numbers. If her foremother been a product of parthenogenesis, Genevieve wouldn't have been surprised. At thirty-nine, Genevieve hovered somewhere near the middle of this consanguinity. The neither-here-nor-thereness of approaching middle age made her feel especially mediocre: other than a PhD in art history, she had accomplished nothing of note. She had always felt as though she had time to be something other than mediocre, but even her university teaching job was on contract. In pictures (never posted by her), she had started to notice a sort of shrinking: beginning with her eyes, her whole face seemed to be spiritually collapsing in on itself. Nothing so dramatic as *Dorian Gray*, but small chimes, alerts, drifted into her consciousness when she considered her own countenance. Certainly it bore no resemblance to the picture of Indigo, had none of the velocity that seemed barely skinned over by paint and time.

The last time anyone saw Mrs. Indigo Burns was in July, 1926, when she'd gone to spend the month in San Francisco. She did not, however, check into the Palace Hotel, which she'd given as her residence. And, unlike her previous stays in the city, she'd departed without her usual accoutrements—trunks, furniture, lamps. Her only luggage was a leather suitcase and her viola. Though there were stories brought back from San Francisco of a woman who went by the name of Indigo giving jewelry to taxi drivers and chambermaids, she appeared to have otherwise vanished. And no one in her family made much of an effort to find her. When Genevieve used to pester her grandmother for some explanation, her grandmother simply shrugged and said that everyone had always known it would happen.

*Not Kano*

Where Ben's mother, Nabilah, was born, the indigo used to be soaked in stone pits; she remembered that this was how it was done at home, before the passage.<sup>1</sup> She and her sister would crush the newly-cut branches with a pestle, then roll the pulp into balls to be dried in the sun. The courtyard was strewn with them, like beads on an unfinished collar. When they were dry, they were taken to the pits, a hundred or more balls dropped into each well, and then submerged in ash water. The dye was steeped for three days, simmering in the hot sun, and then it was ready for the men, and for the cloth.



*Eliot Elisofon, Hausa man at indigo dye pits with basket lids, Kano, Nigeria, (ca. 1959)*



*The indigotery of Anse à la Barque, Guadeloupe  
slaveryandremembrance.org*

On the island where Ben was born, the cloth was not the thing of value, but rather the small, square dye cakes that were shipped back to England. On the island, the leaves were soaked in a chain of masonry vats,<sup>2</sup> the indican distilled down to a paste that was molded into those hard little blocks, then then loaded like gold bricks into the holds of the just-emptied ships. His grandfather, the planter, let the women scrape the sides of the pits, beading the residue, for their own clothes. Not enough dye was left for the blueblack of Nabilah's childhood, but Ben's memory of her draped in shades of the diaphanous Caribbean sky was no less indelible than the dark stains on her hands. When the old man died, perhaps out of guilt over his son's death, he gave her her freedom and twenty-four acres of land: eight each for her and, eventually, Ben and his sister, Aisha. They were the only ones given land, and Nabilah was the only one freed; the children would have to earn their freedom. On their new plot, Nabilah built a courtyard and, at the edge of the cleared land, a row of stone pits.

Aisha hated the stench of the steeping indigo, so she was the one sent to the market to sell the cloth. She loved the town, being away from the sounds of the plantation, the memory of labor. Aisha reminded planters of the many promises made by the islands: she sounded reverberative, fecund, and she looked hard, golden, like money. She wore white bodices with full skirts, with a bolt of azure petticoat moving underneath. She wrapped her hair in a white turban, which steadied a straw hat winging over her shoulders. Her marine eyes pooled in her unrelenting face.

<sup>1</sup> Eliot Elisofon Photographic Archives, Smithsonian Institution. "Smithsonian Learning Lab Resource: Hausa Man at Indigo Dye Pits, Kano, Nigeria. [slide]." Smithsonian Learning Lab. November 04, 2015. Accessed July 26, 2018.

<sup>2</sup> <http://slaveryandremembrance.org/partners/partner/?id=P0064>

6.7

*Victorian Candles overwhelm a hallway gardenias trumps face a  
rat black lemon wrapped why did the artist make him Black  
Gloriana black rats have pink hands that's the  
Char of Tiki in the other room the dark kitchen he watches American  
Horror Story I like period Dramas Gloriana is not American  
i know this but we are Gothic like Live Oak*

## Free Women

In her third year of graduate school, when she was flailing around for a dissertation topic, Genevieve went to visit her sister, Lucinda, in Brooklyn. Lucinda, who had a one-year-old daughter, was (as she herself unsentimentally put it) stay-at-home under duress; that is, she made less at her media job than childcare cost, so she stayed home. She was feeling even more unmoored than Genevieve, so Genevieve thought a visit might make her feel better about herself. When she arrived at Lucinda's apartment, the baby, Charlotte, was sleeping. Feeling uncertain of her ability to maintain absolute silence, and knowing that Lucinda's tenuous mental health was solely dependent upon this hour of transportive silence, Genevieve dropped her bags and went for a walk. As she came out into the bright sunshine of Eastern Parkway, she saw the hulking mass of the Brooklyn Museum at the end of the block. Feeling the pressure of her scholarly obligation, she supposed that visiting a museum might count as field work, and she turned toward the building that, from her vantage looked like the supreme court in a beret.

As she walked, Genevieve took out her phone and searched for news of exhibits or new acquisitions by the Museum, finding the following notice:



**BROOKLYN, NY.-** The Brooklyn Museum has acquired, by purchase from the London Gallery Robilant + Voena, Agostino Brunias's (1730-1796) painting *Free Women of Color with Their Children and Servants in a Landscape*, (circa 1764-96), a portrait of the eighteenth-century mixed-race colonial elite of the island of Dominica in the West Indies. Brunias, a London-based Italian painter, left England at the height of his career to chronicle Dominica, then one of Britain's newest colonies in the Lesser Antilles. [...] *Free Women of Color with Their Children and Servants in a Landscape* will go on view on March 7, 2011 in the European galleries on the portraiture wall between contemporaneous female Spanish colonial and French subjects.<sup>3</sup>

As Genevieve mounted the stairs and found her way to the European galleries. The exhibition walls encircled the majestic Beaux Arts Court, which was in turn ringed by archways, topped by queued columns, and crowned by a celestial skylight suspended more than two stories above the glass-tiled floor.

Making her way through the gallery, she noted several examples of 18<sup>th</sup> century neoclassicism: though nominally a romanticist, it was a style that had always appealed to her—the strict architecturalism of the compositions, contrasted with the fanaticism of the public interest in these dead stories, satisfied Genevieve's sense of irony. But when she finally found the Brunias women, it was not the composition that arrested her gaze, but a single face: staring out at her from within the lush vegetation of Brunias' landscape was the severe countenance of her great-great-grandmother, Indigo Burns.

<sup>3</sup> [http://artdaily.com/index.asp?int\\_new=44268&int\\_sec=2#.W0fV1FMvz-Y](http://artdaily.com/index.asp?int_new=44268&int_sec=2#.W0fV1FMvz-Y)



*Linen*

On Islandmagee, they were flax spinners and weavers. Several times a year, she and her sister took the raw flax cloth to Belfast, to the brown linen market. As they came over the hill, they saw long bolts of whitening linen spread like ribbons over the emerald bleach fields. The cloth had been boiled in lye, then soaked in buttermilk, and then flattened over the grass to be watered, dried, watered, dried, until they were table-white. Brona thought they looked like tape worms; the image tightened in Dierdre's belly.

It was just after the last trip that her mother died. It was the third baby to effect this affliction, and the only one to live. This one was closer to term than the others. When Dierdre and Brona returned to the small stone cottage, she was lying on the matting, jaundiced and swollen, her dress soaked in blood. Brona tried to help her to the bed, but she was too weak to be anything other than dead weight, so she laid her back down on the floor, and, after unhooking and pushing aside her skirts, wrapped her in a blanket. "Run and get Bridget!" she barked at Dierdre.

When she came back in from the cold, her mother, eyes heavy-lidded and almost lifeless, was still on the floor; Brona was wrapping the tiny, shriveled nut of a baby in scraps that had been left off the market cart, but went doubly round his small body. The midwife, Bridget, said, "I can see the life moving from her body to his, a ribbon, the tail end fluttering in her lips. She will not recover from this one."

Now the baby, Fionn, was with them, wrapped in a blanket made of flax remnants. Dierdre wondered what he saw when he looked at the bleach fields; his face was fat, cloudless. She saw Belfast in the distance, the ships' masts stabbing at the blanket of harbor fog. "This fog of sadness will stay on these shores," her father said. "We'll have naught but sunshine when our journey's ended." She tightened the blanket around the baby.<sup>4</sup>



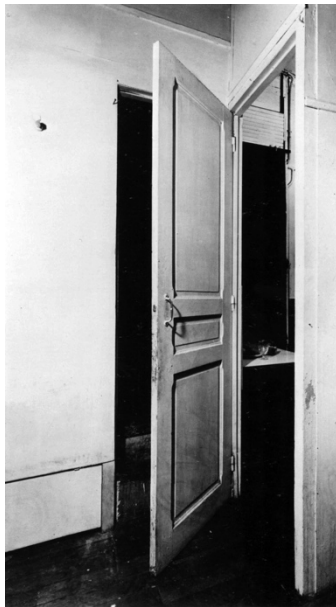
William-Hinks, *Set-Of-Twelve-Prints-Illustrating-The-Irish-Linen-Industry* (1791)

<sup>4</sup> [http://www.icollector.com/William-Hinks-SET-OF-TWELVE-PRINTS-ILLUSTRATING-THE-IRISH-LINEN-INDUSTRY-1791\\_i12656444](http://www.icollector.com/William-Hinks-SET-OF-TWELVE-PRINTS-ILLUSTRATING-THE-IRISH-LINEN-INDUSTRY-1791_i12656444)

## Enfilade

At her funeral, Genevieve planned to have her coffin carried through an enfilade, one room opening on to the next, each door perfectly aligned with the one before and the one after. On particularly trying days, she calmed herself with questions of execution: should the procession begin at the far end of the suite of rooms, or enter into the middle? She supposed it depended on when she died. The middle certainly alluded to a life foreshortened. Better to plan for the longer procession, and then should the event warrant additional dramatics, so be it. In any case, there would be windows arranged at precise intervals along the enfilade, like so many pall bearers, and the effect of the sunlight, as it shone through each window, one after another, had a sort of solemn marching quality to it.

It was for precisely this sense of succession that the enfilade was originally intended. In the grand houses of Europe's nobility, whole floors unfolded in this way. The higher the rank, the deeper the access: a guest of low or middling rank might only be escorted through the first room or two, but should, say, the queen pay a visit, then a procession was built into the design. Genevieve was always exhilarated by the unintended consequences of this social architecture, the oblique way in which space created aspiration—the guest will never be quite satisfied with the room he is in if he can see a grander room beyond the doorframe. Not surprising, she thought, that the rise of the bourgeoisie coincided with this particularly enticing arrangement of vistas.



Although: Marcel Duchamp designed a different sort of door opening onto another door for his apartment at 11 Rue Larrey.<sup>5</sup> The door itself is a conventional wood door. Hinged on a jamb shared by two openings at right angles to one another, the door serves two thresholds (and three rooms) at once. Duchamp explained: “In Paris I was living in a very tiny apartment. To take full advantage of the meagre space, I thought to make use of a single door which would close alternatively on two jamb-linings placed at right angles. I showed it to some friends and commented that the proverb 'A door must be either opened or closed' was thus caught in flagrante delicto for inexactitude. But people have forgotten the practical reason that dictated the necessity of this measure and they only think of it as a Dada provocation.”<sup>6</sup> It is not simply useful—it is the manifestation of art's etymological roots: to fit together. The creation of the door is an act of elimination. Where once there were two doors, now there is one.

That would be a clusterfuck of a funeral—enfilade made modern, like Woolf's war [widows]. Would that Genevieve might achieve the distinction of the first procession, or the arch surreality of the second. Probably neither—adjuncts are neither distinguished nor even officed, and certainly not arched.

<sup>5</sup> Marcel Duchamp, *Door: 11 Rue Larrey*, 1927.

<sup>6</sup> Arturo Schwarz, *The Complete Works of Marcel Duchamp* (New York: Harry N. Abrams, 1970), 497.

*Redemptioner*

Dierdre boarded the ship at Belfast, along with her sister, Brona, and her brother, Fionn. Her father, Fergus, was following his half-brother, Conchobhur, to South Carolina. Conchobhur, who'd since begun calling himself Cornelius in sensitivity to the refined colonial planters' aversion to anything not-English, sent him the name of a ship's captain who was filling a brig and wanted to supplement his flax seed cargo with flax weavers. To redeem the costs of their passage, they each entered into a contract of indenture:

*And whereas Fergus MacKee in & by a Certain writing under his hand and Seal bearing date at Belfast on the Nineteenth day of August in the year of our Lord one thousand seven hundred and fifty two did oblige himself to pay Mr. William Willson twelve pounds sterling for the passage of himself & his three children Brona & Dierdre & Fionn with the Curr. Exchange in South Carolina or give Indentures of them & whereas the said Fergus MacKee did not pay said sum but agreed that he and his said three children should become Servts. For the same William Willson for seven years or till the children Severally attained the Age of twenty one years Upon information of the said Fergus MacKee & view of the said Children Brona the girl is judged about the age of Fourteen & Dierdre the other girl is about the age of twelve Years & Fionn the boy is about the age of Eleven years.<sup>7</sup>*

Conchobhur will help buy out the contracts when we get to Charles Town, her father assured her, as they descended into the ship's hold.

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<sup>7</sup> WB Smith, 73

## 7.6

*Reading a book of criticism that articulates over and over again: “what this book is doing,” and I don’t know if it feels humble or overconfident. I remember using “I want” to describe not what I was doing in my own criticism but some sense of what it was in want of and also the knowledge that trying to fill a void never really goes anywhere. I was sitting on the porch looking over the lake: watching Fourth of July, boats coming in and out of the quiet channel, and thinking again about the word want, about saying “I want” and I felt so engulfed by the weight of that desire and also its futility that tears started. As though they could absolve me, because I sat on the Fourth of July reading my book in a little piece of americana, this cottage, with the smell of round up prickling spicily in my nostrils, and I know that I may be stuck as anyone else in a kind of lived blindness. And how can you un-live the moments of blindness? I can’t. You can’t. Just always the bugs, even in the daytime, flying violently against window panes: the futility of trying to make space between between the blindness and the dark.*

*Indigoterie*

When Ben turned fifteen, he was hired out to a plantation on the other side of the island. It faced west; he missed looking into the eastern sun for evidence of a story other than this one. This plantation was one of four; the planter lived on another estate, a sugar plantation, and mostly left the indigo production to the enslaved and their overseers. Here, the overseer was hardened: he'd been sent to the islands at nine on a prison boat, rounded up with a streetload of other London urchins, and when his indenture was up he didn't know any other way of being. All he had left was cruelty.

Nevertheless, his cruelty was not stupid, and he recognized that Ben might be of some use. By the time he was twenty, Ben was made driver, the loneliest sentence. He was not kind; there was no space for that in the overseer's logs. He was vacant, a shrinking away from what their backs told him. As he checked the vats, tightened the dowels, watched the scythes, the world became mechanical. It seemed merely the cost of freedom.

When the overseer was found dead in Plymouth, an apparent casualty of his own appetites, Ben took his place. The dye was the more brilliant for his scrupulousness, though his soul withered on its solitary hill. This was a mercy, though he did not see it that way in the beginning.



<sup>8</sup>Jean Baptiste du Tertre, *Indigoterie* (1667)

<http://slaveryimages.org/detailsKeyword.php?keyword=Indigo&recordCount=10&theRecord=8>



## Amador

In the decade or so after the gold rush began, Amador was in a near constant state of conflagration. Up and down the Mother Lode, wood shacks bloomed like mushrooms in the yellow hills arrayed like beads against the base of the Sierra Nevada. A miner left a candle burning next to a pile of dirty laundry; a creosote slicked kitchen chimney; drunken lanterns; gun powder; passed out prostitutes: all the kindling of renewal.

When the flames came, the first few times, there was no fire department. Migrants, shopkeepers, the law—they all came out with buckets, formed a line from the sometimes-dry river, passed the water bucket-by bucket. It was noble but mostly useless, not unlike historic preservation, about which Genevieve felt passionately. Foundations were sometimes all that was left of an ambition; most times people left no lasting mark.

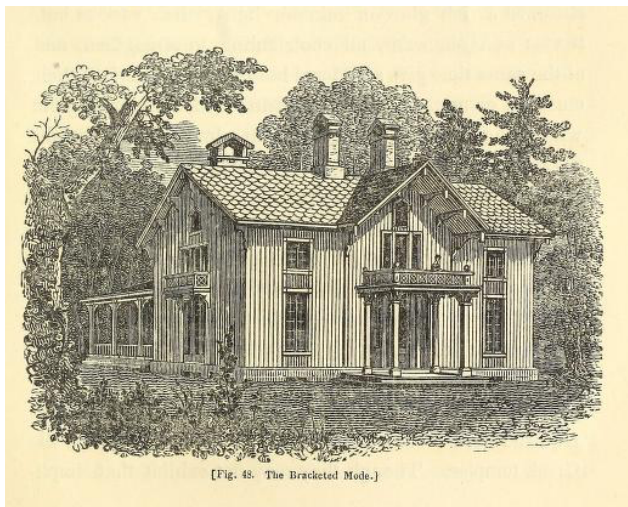
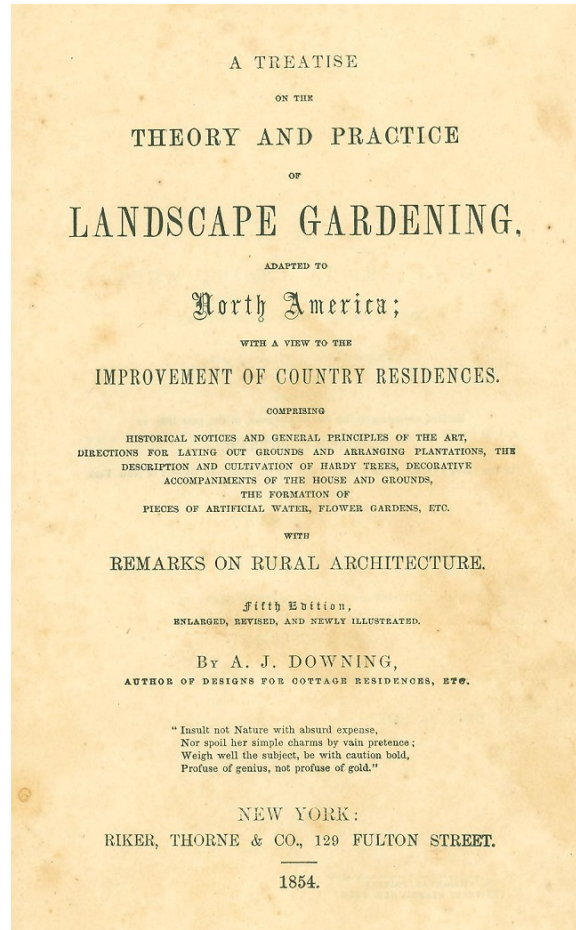
Construction on the old house on Main Street was commenced in 1860. As the sixth son, Mr. William Wilder left his claims to Puritan ancestry and the remaining bits of New England patronage to his brothers and their wives to scramble over: he followed another cousin West upon news of Sutter's mill. The trip was brutal, the only certainty the endlessness of the Utah Territory desert. Every evening, Wilder carefully dusted and polished his balmoral boots, before wrapping them again in buckskin; he meant to arrive in California respectably shoed. When he arrived in Amador, he opened a dry goods store, a venture both more lucrative and more genteel than mining. After four years, he had enough to purchase building materials shipped from the east coast. And so the house was his monument to civility, built in anticipation of a bride. The completion of the house took almost as long as the wait for a wife.

Three times it burned, and three times Wilder rebuilt it. The first fire started in the saloon, just one month after the four frame walls were lifted into place. The flames found their way to the upright white houses down the road via tongues of fire licking along the dry plank sidewalks. From the hill above, those fiery promenades made a roadmap of the town, a town lit from within the earth on which it floated. The second fire started in a neighbor's kitchen, and hungrily ate through the town's western hill before sliding, sated, into the Creek. The final fire was the started by a gas lamp left burning in the freshly paneled dining room. The heat exploded the new double window as the flame tore through the room's external wall, leaving the house with mouth agape at the miners tousling on the road.

Three times the house burned, and three times Wilder rebuilt it, each time bigger than the last. When his bride, Helena, finally arrived, she swept coolly along the wide front porch and pronounced it adequate, if not complete, and commenced her lifelong project of turning the barren yard into one of Andrew Jackson Downing's country residences.<sup>9</sup>

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<sup>9</sup> Downing Figs.: <https://library.si.edu/digital-library/book/treatiseont00down>



*Winyab*

“I send by this Sloop two Irish servants, viz.: A Weaver and a Spinner. I am informed Mr. Cattle hath produced both Flax and Hemp. I pray you will purchase some, and order a loom and spinning-wheel to be made for them, and set them to work. I shall order Flax sent from Philadelphia with seed, that they may not be idle. I pray you will also purchase Wool and sett them to making Negroes clothing which may sufficient for my own People. As I am afraid one spinner can't keep a loom at work, I pray you will order a sensible Negroe woman or two to learn to spin, and wheels to be made for them; the man Servant will direct the Carpenter in making the loom and the woman will redirect the Wheel.”

8.12

*In the mornings, I wake up with  
a dull ache behind my eyes,*

*as though I have been narrowing them  
in concentration*

*on something very small,  
like pulling the wings off a fly*

*Infinite Hunger*

On the evening before she gave birth, Dierdre walked out to the indigo fields to meet Ben. They still had to see each other secretly—the diffusion of the mistress’s enlightenment was cozy. The plants were near cutting, their leaves brushing against Dierdre’s belly and shoulders as she angled down the rows. She heard her name called from the base of the primordial oak in the middle of the field. He stood up, his shadow thrown long by the setting sun.

“I’m going to tell you a story about indigo,” he said, gesturing for her to recline against the massive trunk. “In ancient times, the sky hung closer to the earth, and its reflection in the Niger River was the bluest of dark blues. A woman walked to the edge of the river, and felt a gnawing hunger for the beauty of the communion between water and sky, a beauty beyond the known world. She yearned for hair as blue as thunder, for skin as dark as the sky, for a voice as deep as the river. In those days, bits of the sky could be eaten: the woman knew that rice filled the belly, but sky fills the heart. So she reached for the sky, broke off a piece, and put it in her mouth; intoxicated, she devoured more and more, until her head spun. But then the sky, feeling ill-treated, retreated from the earth, became a distant, inviolate vision. The woman, stunned, bereft, looked down at her hands: instead of the fabric of the sky, a bolt of indigo cloth, a facsimile of infinite hunger.”



## 9.8

*She arranged and promoted a recital for me, this old friend who I so often disappoint with my lackadaisical approach to keeping in touch. I don't know why she did it—I never sang anymore, hadn't since Chamber Choir in college and now here was the evening arrived and she said David Bowie was coming. This is when I knew I was not awake, but trapped in a liminal oneiric space that somehow also had a stage with real-sounding creaks and the burning sensation of hot lights. I sat on the stairs, partially hidden by the curtain, as the crowd assembled, and it was all of the people who had ever had reason to feel disappointed by me: a girl I allowed to be teased in 2<sup>nd</sup> grade; an old boyfriend about whom I still have separate, guilt-filled dreams; people I just ignored because they were either too average or too strange. The way I disappoint people is not through cruelty, but in apathy, which is also cruel. And they all filed in to hear me sing Copland's "Once I thought"—which is, not incidentally, the song I sang at my high school graduation and which was botched by speaker feedback screaming in accompaniment. I started going through the words in my head and they appeared, floating, in my field of vision, and then slowly evaporated: "What makes me think I'd like to try / to go down all those roads beyond that line above the earth and 'neath the sky?" And then they were gone and I had nothing on my lips or before me at all so I slipped behind the curtain and out of the recital room and into the hot parking lot and I could hear her calling me, calling me, telling me how disappointing I was.*

*En Caul*

She was born in the caul.

Some babies of such provenance emerge from the womb with a remnant of the amnion draped like a translucent veil over their face, or fitted over the skull—“caul” is from the Latin *calantica*, meaning cap or helmet. These babies were thought to be endowed with unusually good luck, and the preserved caul a valuable talisman. The midwife would rub a sheet of parchment across the baby's head and face, pressing the material of the caul onto the paper. The relic was then presented to the mother, flesh-made-text, to be kept as an heirloom. These talismans were, as with all things of value, often stolen, sold to sailors as a protection against drowning, to soldiers going into battle. This protection was charmed, but not miraculous.

Other babies born en caul emerge still encased in the intact amnion, visible through the diaphanous membrane, but still separate from the world into which they have been delivered. As she slid into the light, the midwife gasped. Her mother moved closer, gazed at her through the blue film. Without moving to touch her, or to disrupt the strange suspension of birth, she whispered, “Indigo. She is Indigo.”

9.14

*Ecdysis: It began with small patches of skin, desiccated, browned, pulling translucently off my temples, hairline. It separated from the hair cleanly. As I worked toward the crown, the membranes held across larger spans; the final pieces came off like a cap. There was new skin underneath, smooth, plastic. The hair grew straight through follicles, clean as a doll's head. I collected the moulted skin in a shoe box, slid it on to a high shelf in my closet. Just in case.*

*Effluvia*

She'd found a body in the backwater, swollen like breadloaves. The body retained its breeches, thick green woolen stuff with bright brass buttons clinging cheerfully to his still full thighs.

Indigo ran back toward the plantation to tell her father, the effluvia of the rotting corpse clinging to her nostrils. As she approached the dye vats, the putrifying of the just-cut branches in the larger vats outside smelled suddenly of death, of rotting flesh, no matter that it was leaves instead of limbs. She retched in the laurel bushes the grew along the path.

She took refuge from the stench of indigo leaves—foaming, writhing, decomposing, in the limewater—in the darkness of the dye house. The dye house was cool, empty but for the girl methodically packing indigo cakes into barrels for transport. Indigo leaned against the dirt walls, inhaled the sweet smell of the finished dye. She imagined houses, cities, made of indigo bricks, stacked against the hot sun. When a shadow darkened the doorway, she was slow to rouse from her reverie; it wasn't until the girl screamed that Indigo heeded the shadow's portent, but she was too late.

## Lakes

Genevieve spent a very long time in graduate school. She began in a creative writing program, thinking that what she had to say was certainly more compelling than the millions of things that had been said. She came into the program as a poet, and she supposed that's where she still landed: narrative was a far-off country, and diction had a specificity that that felt architectural, controllable. This is not all poets, or all poetry, but this was Genevieve. But the more time she spent in workshops, trying to make her lyric self "believable," the more she thought maybe she wasn't real, either, and she started writing poems about mollusks, trilobites, fulgurites. So when it came time to try to slog through the hiring booths at AWP, she didn't. Instead, she concretized: Genevieve entered a PhD in art criticism. No longer pressured by either the illusiveness of narrative or the nakedness of lyric, she only had to observe into the florid fantasies of others.

This is, of course, too easy. Genevieve was no more an art critic than she was a poet, because the space she really occupied was somewhere in between judgement and navel-gazing: she swam in the mediocrity of associative, looping, sometimes pollen-skimmed waves of personalized abstraction. Criticism was too sure of its position, and poetry was too sure of its marginalization.

Sometimes, especially after meetings with her faculty mentor, she dreamed she was floating in a Midwestern lake, one of those shallow, bloated rivers that are pictured in Fourth of July sale commercials. The scattered wakes delivered by jet skis and pontoon boats created an overall disturbance over the surface of the water, an agitation that Genevieve could feel against the sides of her head as she tried to stay still, calm. Despite her efforts, these small waves always nudged her toward the weedy inlets that graded almost imperceptibly into slough. She'd try to raise herself gracefully, but she was suddenly only in foot-deep water, and she flopped, fishlike, as she rose to standing. Covered in errant weeds and other bits of disintegrated matter, she felt like an amphibian caught in end-stage evolution, a mutant hybrid: no longer able to breath in the water, but without any sense of terrestrial propulsion. As she stood there, a pontoon boat cruised by, and several people in her department, including her mentor, peered over the edges of their cocktail glasses, registered recognition, and then turned back to their conversations, as though even her mutancy wasn't enough to warrant more than a passing glance.

Of course, she wasn't qualified to do anything else, so she kept showing up to teach her classes, ghosted through the mail room, hoped no one would remember her if they happened to glance up at her in the department hallway. She supposed she would rather be no one than nothing.



*Bunting*

She'd seen Cicely, her sister, lingering in the gazebo the evening before, watched as the man stalked down the path after her. The man was a dye trader; he'd come to collect the huge barrels of finished dye cakes, to bring Charleston, where they would be loaded on the boats that had just deposited human cargo bound for the indigo and rice fields. Cicely herself wore a garment dyed in patterns brought by the women newly arrived. She merged with the river and the sky as she hung languidly over the rail of the silly edifice: there was nowhere to sit. She waited for the trader to address her before spinning around on her heel, smiling. The man's bulk obscured Indigo's view of her sister; it was the same dark shape that had stalked a 13-year-old into the dye house in the heat of the afternoon that day. Indigo started to run across the fields, tried to caution her, but her voice floated, azure, weightless, into the air. Cicely looked more like her mother—they both did—and the gold in her hair seemed to catch in the branches as the man dragged her down the embankment, leaving a bunting of bright screams strung from sloping oak limbs.

9.23

*Curdling scream when walking through campus couldn't place the origin heard it  
again echoing out from the trees like Sylvan banshee then saw on a blanket in  
the middle of the lawn two women and a baby one woman was screaming  
a squirrel capering she was screaming in laughter but somehow the sound of  
the scream had been thrown from the open clearing in to the leaves and  
disbursed just a squirrel but it looked like biloquism  
like something dissembled*

## Dardanelle

Genevieve lay flat on her back on the rocky beach, her head turned toward the lake.

The fire is the next ridge over, burning through the bands of forest that gird the Dardanelles. These castle-like formations, etched not out of the thick vein of Sierra granite but into the volcanic icing that tops the loping grey ridges, stand sentry over the Sonora Pass. The precipitous trail around them was first pioneered in 1852, but after a brief period of boosterism it lapsed into disuse—while it necessitated no cannibalism, like its Donner cousin, it was a trial in which few were interested. Though the Sonora-Mono Toll Road was built the mid-1860s, it remained a screechingly beautiful, lonely passage.

The smoke had drifted over the lake overnight. An inversion of warm air pushed the smoke down the mountain in rivulets, and it tufted over the top of the water, obscuring the granite ridges at the far end. Genevieve knew she should be inside, but the defamiliarization of a landscape she had known since childhood acted as magnet. She felt the smoke around her, imagined it lifting her body into levitation, up over the boulders, the volcanic spires, through the vast silver plumes, and into the thin air that disseminated all the toxic particles like sparkling mica over the ceaseless continent.

The Sierran Dardanelles are the namesake of an older, even Olympian geography. The ancient city of Dardanus, whose own eponym was the fruit of Zeus and Electra, sat at the entrance to the strait connecting the Aegean Sea to the Sea of Marmara and, eventually, Istanbul and the Black Sea. This narrow waterway held back the weight of two continents. In Ottoman times, there was a castle on each side of the channel. The castle on the European side was called Sesto, and the castle on the Asian side was Avido; this crossing is where Leander sought Hero, and where Byron swam for Glory. The castles were called the Dardanelles, after the ancient city. When they disintegrated, they left their name to the narrows.

In 1807, a British squadron caught heavy cannonade from both bluffs. Byron made his passage in 1810. It is not known who named the American Dardanelles after such a fabled landmark, but pastured soldiers and frustrated poets alike made the journey west; perhaps one of them mapped the Mediterranean's most difficult passage onto the granite pass that snakes from Mono Lake's limestone towers to California's Mother Lode.

When she was a child, Genevieve's family travelled the Sonora pass every summer on the way to Las Vegas. On the backside of the Sierras, the mountains sloped into blinding desert, and Mono Lake shimmered at the far edge of sight. As the station wagon drew closer, the salted spires ringing the water came into focus, their outlines rising like ancestors out of an ancient seabed.

It was for these mythic forms that Genevieve imagined searching as she was borne over the undulations of vaporized forest, naked sand: what was lost in the passage?

*Saplings*

The pig's head was on a dowel, its hirsute face starting to shrivel in on itself. Indigo had planted it along the verdant path down to the river. There was a gazebo perched at the water's edge, and Cicely sometimes wandered down there at day's end—she wanted to be certain Cicely would see it.

It had not been difficult for Indigo to kill this particular wild pig: Cicely fancied it her pet, despite its wild provenance, and it never wandered far. She'd found it as a piglet in the laurel oak undergrowth, and she fed it in an innocence of what it would become. Though it had been passably endearing in its infancy, it was now a source of unceasing destruction, repeatedly pillaging the dye vats, enticed by the smell of the plants putrefying in the soaking tanks. The women chased it back into the hickory grove bordering the fields, but her father said it would no doubt be back. She had seen the painstaking work it'd taken for her father, Ben, to craft the vats, but he wouldn't dispose of the animal, owing to Cicely's attachment.

So Indigo stalked along the edges of the uncleared woods, the sandy ground sliding under her feet. The trees seemed to multiply, mirror each other as she strained to see between them, watching for a flash of inky hoof. There: a crackling of brush and the glint of snout, the dappled animal sauntering toward her. She backed behind a sapling, out of its line of sight. Raised the scythe. Waited. First the dry snout passed beneath the suspended instrument, then the sparsely-haired cheek, the blank eye, the mangled ear: she swung the blade, eyes squeezed against the gruesome evidence of her capacity for brutality. she let go of the handle, running back to the dye house as the screams grew fainter behind her. When Indigo was certain the animal was dead, she'd crept back to the now-silent woods with the dowel end of an indigo paddle.

Next time he thought to trap Cicely in the gazebo, he'd see she that she was no pig's spoils.

11. 9

*Lying awake in the dark phone light dimmed to sepia and I recall the  
proliferation of eclipsed crescents across the patio down the steps and into the street  
not looking at the sun is dizzying nonetheless            sepia satellites spangled  
sun strangled like            lying in the dark wondering what white hot horror is  
obscured by scrolling            not looking here we are in the age of endless  
fabrication but the dimmed light is real and            I am not sleeping*