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CHIROPTERA

We were in Borneo studying bat migration. Everything was a raw green that made my eyes ache. Trees glutted the island. Sloths held half their body weight in piss and shit so they wouldn't give away their locations to predators. Borneo resembled a fat, excited badger. We were in an inlet that belonged to Malaysia, in the badger's eye. Next we'd travel along its back and down through its belly, part of Indonesia. Every day we sweated through our clothes, took measurements, ran acoustic recorders and infrared sensors, noting what kinds of bats slept where, the delicate makeup of their roosts.

Half the group caught giardia, including Pool, a Peruvian scientist I was thinking of leaving my husband for. The parasite's digestive gases made some of their stomachs puff out. The rest of them shrunk and shrunk. Every day they woke craving sweet things. They ate but took no comfort in eating.

One woman claimed to have starved her parasite. She'd woken up and felt the worm die inside her. "Swear to God!" she said over dinner one evening. "It was moving, kind of thrashing, and then, all of a sudden—nothing."

I didn't not believe her. I liked to think you could trust what you felt.

"I don't believe you," said Pool.

"Show me when you shit him out," someone said. "Then we'll know for sure."

"I think my body will digest his body," said the woman.

Dr. John said that giardia was not a worm. We ignored him. We liked to think of giardia as a worm, not boring single-cells.

"Well, do you feel better?" I asked the woman.

She put a hand on her stomach. "I—well, I suppose I still feel a little bloated," she said. Pool snorted. She suddenly looked like she might cry. She wiped her cheeks. I felt bad. We tried to reassure her. It certainly sounded like her parasite had died, we told her.

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A week later we were camping in a forest reserve in the Sultanate of Brunei. The country was also known as the Abode of Peace, but it didn't

feel peaceful to me. Gibbons screamed from the trees, leering through the canopy and crashing away. A proboscis monkey with noble, sad eyes above his penis-nose gazed blankly at us. At dinner we got on the topic of scars. Most people told the same boring story. Dr. John remained in his tent, peacefully highlighting numbers from the past week.

“I’ve got someone else’s bones in my mouth,” said Pool.

He pulled back a lip to show us his tooth implant, an incisor a shade less white than the rest of his teeth. It was beautiful, a slick plastic grayish gleam to it.

After the others went to bed, I showed Pool my cigarette burns. They were little puckered scars from Mom’s wilder days, when the men who fucked her all worked in fast food. Sad men I’d walked in on arranging my wasted mother for their use. They were only doing what they knew how to do. Wasn’t that all anybody did? He pressed a finger lightly to the fattest part of my arm, moving the scar around on my skin. Ben didn’t like touching or looking at them, but several times after this I caught Pool staring at my burns.

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Ben and I had been married ten years and fighting for the past two. He thought I was too negative. I wasn’t sure what I thought of him anymore. We were considering counseling. One night someone’s poor mutt fell asleep under my car, and we ended up talking about our marriage with a veterinarian. I felt so bad about running over that dog.

Ben’s nickname in college was Happy, after a blond terrier mix from a TV show. For a long time I assumed someone like me needed a Happy around. Doglike loyalty. Someone decent and positive, who kept us in clean sheets. In college I’d been too down to leave my bed. But Ben dragged me to my classes and made me hot breakfasts every day. He introduced me to comfort. He made eggs Benedict. He arranged my life attractively on its plate.

I graduated, we married.

I loved research. Rabbits, baby foxes. Toads we put little backpacks with tracking devices on, as if sending them off to toad school. Then: chiroptera. I wasn’t smart. But my dumbness was what made me a good scientist. I was used to going slow, to laboring over a thing. Making up for, in precision, what smarter people arrived at quickly and without much effort.

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People were biblically awful to bats. Electrocuting them. Blowing them up with firecrackers. Shooting them with paintball guns. They terrified them, broke their little bones. They planted their wind turbines in the middle of ancient migratory routes. In Australia one child went around shooting hundreds of flying foxes from their trees with a BB gun until park rangers caught him. Doctors decided the kid was not a sociopath, just angry. Bats were mysterious, vegetal, mystical congregants, rooting themselves in caves no other being could use. They evolved their forearms and hands into wings. They flew around in the dark on these weightless, hollow bones. Over thousands of years they taught themselves to speak—they even had accents, regional dialects—and to see at night in a kind of speak-sight. They made such explosive noises in order to see that they had to shut off their normal hearing. They could deafen themselves, emit noises so powerful they could kill off one of their own senses.

Most people never saw bats, but they were everywhere. And we knew basically nothing about them. They learned quickly. Once you netted one, you'd never catch that bat again. We knew they wintered down South, but only because they vanished. You had to be in range for a tracking device to work, so it was nearly impossible to identify their migration routes or to figure out if they returned to the same places every year, like birds. It was because they were impossible to track that Dr. John was attempting to track them, to locate patterns where only ghosts of patterns existed. To listen and parse their speech. To see whether, by better understanding their routes and communication, we could save them from white-nose, a cold-loving fungus brought by cavers to the States that was working its way west, decimating bat populations.

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In the weeks we'd been in Borneo, I'd noticed Pool was slow too. He placed equipment like he was arranging a puzzle only he could see. Adjusted the echolocation recorders again and again. Wanted more time in each location so he could better understand their ways of speaking. He spoke slowly, but he listened quickly, his eyes running over what you were saying as it hung in the air. He was a young thirty, two years younger than me, but he'd already been inside over three hundred caves in Peru. Pool's favorite cave, he said, was an underwater limestone behemoth above the city of Chiclayo.

"The government used to drown dissidents there by leaving them inside at low tide," he said. "I'll take you sometime."

We'd gone to a hospital as soon as we knew something was wrong. The doctors came out with images of Pool and the others' stool samples under the microscope. Giardia. Clown faces stared back at us, two nuclei eyes and a mouth below. I remember how mocking they looked, how smiley and defiant. Wall-eyed, unhappy, smiling faces.

After that day, I often dreamt of those faces.

The giardia medication would make him too sick to work, so Pool chose to hold off until the trip was over. The other three reluctantly agreed to do the same. Dr. John approved. I knew nothing of other countries, except for these trips. I'd lived near an oil refinery in Rawlins, Wyoming, for all of my life, apart from college. The constant wind was known to blow cars off the road.

"You don't want to stay in the US?" I asked Pool one day. "Rawlins is so nice in the fall." Rawlins was not nice. But in the fall at least the wind was warm.

"My sister is pregnant," he said. "I will go back to help with the baby."

"Lots of work in Rawlins," I said.

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After the Sultanate we drove south into the badger's belly, out of Brunei and Malaysia and into the part of the country claimed by Indonesia. There it was more peaceful. The monkeys did not scream when we passed through. We were sleeping inside a wet cave in Danau Sentarum National Park. June was drought season, but there were afternoon thunderstorms every day. The immense lakes the area was famous for looked sunken and bleak, like homemade bread. Wrinkled eyes of water staring up at the sun. The others hiked out to camp under the stars, but Pool and Dr. John and I preferred sleeping under stalactites. Emaciated, thirsty tree roots reached down through the ceiling toward the pools of water. I loved caves—they were like breaths that went on and on. I felt more comfortable inside a damp cavern than I did in any house I'd ever lived.

Afternoons in Danau I'd wake from naps after long nights of netting. I'd lie half asleep and confuse the noise of the rainstorm pattering on top of my tent with the fat-eyed, grinning, tailed faces dripping around inside my head, making a *shhhh* sound. Nights, too, the giardia faces visited me, purple with dye, whiskered. Faces that gazed at me like they knew me. Those faces which had been sucked down through a throat into the stretchy, muscular bag of the stomach, into the small intestine where they'd taken root.

Normally I didn't like talking about my marriage, but when I felt tired or hungry or sick, I needed to hear out loud what I was doing. Talking to Dr.

John about my marriage was like talking to a cat. He'd register you were speaking, tilt his head and look fond of you. He found human relationships mysterious and uninteresting.

One evening the rainstorm went on for longer than usual.

"And he refuses to lock his car," I was saying. Ben's attitude about this both made me respect him, for his unwavering puppy-dog kindness, and bothered me, because he seemed to think trusting people not to steal showed good breeding. "He says if someone really wants his stuff, they can have it. But he doesn't mean that."

"Jessa, what's wrong with trusting people?" asked Pool.

"It's because he grew up wealthy," I said. "He leaves the house unlocked too." Everyone in Rawlins did, but still, this bothered me. Once Ben had bought a homeless man a thirty-dollar rhubarb pie. He'd brought him inside and told him to order what he wanted, and the man wanted a pie so expensive we would never have bought it for ourselves.

Every now and then there was a peaceful *whoosh* of cockroaches moving across a damp cave wall. Dr. John was combing his long white hair with his fingers. He dropped freed hairs into the small fire, and we watched them shrivel. He was entirely devoted to his work, a celebrated scientist and a celibate, socially anxious man. He ate Snickers bars and little else. Even when meeting with local bat scientists, Dr. John turned down offers of dinner in their homes. He preferred to meet in their offices and to leave immediately after. I always felt like an idiot around these local researchers, most of whom were men. All of us white, except for Pool. We barely noticed the locals, the people who sold us food or who populated the towns we drove through or who walked on the sides of the jungle roads. We couldn't tell if the languages they spoke changed or stayed the same as we moved through the island. It took us a week to figure out what the yellow liquid they were selling in plastic bottles on the sides of the roads was. Gasoline. Sometimes I didn't even know which of the three Borneo countries we were in.

Later, inside their tents, the two men looked like ghosts, just shapes against the nylon walls. Through the open flap of his tent Pool's bare back became visible. I could see every nob of his spine, which was not unattractive.

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One night after netting, Pool and I didn't want to go to sleep. We'd hiked six or seven miles through the jungle to reach a massive cave system. These caves were known for their limestone walls and their nests of petrified swiftlet saliva. The bird nests were a local delicacy. Of course humans

considered anything meticulously put together by the animal world worth bravely gagging down, me included. I liked the idea of caked ancient bird spit dissolving in my mouth.

Ben had strict beliefs about food. He thought you tasted whatever mood the person making it was in, which was why it was important to never make food in a hurry or while thinking about something else. Whenever I was in a hurry or distracted while making dinner, he said he could taste it in the meal. Eating a nest made by a mother as shelter for her children would repulse him.

“Would you ever eat a nest?” I asked Pool.

“Of course,” he said.

Ten or twenty chambers deep Pool and I found an odd beach we’d been hearing about. A strip of sand a hundred feet across near a small turquoise lake. The ceiling was as high as the refinery towers near Rawlins, brown craggy rock and sand the same color below. Some light came in from a hole above the small lake in a way that made the room seem darker than if there was no light at all, because it made you more aware of the shadows on the walls, the ominous shapes of boulder and mineral buildup and bizarre growth we could only graze with our headlamp beams. Moss grew on the rocks near the opening. We could make out trees and a white sky. Around the hole, where the light was, were remnants of nests that had been there for as long as I’d been alive. Someone must have reached inside the cave and pried them off the walls.

“How are you feeling?” I put a hand on Pool’s stomach. It looked soft, compared to the rest of his body, but felt hard. Like a pregnant woman’s belly. I watched the bones of his face move under his skin, his throat expand and contract.

“Want to stay here awhile?” I asked.

“It’s okay,” he said, a phrase he used in a confusing way. He laid back, and I buried one arm in the sand, then the other.

“How come your name is Pool?” I started on his feet.

Pool said there was some American show playing in his mother’s room at the hospital. She’d wanted to name him Paul. But when she wrote it down on his birth certificate she wasn’t sure how to spell it. Eventually he’d decided to just pronounce it Pool, instead of having a name that was spelled wrong.

We switched off our headlamps and let our eyes adjust. We lay without talking for a long time, Pool still buried. The bats returned from closing their mouths around thousands of mosquito bodies through the opening above the lake. They were watching, maybe, through their infrared dreams the red and orange heat of our torsos, our blue and purple arms and legs.

One thing Ben loved was dragging me the 130 miles to the closest Bed Bath and Beyond. “Want to do a Bed Bath and Beyond?” he’d say. I didn’t mind the drive. It was the destination I minded. When I got back from Borneo, Ben made me choose a new comforter and sheets and towels for us. He also selected pie crust protectors, cutlery with funny incisions, and a home brewing kit with airtight bottles that suffocated the beer. What disturbed me most was that the store was cave-like, but fluorescent, alarming, and unnecessary. Swallows often became trapped inside and would whap into things until they died.

On the ride home I thought about Pool. He was in Rawlins until we went into the field again. After Borneo, we’d hugged goodbye in the airport and he’d kissed me on the ear. I’d decided I’d call and ask to see him, even though I tried hard never to speak on the phone to anyone. Phone calls made me feel like I’d been kicked down a mine shaft with a pillow in my mouth. They made me sick. Still, a quick call. I could take Pool to my McDonald’s, to the old prison with triangles on the roof that looked like little teeth. But in Rawlins, Borneo felt like something I’d made up. I never called.

“Why, in fucking July, are we buying stuff that’s only meant to be used inside?” I said.

“God, you’re so negative,” said Ben, slowing down for an abandoned car on the shoulder. He was always telling me this. I watched a purple forehead vein pulse blood down into his face beneath precisely combed hair. “Plus, I’m the one buying it,” he said, in a jokey voice.

I smiled a giardia-faced smile at him.

“Negativity is toxic,” he said, getting serious. “You’re either traveling for work, or you’re here, being a downer.” I thought of the gorgeous caves, real ones, full of negative space, orange walls of whispering cockroaches.

“This negativity is why it’s so hard for you to be happy,” he said angrily. He seemed like the unhappy one to me.

I didn’t care if I ever fucked him again.

The following weekend was his birthday. I acquired cookie mix to assemble for him but never felt like making it. He’d accuse me of baking it in a hurry anyway. I ended up pouring the powder onto a plate so I could pick out all the chocolate chips instead, licking the sweet cakey powder off my fingers. There were big chips and little chips, and I ate them all.

On Saturday someone broke into Ben’s unlocked car while he was at work. If I didn’t know better, I would think it was me. Maybe it was. Maybe I was losing my mind. I woke late after staring into the friendly leer of the giardia. They’d been blinking at me for hours, observing my face, floating

around, bumping against each other like balloons. The next morning, I found his driver's license face down on the grass. He couldn't believe it. Whoever the thief was had stolen his silly designer sunglasses, crushed the bobbing pink solar flower that used to wag happily on his dash. They'd torn the hula skirt off his fat ukulele man, revealing a smooth, sexless crotch.

"At least they left me my license," he said, cheerfully dismayed. He'd had maybe a few hundred in cash in his wallet. He wasn't sure. It was incredible to me that he'd left that amount of money inside what was basically a series of metal and plastic compartments anyone, literally anyone, could open and close.

After a week of downtime and resting, of uneasy silences and easy fights, I left a lit lamp tipped onto our new comforter for so long it made an ugly smell. Burned a hole right through it. The first thought that occurred to me: glory hole. For some reason I made myself picture sucking his dick through the comforter. I gathered it up in my arms and left the house. It felt like a big, injured animal. I drove around Rawlins with it in my lap, feeling joyful and unhinged. This was a deluxe way to drive. I left the windows down and let the warm wind blow through the truck. I headed uptown to the Frontier Prison, a sweet old turreted structure that reminded me of a castle. The few trees here grew at an angle, as if trying to fight the wind. I liked the feeling of blankness all around, the open space under a quickly shifting sky. You could see so far in every direction that sometimes half the sky would go dark and the other half would remain bright blue, like it couldn't make up its mind. Space like someone's mouth hanging open, space like a big dusty cave, where every word you said was muffled. One good thing about Ben was that he loved this kind of space too. Its blankness comforted him. I wondered, staring at the empty prison's cute teeth, whether my blankness as a person, my slowness, was something he thought he liked and slowly found out he didn't.

Later, I headed to the twenty-four-hour McDonald's, where only out-of-staters went. I spent six hours there, eating order after order of awful, perfect fries. In McDonald's I felt like a good person.

I left the comforter on the hood of a double-parked rusted-out truck on which someone had scrawled *Thanks, ass*. I wasn't a good wife. I wasn't even a decent one. Maybe Ben was right. Maybe I was negative and unhappy. But I didn't think so. I wondered if I could give up the only long-term relationship I'd ever had. If I'd end up zonked out and alone like my mother, getting loaded and calling Panda Express or Domino's or Little Caesar's, asking for long-gone Randy or Tim or Jimmer, calling home phones of men who for years had been married or dead or clean.

One morning Dr. John drove up in his black Tacoma, a truck that rattled nervously. It seemed generally anxious with what it was put on this earth to do: transport our bodies at speeds we'd never reach on our own. We were heading to the northeastern corner of the state. Just the three of us this time. Pool was lying down in the back seat. I sat up front with Dr. John.

"Treatment didn't work?" I asked.

Wrong. It had worked too well, was the problem, Pool told us. In addition to the parasite, the medicine obliterated every microbe in his stomach. Now he couldn't digest anything. He'd probably be lactose intolerant for months. Everything he ate he shat out.

"You look terrible," I said. But he didn't. His face was more handsome to me than before. Chlorine-blue eyes. Wholesome yet whittled, like he'd summited some deathly mountain, or wintered in Alaskan caves on bear fat. Hollows around his orbital sockets, under his zygomatics, on his temples, even his head shrinking where it could.

"I feel terrible," said Pool. He sat up and stuffed a Snickers wrapper he'd found down the back of my shirt. I reached my arms around the side of my headrest, catching both of Pool's wrists. Pool tried to free his wrists from my grip, pulling me roughly back against my seat. I was so turned on I couldn't speak.

Dr. John started telling us about Devil's Tower. "The explorer who discovered it misunderstood the Indian name. He mistranslated it to Bad God's Tower," said Dr. John.

"Bat Gods Tower," I said.

"Mm," said Pool.

"Devil's Tower, for short. Mato Tipila is its real name," said Dr. John.

We passed a young buck lying on the side of the road, then an adult doe.

"Watch for deer," Dr. John said to himself. When we arrived we stood for a while at the edge of a field before setting up our tents. The monument loomed above us.

I took my time setting up the nets, tying guy wires, testing tension, pulling up stakes, taking everything apart, and moving it all a few feet to the left, for an angle that would be the same but better in some way I could not name. It took years for me to reach this feeling. To gain access to the imperceptible geometries nets needed. I watched the panels shimmer in the dusk. I made myself put them up and take them down until something settled inside me and I became calm again. Usually when I netted I felt dreamy and tired. Missing Ben, the comforting aspects of him. That night I did not miss Ben at all. Dr. John stayed in his tent going through logbooks. I could hear him unwrapping a Snickers. Pool and I sat on a tarp watching

stars twitch in the sky, waiting for chunks of living matter to wobble in the nets until we freed them.

Pool had a tiny mole at the corner of one eye, a scar line through one of his eyebrows where the hair didn't grow. I could smell the dried sweat on him, which I couldn't remember smelling on Ben for a long time. It smelled good. Pool kissed me. An owl we'd seen make several unsuccessful dives that night flopped wearily back onto his branch and watched us with his fixed-socket eyes.

Pool unzipped my jacket and reached under my shirt. "Harmless serotonin," he said. He held up one of my breasts, as if giving it a rest from a long day of hanging off my body. I watched for the plastic incisor, and even in the dark it had a different gleam to it than the rest of his teeth. Tongues out, bats swooped over the river, lapping water like dogs. After a while I zipped up my jacket. The owl left for the tough work of lifting small mammals off the ground and transporting them inside himself.

There was no light pollution for miles and miles, and the Milky Way was this ghostly smear. This made me feel small, like I should call Ben and apologize for the comforter, but I didn't. I always got this sharp pang of hunger when I saw the Milky Way, the same stomach-clench I had while setting up nets and waiting to see what flew into them.

The last bat of the night was a young silver-hair. Pool held her in one gloved hand and detangled her with the ungloved hand. Rabies was not a major concern in the field, not with healthy bats, and the gloves got in the way. We measured her tragus and looked at her tail. Pool shaved a patch on the back of her neck, and I deposited a tiny jewel of surgical glue. We pressed a tracking device the size of a grain of rice to the glue. He held her up in the direction of the tower and kissed his own hand. She hung onto his finger with her little fingers. He peeled them off one by one.

We watched her whisk away. I asked if he missed his sister and the rest of his family.

"It's okay," he said.

We talked about other names our parents had for us. Mine were Brittanie, Krystal, and Miseen, one s, two e's. His were Bruce, Billy, and Sylvester. His mom had watched a lot of American soaps while pregnant. I didn't ask what his sister's name was, and he didn't offer it. We didn't sleep together that night, and he didn't touch me for the next week.

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After Devil's Tower we went to Yellowstone to study maternity nests near the place the body of a young ranger had been found mauled by a bear. Pleading yet angry letters from Ben arrived, always on ugly, optimistic

stationery, neatly written but with my address scrawled on the envelope. I dropped them in a bear-safe trash bin, then pulled them out and kept them in a tent pocket.

One night we sat on stumps and drank whiskey, and Pool listed from memory the types of bats in Peru. It was so bright we hadn't bothered starting a fire. "Little big-eared bat, lesser bulldog bat, greater bulldog bat, blue-eared bat. Silver-tipped myotis. Spix's disc-winged bat, broad-toothed tailless bat, little black serotine. Lesser ghost bat, greater ghost bat, pale-faced bat, naked-backed bat. Minor long-nosed bat." I watched the way his chapped lips moved over his grayish tooth and tried to memorize the names. His arms were long and thin, his hands larger in comparison. He looked like he was wearing oven mitts.

"Bidentate yellow-shouldered bat," Pool went on. "Brazilian brown bat. Argentine brown bat, Western mastiff bat, Incan little mastiff bat. Hairy-legged myotis. Hoary bat, desert red bat, Cinnamon dog-faced bat. Dwarf bonneted bat, white-winged vampire bat, common vampire bat, orange nectar bat, velvety fruit-eating bat."

"You missed at least half," said Dr. John, made more social by the whiskey but not far from retiring to his tent and a Snickers, which he kept in there despite the bears. The man couldn't present his work at a conference or attend happy hour without taking Valium, but he could list over a thousand species of bats by country or size or ear type.

"I wasn't trying to name them all," said Pool.

When Dr. John finally retired to his tent an hour later, he was humming, happy with the day's figures.

I don't know what else we talked about. That night I slept in Pool's tent, on a pillow with a T-shirt for a pillowcase. There was something about a man's chest, the blood radiating heat inside, the distracting heartbeat when I pressed my face to it, trying to focus on his fingers inside me. My period hadn't quite ended, but I didn't feel the need to tell him. "Is this okay?" he kept asking. He knew it was. He went limp halfway through but did not apologize like Ben did, which I'd always found pathetic and repulsive. Pool made me come harder than I had in years. In the middle of the night he got hard again and pressed against me and didn't ask if it was okay.

The next morning his fingers were brown with blood. His shirt pillowcase had streaks on it, like some cipher had lifted our heads to write a message while we slept. If Dr. John noticed I'd slept in Pool's tent, he didn't say anything. He might not even have understood why I'd slept there, if he had noticed.

Over the next week I slept in Pool's tent every night, not bothering to set up my own. We liked scraping our feet against the walls, liked the noise they made on the nylon.

One afternoon I became very drunk. I woke in the dark to Pool having sex with me in his tent. He was moving my legs so that he could enter me from behind, and I might have slept through it had he not bitten my shoulder so hard it broke skin. In the morning he apologized and showed me the beginnings of a pattern he was finding in the echolocation data.

The rest of the trip passed quickly. The whole time I felt anxious, a feeling which lived in the stomach. It was like always being on the phone. I couldn't help narrating what was happening to myself. I was sick of my voice. We visited small caves near remote towns, bumped around in our minibus. In Maudlow we met a colossal elderly woman who had tattooed every person in town. In her yard was a hand-painted sign on nailed-together planks that read: *Prayer is the best way to reach the Lord. Trespassing is faster.*

She made permanent marks on the bodies of people she knew best, of those she'd never met before, of strangers who visited from all over the world so she could tattoo them. She'd covered every part of her big body she could reach, including her face. Her markings were so horrifying and brilliant I could not look away. She had a grin that cracked open her face, elegantly callused hands. Flesh tightly strapped to her. Her neighbors conveyed that she ate nothing, never hungered, just drank tea visitors brought her in exchange for their markings. Pool wanted some type of ancient symbol on his pectoral muscle that looked like a millipede, but he chickened out.

I asked her to select something for me on the back of my neck, on top of my cervical spine. It felt incredible, the pinpoint of pain in such precise, tiny locations, like some insect was picking its way across my skin. While she was administering the ink, I pressed my fingers into the bones in my palms. I knew not to look when it was finished, that it was best not to see what she had chosen for me. I only pretended to check what it looked like in the mirror she held out. A fear grew in me that what she'd marked would resemble, to me, the parasites' faces, even if this wasn't what everyone else saw.

The last week in the field my whole body ached. Mornings I woke with my cheek sticking to Pool's chest. I was careful never to fully look at the tattoo the old woman gave me. I didn't have to be careful, because we were camping, but I approached with caution even mildly reflective surfaces. The Jeep. Ponds. Dr. John's silver coffee container, camp bathrooms with an occasional flake of mirror glued onto the wall. I had the feeling that at any time I could be shown the back of my neck against my will.

"Rawlins is nice in the fall," I said. Pool, Dr. John, and I were discussing

plans for our final day.

“You already told me that,” Pool said.

“You could come back after you see the baby,” I said.

“It’s okay,” he said. I yawned, and when he put his finger in my mouth like he usually did, I bit it, hard. “Hey!” said Pool.

“We might need you,” said Dr. John.

Setting up the nets began to tire me. It was no longer calming, getting the angles right. Whatever I’d been gaining access to before was eluding me. Or no longer there. I kept tangling them in the terrible invasive bushes that were everywhere here, crawling up trees and choking the undergrowth. I began to accept Pool’s offers of help. I tied the guy wires, and he companionably held things I wanted him to hold, nothing to do with the net structure itself, things like stakes or the bags we kept the nets in. I would let him help me take things down if I needed to move them. He’d admire the sheen of the nylon mesh in the dark. We’d observe the wind flowing through the shelves, the horizontally strung lines that created the voluminous pockets, him with satisfaction, me with dread. Soon Pool was doing most of it, badly. The tension was all off, the panels crooked. “Is this okay?” he’d ask. He was very careful. And I was telling him they looked good. What did it matter? It didn’t matter. We caught fewer bats, tore one of the expensive panels on a bush. “What’s wrong?” he kept asking.

It was the caves and the bats. I’d used them all up.