

ENVELOPED

Here is my envelope, purpled and pollened, stained by my tongue. This is my beginning: I came too late and stayed too long. The errata slip laid in, I continue to err. I failed to plant my plot in our park's lake garden. I didn't want to see tomatoes sunworn. Our Taurus five-chambered revolver on my desk rests dusty and *Sorry kid, your moola's no good here*, Sid says, smiling from his red leather booth in the shadow. Somewhere from the midst of an unrecallable afternoon, when the dead judge's rambler roses lifted their heads and dangled over the privet, a moan, lovely as steam twisting from the street, a moon moan but of pain, drifts in, or seems to drift, dreamy as ashes, real as a floor with a hole drawn into its surface. A door closes softly, but with a wooden, final click. The scarlet sundown grows itself along my skin above my shins. Soon the clouds will be like I was, far away from the brilliant end of the sky. The bumblebee colony seems like an idea of pink in the few trees I've planted here. I slow my cells with sun, and darken too. The wild divisions crawl onto my knees around the scars.

FIRST DREAM ABOUT MY FATHER AFTER HEARING OF HIS DEATH

I was driving the '76 Ford F-250 Ranger 4x4 with a camper that my ex-father-in-law sold me for one hundred dollars when I flew out and drove it home from San Diego to Tuscaloosa in 1995. It was painted metallic copper over the original pale yellow. I arrived and drove into the space in the driveway meant for parking. It was dark but not dark outside. The truck was overheated and when I turned off the engine steam began to trickle up from the hood. I got out and was going to open the hood but I knew it was too hot to touch and I could not find a red rag. My father I saw through the plate glass window was walking down the hall toward me, naked, hairy, darkly olive-skinned, and much younger than he was when he died, more like my age, which was in February, also the month of his birth. He looked down at the floor as he strode and his shoulders slumped. His wife Wanda appeared next to me with one of my sisters but she was not my sister she was some kid who came up to me in 1991 at the beach in Panama City and asked me how old I was because she was hoping I was really young, which I wasn't, but without her granny glasses. Her freckled companion looked at me intently with confusion. I was wearing a white long-sleeved shirt and torn jeans and a gray suede Stevie Ray Vaughn hat with a buffalo nickel woven into the braided band that I bought at a Renaissance fair and sunglasses because I was darkly tanned and sunburned and the child molester I was living with but didn't know about yet was in the hotel room with her four-year-old daughter, napping. All I knew then was that I wanted to walk on the beach by myself. All I knew later was what no one else knew except her: that it wasn't me. Until a long night in a Charleston hotel room when suddenly things came clear, even my best friend suspected me. I didn't know it but I didn't blame him at all. That's how it began to come clear. *She* never suspected me. The sand in Charleston was black. Scylla swallowed seawater and puked something day-glo pink in the German sports wagon. Wanda had a knowing look in her eye, like she did on the king-sized bed in their bedroom that day while we did cocaine on the bed while she sat crisscross applesauce in her panties and the light came through the floor-to-ceiling wall of glass panels and told me about the three-ways my mother used to have with my father and Jim Echoes, who died of a brain aneurism one day just like that as he was walking out the door of his apartment. He fell off the stoop into the bushes. That was in 1969, when the Braves lost to the Mets and I

had already found the polaroids by then, high in the guest room closet in a box. My grandparents were staying there, had been called and told about the cocaine and they had come from Columbus but believed that Wanda and I were in the bedroom discussing how best to get my father off the cocaine. I had told him, *Just give it to me to hold*, and he had laughed and I had seen the gold on his tooth, and he was right, I would have done the cocaine, not hidden it. Wanda and the sister disappear and my father is standing next to me beside the truck. It is a repetition. We slowly, almost formally, embrace, kiss; something of little importance is said; it is enough to be there in the darkness that was not yet dark.