

## ROSE LANE FARM

Each morning, the Hing Ta Chinese Restaurant serves fried dumplings in a field of purple and white flowered tobacco: just next to where Joe Basset keeps his pet pig. Big trucks, overflowing with produce and Swedish furniture, fire their fog horns when the little boy waves from under the overpass - he is plowing his daddy's fields in the Chick-Fil-A parking lot: one mule in the morning, one mule at night. In wide-brim hats and yellow scarves, the boy scouts take a record breaking fourteen mile hike around the big Wal-Mart shopping center, stopping for root beers at Lattie's Grocery before rushing home to chop wood for the stove. At Red Oak High School, with the bases loaded, one player makes a barehanded catch deep in the corn, while another is stopped short by a chain-link fence with corporate sponsorship - a Hardee's Grand Slam home run. In a cul-de-sac forest of single-family homes, Old Man Wilkins takes measurements along the edge of his machete, calculating the price of lumber in his head. The lane of rose bushes that Mama planted leads right up to the porch of the new Mexican restaurant, where your grandfather sits and smokes Dunhill tobacco from the pipe he gave up fifty years ago, blowing smoke rings to make you laugh. "I'm the only one who remembers it," he tells you, "There's no one else left."

## PLAYER PIANO

My mother was a player piano - a pneumatic pianola.

At night she would softly unwind long scrolls of lullabies. On rainy days she would pluck out rolled up cylinders of show tunes while I capered about the house.

On Sundays, we would put on performances. She would operate the music and I would sing or dance, and always, as a comedic finale, I'd put a feather in my cap and pretend to pound out Yankee Doodle. We did this so often that now I don't have to pretend - I really can play Yankee Doodle. I just close my eyes and imagine that each key is anticipating the slightest tap of my fingers.

As it turns out, my mother was exactly one half-step out of tune. I didn't learn this until years later, when my wife pointed out that I was singing off-key. Now I sing a half-step flat, so as not to stand out.

It occurs to me that we all betray our mothers, just so.

## BITTER

“Eat your acorns!” the mothers say, but the kits don’t listen. “Store your acorns!” the old ones say, but the kits don’t heed them. Instead, they leap gracefully into open dumpsters where winter’s famine never comes. They eat bread. They eat meat. They eat cold potatoes, fried in oil. They play tag with their neighbors from two trees over - the cute ones with the bushy tails. They drink water from the dripping hose. They lay in the sun on the wooden deck, soft bellies brazen to the sky. The mothers say that the kits will get fat and slow for when the dog comes. When the dog comes, the old ones say, the kits will get eaten because they can’t climb fast enough. But all the dogs are on leashes here. There’s nothing to be afraid of. High up in the tallest branches, as far from the ground as the oaks will let them go, the mothers chitter disapproval, while the old ones stuff their cheeks full of acorns - bitter with resentment.

## THERAPY

One day, your grandfather will tell the story of your grandmother's death over and over again. He will use all the same words, with the exact same intonation. He will explain how he found her collapsed in the hallway. He will explain how she "soiled herself, unfortunately." You will be embarrassed at this. Your father's cousin will whisper that this recounting is "therapeutic." She will say this each time he repeats the story, like an Amen. Like, The End. She collapsed. Amen. There was nothing I could do. Amen. She had soiled herself, unfortunately. The End. "This was therapeutic for him. I think it is therapeutic for him."

Therapeutic. For Him. Therapeutic. Form. Therapeutical Forum. The Forum of Therapeutics. A funny thing happened on the way to Therap Eutic. Formless...the Rape U Tic! Ther/ap/eu/tic. Thera, it is peutic for him, I think. Think - it was this for him. Thus, this. For him, therapeutic: formed -> foreign -> forlorn. Always, it will be this for him.