

I began the day having just uttered the words, “I am not looning up on claw,” and feeling angry as a result of my disposition. It was as if I knew indisputably that I would never loon up “on claw” or any other substance that would threaten whatever in that dream was the opposite of *looning up*—I knew this, but it seemed I had to make my stance clear anyway. I was angry and thought I should go strictly decaf that morning, which had to be retrieved from the depths of the cabinet. It had been a week of procuring beans from all the continents, minus that very small one. It wasn’t long before I realized I’d somehow looned up on decaf, though decaf was designed expressly to avoid such a thing. How confusing to have found yourself shaking as you brought a large mug of decaf to your lips. How ridiculous.

I began the day trying to imagine a suitable place for an academic to attend a vacation; it had been a long time since I was a domestic tourist, and because it was only a long weekend over which I would travel, my destination needed to be in close proximity to where I lived. It turned out that I was already planning to be away, so I just did what I was planning to do, which was travel to Hilton Head Island, South Carolina, with my family, and by this I did not mean my husband and children, but rather my mother and two sisters. It was our first family trip in twenty-one years—it had taken that long for them to recover from the last time they vacationed with me. The scene, those twenty-one years ago, had not been pretty. It was an unfortunate period in my life where I seemed to have time only for Ayn Rand, a condition that left me sitting in the blazing sun for hours reading *The Fountainhead*, oblivious to all other forms of engagement. It wasn't just decided that we'd do this thing; we had to assess it as a family. After crunching the numbers—the years that had passed since that trip, the number of mood swings I'd had per day, now versus then, etc.—we determined that not only had I become far more companionable

as a full-fledged woman-loving adult (V. thought my then-solemnity had had something to do with repressed sexuality), but also we discovered that somehow we'd all gotten old. So, we went and were all fat, or if not fat before we arrived, definitely fat upon our departure. Gwen, who'd been thirteen at the time of that long-ago trip, had now become everybody's captain. We did what she said do and only a short while after she said do it. I found that I liked to be bossed around in resort conditions: you can be sunning on the beach, drifting in and out of sleep, and at any moment the tall robust captain might stand over you and command you to do something. It was exhilarating to be told it was time to dress for lunch or that I needed to put away the Snickers. You might see how she was a government worker. However, the Snickers seemed to want to spend all their time with me. This was surprising, as we hadn't been close for years. But I ate them only when I was in the vicinity of the captain. She supplied the Snickers, and then at random times of the day tried to retrieve them from me. It was easy to eat so many Snickers that you put yourself to sleep as you stared out at the ocean from the oceanfront balcony. It was easy to fool yourself into believing you were eating Snickers when in fact you were eating rib eye and mashed potatoes. Soon I began to eat only these items and everything slowed—

my speaking voice, my bowels. It became a problem. No one could understand me. It was more than that my mouth was full. It was that I was no longer digesting my food. I couldn't get enough oxygen to form words. This was okay, in the end, because all I really wanted to say was, "How can Snickers be this good?" It was hot on the island.

I began the day thinking that writing was becoming a thing of the past as my fondness for Rollerblading now was, though in my time of writing and my time of Rollerblading—and these did sometimes overlap—I was far better at the former than the latter. I was far better at writing than I was at Rollerblading, and for the most part considered them vastly different. However, when they departed my life, they did so identically, robbing me of the ability—in retrospect—of remembering separately when I wrote and when I Rollerbladed. You were going to say that writing was for birds flying when suddenly a feeling came over you. Someone beautiful was talking about your sentences. It felt like rain. Things were starting to line up: history was speaking, which hardly ever happened to me. It was saying I had arrived at a moment where I could put writing down and walk away from it. I remembered the ache in my mouth when I ran into the back of that pickup truck. I was alone in a parking lot and had already given up too much—too much to brake, too much to swerve. I gave up most in my mouth, where a tooth chipped and I bit through my lip. I gave up most in going to the

hospital. The language I had accumulated confused me, and slamming into the truck had cut my knees. I didn't know how to explain myself to the medic, but soon I began writing poems. In the ensuing years, the poems became prose, and I had written my last of it. Finally, I was done.

I began the day trying to understand how the phrase *slam dunk* functioned when uttered by the president of the university at which I was employed, who was, in that moment, explaining how I would soon be dis-employed from that university and pulling from her gallery of expressions the phrase *slam dunk* to drive the point home. The reasons for my dismissal were cloaked in a mysterious mystery (as if we were in a double tunnel), and I was trying to find a clearing. But she'd said "slam dunk" then relayed a story about her life, which, I believed, was intended to place us face-to-face in a rolled-up-sleeves kind of way, where she could say, "slam dunk," and I could lower my head with humility. I thought she might have been writing fiction, because the whole air of why I was there was that she knew more about fiction than I did, as did the provost and some other men at the university level, so "slam dunk," which she confessed I was not, was an opening to some novel she was writing. "Were you a slam dunk," a passage in the novel read, "it would be easier for me to see you and to listen to you, but I am tall and the wind is blowing through my hair. In fact, only something loud, something that would crash down on this glass, that

would replicate one hand emphatically putting the situation into a clearly defined hole such that there was no possibility of mistaking anywhere and in any light that (a) there was a ball and (b) a hand that delivered it and (c) something gained from the ball delivered—with violence—through a hole that stood alone and had arrows pointing the way . . .” And so the president’s novel continued beyond the point of our meeting, into the cycle of my sleep, clanging through my dreams.