

My mother kept a prayer garden in the backyard. Each morning before dawn, before the light ushered in the demands of day, she woke and sat next to the concrete birdbath carried from house to house to house, and the flowers planted and pruned each season. Roses, violas, butterfly weed. She didn't wear slippers or shoes, just bare-foot, skin to concrete, cool and damp in the early Houston hours. The morning after she didn't come home I find a baby sparrow in the garden next to the birdbath, under the pine tree. If I can nurse the bird back to health my mother will be OK. I make a home for the bird in a shoebox, cut grapes for it to eat, and keep it on my bedside table for two nights.

Daniel Kahneman, Nobel Prize winner in Economics for his work with Amos Tversky on decision making, discusses the natural human tendency to find causality in the world: *a large event is supposed to have consequences, and consequences need causes to explain them*. Somehow causes bring meaning. If we can find causes or intentions then it helps to understand the place from where the effect was born.

In 1839, the anatomist Matthias Jakob Schleiden and Theodor Schwann formulated the now ubiquitously accepted fact of cell theory. The theory is composed of three basic precepts: First, all living organisms are made of cells (I am you and you are me). Second, the cell is the basic unit of life (Distilled to form, we are the same). Third, all cells are generated by other pre-existing living cells (Those before to those after).

1. I am new: an hour comes and opens me into the dark like a stiff, knotted bud of myrtle

Just a year earlier the first telegram in the United States was sent across two miles of wire in New Jersey. Congress saw the potential for this new form of communication and allocated \$30,000 to Samuel Morse. A line was laid from the old Supreme Court chamber in Washington D.C. to the Mt. Clare Train Depot in Baltimore. On May 24, 1844, while Congress watched, Morse used his code of dashes and dots to send a message to Alfred Vail in Baltimore. Vail received the message, decoded it, and sent it back to the Capitol chamber waiting in silence. Morse read aloud, *What hath God wrought?* The message, suggested by Annie Ellsworth, the daughter of a friend of Morse, is taken from Numbers 23:23. The International Standard Version is the only translation that poses *What hath God wrought* as a question. The King James uses an exclamation mark and the Douay- Rheims a period. The Holman Christian Standard reads *What great things God has done!* and the International Standard translates the verse as, *What has God accomplished?*

ii I only trace my mapping by the slender branches of elm

The telegraph lines were installed across the country next to the railroads. And 150 years later fiber optic cables for high speed internet are laid along the same routes. America is connected by lines—rail lines, telegraph lines, telephone lines, internet lines—all drawn across for communication. All for intention of connection, to be more. Railroad historian and photographer, Lucius Beebe is quoted as saying, *It is no accident of circumstance that the most beautiful devisings and artifacts of American record have all been associated with motion and movement, the transport of people and things going somewhere else.* The transport of ideas and thoughts sent from one location to another.

I smell her in random places. It happens more in the first years after, in gas stations or on the streets of foreign cities. But mostly in grocery stores. It's her perfume. I follow the unsuspecting women up and down the aisles, stopping when they stop, moving when they move. Following like I also need apples and milk. Silently inhaling as if I might be able to breathe her into existence from the place she disappeared. Once, I asked a woman in front of me what perfume she was wearing. She looked up and answered like I knew she would, *Elixer*.

That's what my mom wore, I said.

my passing has not come