

Spirit of the Water Bear

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with drawings by Claire Pentecost

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Juni was happy to be out: out of school for the summer, out in the real world taking action, and *outside*, her favorite place to be.

She and Portia leaned on the hood of her aunt Rosa's dust-colored Honda— dust-colored and usually dust-covered, as Rosa lamented trying to keep it shiny in this town built on sand. They'd driven instead of riding bikes, because Portia had gotten her license and Rosa said she could take the car and they just had to get in the car, the two of them, and drive away. They could've gone anywhere. They came to the port to demonstrate against the building of a gas pipeline terminal in Three Rivers.

"Everyone here looks really old." Portia was in a mood, which wasn't unusual. Kids who didn't know her thought Portia was high-and-mighty but that was because her cheekbones were just the beginning of her beauty and she carried herself like a princess. She had just gotten back from a school year with her dad and stepmother way up north and far from any ocean in the huge city of Chicago where she'd done ballet five days a week.

Juni wasn't sure how Portia felt about their hometown now but put off her worries about this just like she put off acknowledging Portia's mood. "This is a protest Portia. It's always like, old hippies."

"I went to anti-police violence demos in Chicago. They have a lot more people our age."

"And their moms!" Juni reminded her.

Portia's face crashed. "The poor moms."

Juni was sorry she'd brought them up. Her own mom had a son to worry about, and now for different reasons.

Her eyes fell on a woman at the edge of the gathering crowd who greeted a friend and hugged, tipping from side to side. The woman looked similar to her mom in age and curviness. On the back of her faded orange hoodie, two hearts linked together in a web of ornamented lines that spelled out "Lifelines not Pipelines." This only brought her brother Titus

more painfully to Juni's mind. There was no lifeline for his disease; all they could do was love him as he lost the use of his muscles.

Juni looked away, looked for the Loblolly River, but the river was lower than the parking lot, and the scattered people and cars blocked the view. She knew it was there, because most of the decaying pavement below her feet was covered in sand that the river had brought all the way up here during last years' unprecedented storms. Nowadays, if a high tide coincided with a full moon or with hardy winds from the southeast, the Loblolly just might rise and spread another layer of sand over the lot.

A woman nearby wore a cap with a skirt around the back to shield her neck from the sun. Portia shook her head at the fashions people would stoop to. "Why do only old hippies care about global warming? They're probably gonna die before it gets really bad."

"First of all," Juni started one of her numbered lists, "it's already bad. And second, these people have been protesting all their lives about one thing after another. To them, this is doing something about the crazy mess."

"You say that like it's not really doing something about it."

"We have to try, Portia!" Juni pushed away from the car to face her cousin. Her irises were such a dark blue, they looked black, or maybe the pupils were huge with outrage. "I mean what if nobody made any noise about all the criminal activities of the jerks in power. That would be super scary. Really, imagine everybody just sucking that up." She waited. A flicker in her face showed the effort she made to give Portia time to imagine such a disastrous condition.

She backed off and leaned again beside Portia. "Three, it would mean everyone has just given up."

"Maybe they have," Portia mumbled. "This crowd is pathetic. If you could call it a crowd."

In the five Saturdays Juni had come to the pipeline protests, she had thought there were more people there. Maybe because she'd been inside the cluster of concerned citizens and

not out on the edge of the lot looking at them through Portia's eyes.

"Look Portia, there's a friend of my sister's so that would mean around thirty years old."

"Spring chicken."

Juni examined the crowd more closely. To her the crowd represented a decent variety of ages and walks of life, mostly white, but some were people of color. She always recognized a few folks from around town. She saw people who worked at the clinic with her mom, and a young man she had met at the Buddhist place where her dad was caretaker. Mr. Jaegggers, the teller at the bank, was there with two of his kids.

"Look at that troupe in matching t-shirts." Juni couldn't make out what the shirts said. "See them? Blue? Didn't some of them just graduate from Tullahoma?"

"I wasn't here."

"Oh, Por—Wait a minute, what the hell is that?" Juni scrambled up onto the car's hood. Down on the left, near the small guardhouse at the gate to the port, was a group of what looked like very large and very padded robots. "Are those cops?"

"Where?"

"Over there. They're in all kinds of black padding. Their helmets are huge and black and you can't see their faces. They look like football players at a funeral."

Portia was about to join Juni on the hood but Juni yelled out to someone in the crowd. "Hey, Pete!"

A very big guy standing in a knot of people clapped his hand on a companion's shoulder before making a beeline toward them. He wore overalls and his sandy hair stuck out around the edges of a John Deere gimme cap. "Hi, Juni, who's this?"

Juni jumped down from the hood. "My cousin, Portia. Portia, this is Pete Pettigrew. He's one of the organizers. He worked against the Keystone pipeline too. But what's up with the bionic police?"

"In Chicago we call them robocops." Portia folded her arms across her chest, owning her worldly experience.

Pete turned to search for the police. “Robocops. That’s funny.”

“Is it?” said Juni. “I think it’s frightful.”

“I don’t know why they’re here.” Pete glanced at Portia then at Juni then peered over heads at the cops. “It could mean they expect trouble...”

“Why would they expect trouble?” Juni asked.

“Maybe our demands are making somebody uncomfortable. Maybe this a good sign.”

“Well, have you seen them before,” Juni persisted, “like at other pipeline protests?”

Pete lowered his gaze to her face without moving his head. This made him look sneaky which was so out of character for Pete that Juni almost laughed. “I can’t imagine they’re going to trounce us. We haven’t damaged any property these past Saturdays or even threatened to.”

“Seems like bringing out the cannons for a cloud of mosquitoes,” quipped Portia.

“I will not take offense that you call us mosquitos!” Pete’s laugh was squeaky.

Portia was laughing too. Juni changed the subject. “Have you seen any press?”

“Just cell phones so far. I posted a press release and called the *Tribune*.” Pete waved to a woman carrying a bundle of signs. He took two from her as she approached. “Here you go. I’m so glad you’re here, Portia. I hope we’ll be seeing you out here with Juni Saturday mornings.”

Portia looked at her cousin. “Juni comes every Saturday?”

“I’d say we’ve started to expect her.”

“I never know what to expect from her.”

Juni fluttered her poster. “Uh-hunh, you and your big city expertise will be quite the asset here in Three Rivers.”

Pete nodded. “This summer is crucial. We need to create awareness before the public hearing in September. Every body counts.”

“What, will we be doing a body count?” Portia feigned alarm.

Pete laughed a little bit like someone imitating a donkey. “We just want to get a sense of how many people show up, but don’t you worry, it’s not a war! Not much really happens here.” As he squinted at the police still huddled together near the port entrance, his cell phone vibrated. “Come on ladies, let’s get out there with the masses.” He answered his phone and walked back into the crowd.

Portia looked at the printed, laminated sign in her hand.

Three Rivers Port Terminal:

TERMINAL

and on the other side:

SURE, WE CAN HAVE IT ALL!
BUT OUR CHILDREN GET NOTHING

“Yeah,” Juni said, “let’s stop being bystanders with a criticism for every effort made by the last good people in the county.”

“Give me a break,” Portia moaned. “I swear you’re always gaming some language for the paper.”

It was true. Since Juni had made the school newspaper, she’d taken to making a running commentary on their lives. “But that’s a good thing, right? We have to publicize any resistance to these mendacious energy companies. Even if this is a lame event, we have to write it up, so other people who are freaking can see they aren’t alone.”

“For starters, you can’t use the word ‘lame’ anymore for things that are pitiful, because some people really are lame. And ‘mendacious?’”

“Yes, mendacious! Remember the old guy in *Cat on a Hot Tin Roof*? He was always yelling about mendacity. That would be dishonesty!”

“I know what it means, Juni.”

“Well, they lie. They know that burning oil and gas causes global warming. We’re all cats on a hot roof. And I’m about to have heatstroke. Those cops must have air conditioning in their armor.”

The girls had ambled into the crowd of people holding signs and were talking over the chanting: “Whose earth? Our earth!”

Juni raised her voice, adding her own words. “Whose earth! Our earth! Whose earth! Your earth! Whose earth! Turtles’ earth! Everybody’s earth! Everybody’s earth!”

Portia hesitated. She lifted her sign higher, thrust it in time with the chant. Juni watched her cousin from the corner of her eye. Everybody’s earth. Enough to share and be peaceful about.

“Juni,” Portia raised her voice above the din. “Your protesters need to get on the same page! Half of them are chanting something else.”

Juni shrugged. “Stop being so hard on us! At least everybody’s yelling.”

“Hold up!” Portia grabbed Juni’s arm. “Just stop, Juni, listen!”

Juni focused her ears on the words in the air. Behind the mix of shouts near her, there was a strong chorus of deep voices.

“WHOSE JOBS? OUR JOBS!” She couldn’t locate them.

There was a quick *pop*, then another.

“Was that a gun?” Juni grabbed Portia by the arm.

They bent down together reflexively. The people around them crouched, a few dropped to the ground. Another *pop*. People yipped in alarm. Something whizzed in the air and people ducked lower.

“WHOSE JOBS? OUR JOBS!”

“Get down!” someone shrieked.

“Fireworks!”

A whiz followed by a *pop*.

“Rockets!”

“They’re shooting bottle rockets!”

The crowd moved moved this way and that, all different directions and halting, it wasn't clear where to move. Whiz whiz *pop* whiz *pop pop*.

"Can you see where they're coming from?" Portia's voice was breathless.

Juni held her sign in front of her and poked her head around it.

"Juni, don't!" But Portia came up behind her own sign.

Beyond the row of cops were a few people with red cloth over their faces and red shirts. The girls ducked as a bottle rocket hissed in their direction.

"Are those red shirt guys doing that?" Juni asked. "Where are the cops?"

"They're in front of the red shirts," said Portia.

"Yeah, but why aren't they doing anything to stop them?"

Now a more concerted movement ran through the crowd. The girls peeked around their signs again. A cop, burly in his gear, was plowing into the crowd. He knocked a sign out of a woman's hand and grasped her arm. "Everybody get down! On the ground NOW!" He pushed the lady down and she fell on her hands and knees.

A scatter shot of rockets came from behind him.

As soon as these were past, Juni dipped her sign and screamed at the policeman. "Stop! The guys throwing rockets are behind you!"

"I said get down!" Another officer had come in closer. "Sit down and put your hands on your head!"

Demonstrators were dropping to the ground, their arms over their heads to shield themselves from the hissing projectiles. A few tried to run. One of these was caught in the black oversized arms of an officer and they locked briefly in a lopsided dance. Some people sat in the sand as they were told to, and Juni could see that there wasn't just a straight line of police in front of them. Instead, the line curved around the sides, maybe it went all the way around. Maybe the protesters were completely surrounded by the cops.

Just a few feet in front of her, a cop caught hold of the woman in the orange hoodie. He punched his captive's shoulder blade while he pulled her hands behind her back and tightened a big zip-tie around her wrists. She let out a sharp yelp and started to buckle, but another cop caught her.

Juni needed to act. Where was Pete? He hadn't told them what to do. "Let's go, Portia!"

The cops were weighed down by armor and the girls were light and quick; surely they could dart through the cops. Juni leapt forward, caught on something, and went down. She'd tripped on an old man cowering beside her. Had she tripped him? "I'm so sorry!" Then she saw a black wound on his upper back. A rocket must have hit him and exploded, melting a hole in his aqua shirt. She smelled the burning synthetic and something sickening. He was wailing.

"Help! We need help here!" She tried again to regain her balance but was yanked away from the wounded man as he fell onto the sand. A cop seized her by one arm and jerked her around to catch hold of the other. Instinctively she twisted away. "That man is hurt!"

Still the cop went after her other arm. He was awkward. She swung around his bulk to keep her arm out of reach.

Then she heard a distant thud.

In the sudden silence, a bright light surrounded her and she felt strangely euphoric. She sensed an alphabet swirling around her head, too close to see clearly. Words? She pulled her mind back. It hurt to look at. She pulled back again and numbers came into focus. It looked like a badge: GRIMM R1216. The light faded and a dark cloud seeped into Juni's field of vision. She was sure she was in the family room at home, lying on her stomach on the coffee table and staring too closely at the TV. She tried to hold onto the elated feeling, but her head throbbed. She squeezed her eyes shut more tightly.

"Hey, get a medic over here." A man's voice, gravelly. "We don't want a lawsuit on our hands." Without stirring, she tried to get her bearings. This was not her family room. She was pretty sure she was outdoors and lying on her back.

The image of a policeman's badge was still clear in her head: GRIMM R1216. She repeated it to herself silently.

Someone lifted her hand and held it lightly by the wrist. Then she remembered Portia had been there. "Portia," she said under her breath.

"Can you get her out of here?" The gravel voice snarled.

"Hey that's my cousin!" Portia was panting. "What happened to her?"

"Get down!" said the rough voice.

"No wait!" Another man, his voice almost gentle. "This will go better if she has some family with her."

"She's yours then. Get them out of here."

A soft hand expertly opened one of Juni's eyes and shone a little flashlight into it. Ouch! She blinked both eyes open and saw a pair of dark eyes peering at her from a kindly brown face. Green scrubs. A medic. "Anybody home in there?" The light shone in her other eye. She winced and shut the lids.

"Your name please?"

"Whass happening?" She heard commotion but the sunlight was excruciating.

"It looks like you managed to get yourself a concussion. We're going to County where they can take pictures of the inside of your head. Name and birthday?"

Shouts. Scrambling. "Wha-? Louisa Belle Poole." She touched the side of her head and found a lump. Grit was pasted into the hair and skin but there was no open wound. "August 26." Her head was thick, everything was thick. "2002."

"She sounds funny." Portia brushed sand from Juni's hair with a light touch.

"And what's today?" the medic pressed her.

"Saturday. Saturday, June... something."

"That'll do." His hands slid beneath her shoulders, someone gripped her ankles, and she was lifted up, shifted to the side, and laid down again. She knew she was now on a stretcher. She squinted and glimpsed a young woman in scrubs at her feet.

She put her hand out and Portia took it. She laid her other arm across her eyes, careful not to press the side of her

head that hurt the most. Her arm hurt! “But there’s an old guy.” The words came out slurred and slow, but she kept talking. “He got brunt.” That was wrong. She tried to sit up.

“Just let us do our job.” The medic kindly restrained her. “We need to get you out of here without you making things worse.”

“But I can walk.” Juni tried to protest through the haze.

“Not with your eyes closed,” said Portia. “Why isn’t she opening her eyes?”

“But the lady with the lifelines not pipelines.”

Portia shook Juni’s hand. “Juni, will you just let us get out of here!”

The medic laughed. “Does she feel responsible for everyone?”

“I saw people getting heart.” Juni said.

“Why isn’t she talking right?” said Portia.

“That’s just her mind catching up with events. She should get straight soon.” He touched Juni’s shoulder. “Maybe you’re destined to be a doctor yourself.”

They hoisted the stretcher onto a gurney and started rolling. Guys playing football got concussions all the time, why were they making such a big deal of this? But the pain in her head was real. “Portia, please tell me what happened please.”

“Oh my god, she’s going to be okay!” Portia said to the medics. “That’s the double please we got from our geometry teacher! Now would you please shut up idiot, please? the EMT guy said you should be quiet.”

When did he say that? Juni didn’t remember that. Maybe they had taken over Portia’s mind and she was in on this, this, this, what was it exactly?

“Portia, is that really you?” the words felt heavy in her mouth.

“No, Dorothy, it’s Auntie Em!”

The gurney stopped and the stretcher glided into the back compartment of the ambulance.

“What’s your name?” Portia asked the medic.

“Me? I’m Gabriel.”

“Like the angel,” murmured Juni. Portia and Gabriel looked at each other and stifled their impulse to laugh. They climbed into the ambulance.

“Hey now, don’t go to sleep on me.” Gabe touched her cheek.

Juni roused. “Are they arresting... those guys in red shirts.”

“Oh, I don’t see anything at these skirmishes. Otherwise I’d be in court all day long—witnessing for the prosecution, witnessing for the defense.”

“Even if the cops are acting like thugs...” Juni’s voice didn’t rise at the end of her questions.

“Let’s just say, not every battle has to be my battle. And if I didn’t stay on good terms with the police, it would be a lot harder to do my job, you see?”

“I get that,” Portia said.

“You don’t take sides,” Juni muttered.

“I take the side of whoever got themselves a goose egg on the head.”

“I didn’t get myself a negg.” Juni’s mind groped for the details of what had happened but she could remember only the biggest, simplest thing. “Do you take the side of the planet. No one needs more help than the planet. Nobody can save anybody if we don’t...”

Portia squeezed her hand. “Juni, will you please be quiet please!”

“That has to be... everybody’s battle.”

When they arrived at the hospital, Juni’s mother was waiting for them. A lot of people at the hospital knew Lou. She was a nurse practitioner and midwife.

Lou’s mass of hair was too much for any clasp to restrain for long, so that a thick amber spray of it was usually visible around one side of her face or another. When she saw her, Juni

started crying, like the time she was lost at the Christmas parade and didn't cry until at last she saw the familiar being.

"Mom," Juni sobbed. A nurse was setting up an IV in her left hand. The pain had subsided so at least Juni could open her eyes.

"Are you okay, baby?" Lou sat down on the edge of the bed. "You don't look so good. Let me look at your eyes."

"These guys were throwing bottle rockets. I saw a man get hit."

Lou took her free hand and massaged it gently like she had ever since Juni could remember. "And Portia! Are you okay?"

"Just a little worried about this nutcase."

"Who was throwing bottle rockets?"

"These people in red shirts and masks." Portia actually looked a little shaken. "I think they were devils."

"Weren't the police there?"

"Yeah, but they started in on the protesters and the devils ran away. Everyone was trying to run away, but it was over fast. I think the police were arresting people, but the medic said I should ride with Juni."

"Did you see what happened to her?"

Portia shook her head. "I was just trying to duck."

"I saw the badge," said Juni. "Grimm R1216."

"Isn't her voice weird?" Portia didn't listen to what Juni was saying.

Lou nodded. "Flat. That's common after a concussion. Juni, do you really think you remember the details of a badge? People who get knocked out don't usually remember much about what happened to them."

"I saw the badge in the dream I was having. Look up the officer. His name is Grimm."

Portia pulled her phone out of her bag to note this.

Juni closed her eyes and recited slowly and emphatically as though she were reading. "R1216, G-R-I-M-M."

"Got it."

The hospital rehydrated her and decided the concussion was mild and sent her home with instructions to rest and take Tylenol if the pain continued.

By the time they climbed the steps to the front porch, the afternoon sun was slanting through the masses of hanging potted ferns growing as a shade along the western side.

“God, I missed this porch,” said Portia, “This must be the deepest porch in town.” She looked up at the three ceiling fans and the tin tiles painted sky blue. It was cool and inviting, with big cushions on the wicker furniture and on the glider. The Pooles even had lamps outside so they could sit out reading late, or turn off to foil the bugs while talking lazy talk.

Juni’s older brother Titus was sitting in one of the generous arm chairs. He pulled off his headphones. “You thought I was getting too much attention and decided to compete with me, huh?”

Juni started to cry again.

“Hey sister, you don’t look so good.”

“So I’m told.” Juni sniffed. She stepped into the entry hall to check herself in a mirror and let out a wail. “My hair. And look at my face.”

“Getting attention has its price,” said Titus. He spoke to his mother. “I know she’s upset but I’m not hearing the pain.”

“Lack of affect.” Lou straightened the pile of books on the brass tray that served as a table top. “Common after a head bump. She should be back to her usual expressive self soon. She needs to rest so let’s help with that.”

“Awright, now you get to keep me company, me and your 500 canaries.”

“Three canaries.” Juni whistled softly into the cage which was bigger than a refrigerator turned on its side. “Hey, Papageno. Hi, Ludacris. Hello, Bowie.” If she spoke to one, she had to speak to them all.

“Why aren’t they singing?” Portia asked.

“They’re getting ready to molt,” said Juni. “They have to use their energy to grow new feathers.” She felt her own energy was shriveled up somewhere she hadn’t decided to put it.

She drifted back onto the porch where she kept her turtles. “Hey Groucho, hey Frodo. Did anyone feed the Groucho-Frodo today?”

“You did, I saw you this morning,” said Titus.

Juni chose a stationary chair rather than the glider and eased into it. “I can’t remember anything. I’m already sick of being sick.”

Titus smiled his crooked smile and his dark eyes caught the light. “I guess not all of us are fit to malingering.”

“I’m sorry, Titus, I don’t know what I’m saying.”

“I was going to fry chicken tonight,” Lou intervened, “but I’ll make chicken soup instead.”

“It’s too hot for soup!” Juni and Portia protested in unison.

“Never too hot for chicken soup. Titus, I need you to watch her, and Portia would you call Juni’s dad? See if he can come over and mind the broth if I get it started. I really need to get back to the clinic.”

“Yes ma’am.” Portia walked down the stairs and into the yard to call Ezra.

“I can handle the soup,” Titus said.

“Maybe so but your dad needs to come over here and spend some time with Juni.”

“Right.”

“And I’m sure he wants to see you, too.”

“You don’t know that.”

“Yes, I do. It’s one of those secrets that only parents share.”

Portia came back up the steps. “He said he can mind the soup. He got a job lately, right? It sounded like I woke him up.”

Juni tucked her legs beneath her. “Dispatching or something. His hours change all the time.”

“Nobody can wake him up,” said Titus.

“That’s because he’s already woke.” Juni almost smiled.

Portia stood behind her and began to work her shoulders with her hands. "I like Uncle Ezra, he's nice."

"That's right." Lou came back out of the house. "You should be grateful to have such a nice father."

"Too nice to live with," said Titus, "but I guess that has to do with another secret that only parents share?"

"Try not to be bitter, sweetheart," Lou gave him one of her sympathizing looks.

"Try not to be patronizing," he replied.

Lou ignored this and got her bag. "Okay you three, listen up. If Juni becomes unconscious again, or vomits, or starts acting weird, or god forbid has a seizure, call 911 and then call me immediately. But 911 first, okay? Portia, you stay for dinner. I'll tell your mom when I see her at the clinic."

"Yes, ma'am."

They had moved inside and were watching a movie when Ezra appeared in the family room, his usual quiet entrance, his usual black t-shirt and loose jeans. He studied Juni whose eyes were closed, put his finger to his lips, and went on into the kitchen. In the quiet lapses of the movie, they heard him chopping and humming. And then the early aroma made its way into their circle, promising, but not yet mingled into greater than the sum of its parts.

Then he was in the room again. "Soup's on course. I added some ginger and garlic. Good for the blood."

"Everyone in this family is a kitchen doctor." Titus muted the TV.

Ezra pulled an ottoman up to the couch near Juni, sat down, and took her hand in both of his, soothing it in the same way Lou had. "What injurious conduct happened here?"

"I think the legal term is 'mischief,'" answered Titus.

"Yes, when you want to sue someone. Is this baby going to sue someone?" Ezra crooned. He had worked as a lawyer for an affordable housing organization for a few years, before he

quit in frustration and became a preacher. But that was before Juni was born. By the time she was nine, he lost his inspiration for preaching too, and had been taking odd jobs for the last six years while he studied Buddhism.

"Juni thinks a policeman knocked her down or tripped her or something," said Portia. "They were using way too much force as usual."

"He did push me or—made me lose my balance." Juni mumbled, eyes droopy.

"I'm sorry, baby," said her father. "What were you doing dancing with clumsy policemen?"

"It was a protest against the gas pipelines," Portia answered for her. "Over at the port where they're gonna put the future terminal. Hey, Titus, let's see if it's on the news."

"There were people in red shirts throwing bottle rockets," said Juni.

"But I didn't see the cops do anything about them." Portia took up the story. "They were rounding up the protesters."

"You sound like a robot, Juni-toons." Titus was flipping through channels but left the sound off when he saw it was only the weather report. "They didn't knock the passion out of you, did they?"

"Why do you girls want to get mixed up in all that?" Ezra's question was cranky but his voice was soothing. It was a mismatch Juni had trouble dealing with.

"Dad, we didn't go to get mixed up in anything. The same stuff that's poisoning the world is happening in Three Rivers. We live here. So here's where we take a stand. This is what happened when we took a stand." She released a slow, shuddering breath. "We didn't even think we were doing much. It felt like so little."

Everybody stared at the screen. The weather was followed by an interview on a sidewalk, a mug shot, the anchors faced the camera, they turned to each other, they faced the camera.

"I bet it's not even on the news." Portia stood up from the sofa. "I bet they think if they don't mention the protests, we'll go away."

"Don't get yourself worked up." Ezra tipped his head toward Juni, meaning don't get her started.

"But we are worked up." Juni's listless voice came from the corner of the sofa.

"Everything is awful," said Portia, pacing, "and it's pathetic that we're the only ones who want to do something about it."

"Okay, but Juni needs to chill," said Titus.

Titus had pulled his computer onto his lap. "National Energy Independence Party," he read off the screen, "'received funding in 2017 from the oil and gas industry,' dot dot dot, here: 'It has been reported that the NEIP send red shirts to disrupt peaceful demonstrations calling for renewable energy.' I knew I'd heard of those red shirt shenanigans, confirmed here by the urban dictionary."

"Didn't you write that dictionary?" Portia teased.

"Nobody writes dictionaries. They're found, carved into tablets under a bush, like the book of Mormon."

"Did the Mormons really find their book under a bush?" she asked, moving a pillow to get more comfortable.

"Not exactly, the sacred text was engraved on golden plates and buried in New York until they were revealed to a guy named Joe Smith."

"Who buried them?"

"The angels of the ancients, half Egyptian, half American."

"That doesn't make sense."

"Can one million Mormons be wrong? Come to think of it, probably more like 10 million."

"300 million stupid Americans can be wrong about their future in a series of extreme weather events and rising sea levels," Portia punched the pillow in her lap.

"More like 325 million, except that there may be a few million who actually believe the scientists," said Titus.

Juni interrupted. "All those numbers are making my head hurt again. Please just stop it please."

Ezra leaned in closer to his younger daughter to push her hair out of her face, careful not to disturb the hurt place. His fingers were large and clumsy but nearly put her to sleep. "The Buddhist scriptures are historically verified. They were written by humans, not angels or gods." He paused. "Although some of us believe in a kind of divine inspiration."

They let his mellow voice have the last word on sacred texts and watched the TV in silence. If there had been any coverage of their day's events, they had missed it.

Juni dreamed she was on the beach and the sky was full of menacing clouds. Huge waves thundered against the sand. One rose up like a wall and started to curl as if to break. Juni started running, but she was so tired she could hardly move her legs and her feet were sinking in the sand. A big man in a black bear suit reached out and grabbed her. Suddenly the wave was gone but rain was falling and the surf around them lifted them up. Black leather mitts were pushing her down under the water. "Officer Grimm, let me go!" she cried. Titus was there in a yellow raft holding his guitar out to her. "Get in!" he yelled over the surf. Suddenly it was quiet and she was drifting in the raft alone. "Titus!" she screamed. "Titus come back!"

Titus was gently shaking her awake. She was still on the couch, he was on the ottoman now. "Hey, hey, it's a dream."

He had disappeared from the yellow raft and left her afloat but alone. But he was real and still here in the gloomy light of the family room. A dry sob rose in Juni. "You saved me but I didn't know where you went... Grimm was there in a bear suit and it was like a tsunami."

"Who's Grimm?"

"Grimm. The name I saw like on a badge when I went down. I think it was a policeman's badge because it had a number with it too."

“Did you actually see this badge?”

“I don’t know, but it was so clear in my mind, it must have been the last thing I saw. Or something.” The room was quiet. “Where is everybody?”

“We all had soup and they left. I’ll bring you some. I’ll just heat it up.”

Juni sat up while Titus went into the kitchen. Her headache had backed off but she felt generally wrecked. Her neck was sore and she had no idea why her arm and shoulder would ache like they did. She’d lost track of the day; maybe that was a problem. The microwave dinged and she detected hunger beneath the wreck.

“Is it still Saturday?”

“And for a few hours more.” Titus came in from the kitchen with a tray. Juni thought his left foot was dragging a bit. She got up to take the tray from him.

“Sit back down, Juni-tunes, I got this.”

“It looked like it was going to fall.”

“It wasn’t going to fall. Contrary to Lou’s mothering overkill, I can still carry a bowl of soup.” He lurched the last step and she wasn’t sure if it was a joke.

She let him set the tray on her lap. “I didn’t mean you couldn’t. Lots of times I just don’t want you to hurt yourself.”

It had been only a few months since Titus was diagnosed with ALS, and he was expected to grow weaker and clumsier. The nerves connecting his brain to his muscles were dying. He picked up his book and sat again in his chair, his knees and her knees perpendicular. Was he a little more hunched? Juni wasn’t sure.

“Titus, I have to tell you something. When the red shirts started throwing the rockets something happened to my brain. Suddenly things were fast and slow at the same time and I was noticing everything in amazing detail. This man was pulling on my legs and I could see each hair on his head.”

“Probably just adrenalin, the fight-or-flight chemical your body makes when something threatens you.”

“You think that’s all it was?”

“Sorry it’s not a supernatural explanation.”

She closed her eyes and saw again with the strange clarity of vision she experienced minutes before she fell.

“Juni, maybe this would be a good time to get Dad to teach you to mediate. It can actually heal the brain.”

“I don’t want to encourage him in his Buddhism thing.”

“Get some perspective. He’s not like that guy who stands over on Church Street barking about sin and hell all the time.”

“No comparison. I just don’t know why he can’t care about Buddhism and the world too.”

“But he does care. You know, it can be painful to care. His Buddhist practice is a structure that allows him to feel compassion and not fall apart.”

“I thought it bothered you too, that he’s so passive.”

“It does—sometimes, but I’m working on compassion too. I’m working on having compassion for Dad. I’m extra hard on him because he’s my father and I’m disappointed in how detached he is. If he were just some person, I could feel more sympathetic.”

“So you’re being detached too—from him.”

He shrugged. “I guess it’s a good example of how detachment can allow for more compassion.”

“Always the paradox,” sighed Juni.

“The parafox with the parabox needs to open the paralocks.”

“Cuz the parafox needs his parasocks.”

Titus’s double row of eyelashes shaded his dark blue eyes.

She tipped the bowl to drink the last of the soup. “Why did you get all the eyelashes in the family?”

“Hmm, you know some geneticists suspect that the same mutation that gave Elizabeth Taylor her famous double batters, also gave her the heart condition that killed her.”

“Who’s Elizabeth Taylor?”

“You know her. She’s the female lead in *Cat on a Hot Tin Roof*.”

“In the white dress.”

“She was an actor, but also pretty notorious in the tabloids— she had eight husbands. Not at the same time of course. And she was famously getting fat and then thin again, kind of like Oprah.”

“Eight husbands? Sounds like she got to live a long time, even with a heart condition.”

“A good thing too, because later in her life she raised a lot of money for AIDS research and treatment. That was the ‘80s and ‘90s, back when there was even more prejudice against people with the disease. She’s taken her place in gay heaven.”

“Why isn’t there an Elizabeth Taylor for ALS?”

Titus’s eyebrows rose. Juni couldn’t tell if he was considering the question for the first time or just surprised that she said it. “Not as many people get ALS. The big majority of us are much older than me. I have the distinction of being a rare case of a rare disease.”

“Not fair.”

He nodded slowly. “Gay people were the first to start dying of AIDS and they became activists and demanded money for research and treatment. There was this organization Act-Up. You should know about them, they were very militant and very effective, so now there’s a range of drugs that keep people with HIV alive for a long time. If they can afford the drugs.”

“That’s not fair either. Maybe I need to be more militant.” Juni leaned toward him, to be closer, to listen harder, but then put the tray on the ottoman and curled against the arm of the sofa.

“I’ve thought about this a lot,” said Titus. “There’s a whole list of ways ALS doesn’t set the ground for a movement. We don’t usually live long. We don’t usually know we’re at risk. We can’t protect ourselves with condoms.” The muscles of his face pulled it into an unfamiliar shape. She tried to remember if she had ever seen him cry. He had never said so much so directly to her about the disease. He’d never used the word “we.” What he meant was: “I won’t live long. I had no warning. I can’t protect myself.”

“Titus.”

But he wasn’t finished. “And ALS isn’t contagious. It doesn’t freak people out that way. It’s probably never going to be a money-maker for the drug companies. They don’t know the first thing about how to treat it.”

Juni wanted him to stop.

He leaned his temple against the chair wing. His eyes glinted in the lamp light and suddenly he looked feverish to her, really ill, like in an old book. “The part of me that used to stretch into the future is cut off. I didn’t know it was so big. It’s gone and this is all I am. This is just it.”

When her older sister, Alice Coltrane, left home for college, Juni was only four years old. It was as though a captivating light in her small galaxy had skipped out of the sky and left a dark place that was just as captivating. Juni couldn’t take her eyes off it. She asked so repeatedly where her sister was that Lou greeted her in the mornings with “Alice Coltrane is still at college today.” Lou remembered this and loved to tell the story.

Titus felt Alice Coltrane’s absence, but Titus was off more and more on his own anyway and soon he was driving. Her absence made leaving home real to him, a little intimidating but mostly exciting, and he started working toward his own launch.

Lou thought it would help Juni to see where her sister had disappeared to, so several weeks later the whole family—Lou, Ezra, Titus, and Juni—went to parent weekend at Bartram University. Lou pointed out to Juni, “Here’s where Alice Coltrane sleeps,” and “Here’s where Alice Coltrane eats,” and “Alice Coltrane walks on this special sidewalk to the class where she learns about what blood is made out of.”

When they were telling her sister good-bye, Juni raised her arms for a hug from Titus. She thought now it was time for Titus to disappear to college. Lou didn’t remember this part and

neither did Juni, but Titus did. He remembered the mix of anger and sadness on Juni's little face and the way she led the farewell. She didn't wait for someone to tell her to say good-bye to Titus.

Titus and Juni got back in the car with the old ways shaken up. She didn't take for granted that he continued to walk into the house after cross-country practice and to eat at the table across from her. And he took her to parks and nature preserves because she was never disappointed when they got there. He quickly became the most special person in her world.

It was still light when Portia left Juni's house. She walked home to get her bike and rode straight to the library, open late for summer hours. She was going to use the computers but decided to ask the librarian huddled over a magazine on his desk.

"How do you look up a policeman if you have the last name and badge number?"

The librarian straightened up slowly and peered at her through his spectacles. "Make that a policeman or policewoman. It could be a police woman, you know."

"Right." Portia was surprised he thought of this. "But I know this one is a man."

"If you know his name, number, and that he's a man, what more were you hoping to find out about him?"

"A picture maybe? Something about his record? His precinct? Things like that."

"Did this police officer do anything wrong?"

"We think he might be the one who knocked over my cousin, and—she got a concussion."

The librarian tapped the eraser of his pencil on the open magazine. "How do you know his name and badge number?"

"She saw it." This guy was thinking too much.

"She saw his badge information, got knocked out, woke up and remembered the name and number? That sounds highly unlikely."

"Ok, she dreamed it. While she was knocked out."

“Please don’t tease the librarians.”

“I didn’t mean...”

“We actually put up with a lot. The government is against us— funding cuts, you know. We lost another assistant librarian position last week.”

“I’m sorry the government doesn’t like you, but my story is true. If you hadn’t grilled me like a criminal, I wouldn’t have bothered you with my story at all.”

“Of course you aren’t a criminal.”

“Well, can you please answer my question?”

“Of course. That’s my job. The problem is that police officers don’t wear badges in our town. They have their names printed above the pocket on their shirts and don’t show any number at all.”

Portia rode home slowly in the twilight, in the deep resonance of cicadas and tree frogs broadcasting evening. The little house was dark when she arrived, so she assumed her grandfather had fallen asleep in his chair. She flipped the light on in the kitchen and peeked into the sitting room. Sure enough Gramps was sitting in his armchair, newspapers fallen to the floor around him, the TV on. She closed the door softly, pulled some cheese slices from the fridge, unwrapped one, put it on a piece of bread and folded the whole thing over. This was part of her routine. She leaned on the counter, chewing her thoughts with her food. She was interrupted by the screen door creaking open and snapping shut again, along with the sound of Rosa’s soft-soled shoes.

“Helloooo! Portia?”

“Shhhh! Gramps is asleep.”

“He can sleep through anything.”

“Hi Mom.” She greeted Rosa and kissed her on the cheek. “You’re so late! How was work?”

“How was work? How was the police riot?”

“What did you hear?”

“Only that some people were throwing fireworks, the police showed their ugly side, and Juni got her head stove in,” Rosa put her bags on the counter and turned to Portia with one hand on her hip.

“Almost right. She fell and must have hit her head on something hard. It didn’t bleed, but they said she has a concussion. The fireworks were bottle rockets to be exact...”

“What about you? Did you escape unscratched?”

“My backpack has a hole in it, and my water bottle has a serious dent in the bottom so it won’t stand up straight.”

“I’m talking about you, baby, not your old raggedy stuff.” Rosa put her arm around her daughter and kissed her on the forehead.

“I’m fine. But it was weird. Juni talks like a crazy sometimes, but seeing her knocked flat and then acting weird in a different way, that was not okay. Those robocobs— they are not okay.”

“What’s a robocop?”

“Police in riot gear. They look like paratroopers from the moon, all padded, with helmets and big visors. Chicago has a lot of them.”

“What, are you saying the police knocked her out?”

“I didn’t actually see her go down. I don’t know if anyone hit her, but they were roughing everybody up, and something made her lose her balance.”

“I don’t know why they have to buy the riot get-up for police in Three Rivers. Are the protesters dangerous?”

“Titus says they’re expecting trouble in coastal areas as the weather becomes more extreme and there’s more flooding.”

“Will the lord have some mercy on us please. Juni and Titus are making me worried. Do you believe all the stuff they say?”

“It’s not just Juni and Titus, Mom. My biology teacher in Chicago, she talked a lot about the mass extinction happening now, and Alice Coltrane works at the wildlife park and she’s a scientist and she told us about the turtles. Did you know about the turtles?”

“I’m not saying I don’t believe it, believe them, but I just don’t think it’s as urgent as y’all are making it out to be.”

“The sea turtles are really in trouble. For the turtle eggs to turn into male turtles, it has to get cold. Now it’s hotter and not so many turtles are born male. That’s going to be a big problem.”

“Remember Juni’s pet turtles?”

“She still has them and you aren’t listening to me. I said the turtles are in trouble because of global warming. And Juni and I, we’re both supposed to start working Monday. I hope they don’t fire her for being sick on the first day, because she shouldn’t go in.”

“No, she should rest for a few days. But Juni is a good worker, and if they can’t see that, I don’t know what.”

“Yeah, but I don’t really feel like walking around in a pirate costume by myself.”

“Speaking of walking, I didn’t see the car out front.”

“Oh no! I totally forgot! I rode in the ambulance with Juni. I guess tomorrow morning I’ll ride my bike over early and get it.”

“I guess you will.”

Sunday morning Portia pulled on cargo shorts and her old Tullahoma tee-shirt which she hated. Why’d they have to ruin a cool mascot like the Swamp Fox with such an ugly snarl? There were droplets falling off the fangs, spit or blood, she didn’t know which was worse. She was up earlier than she wanted to be because she’d promised to get the car before Rosa needed it. She dragged her bike out from behind the carport.

She pushed off in the sweet of morning before the sun dominated even the air under the oaks, before the church traffic dominated the streets. She rode down Percival street instead of Front to avoid the two diners and the new coffee shop along the main wharves. She didn’t want anyone to ask her where she was going, the answer was too long. Avoiding people made her feel

like she was up to something out of the ordinary, more adventurous. And this made her ready for some kind of adventure.

She pumped over to the northeastern end of town where all of the houses were small. Up where she and Juni lived, a house could be any size. Even on the same block there was a mix of large and little.

As she got closer to the site, the ambulance ride came back to her, how tight it was in there, how weird Juni had been. What had happened to Juni was scary. Did the cop do that? What if Juni had had darker skin? What if it had been Portia?

She barely turned the pedals as she headed through the last row of houses onto a sand road. It led into the parking lot and the big open space where they were planning to build the pipeline terminal. She stopped and turned to look at the wide bridge sweeping through the sky over the Combahee River. The bridge was still clean and so smoothly curved, like they built that curve just to make it pretty. It made her proud of her town and glad to be back.

She wanted to continue the feeling of investigating something. She wanted to find out what happened to Juni or at least gather material for Juni's story for the paper. She pushed herself along with her feet and scoured the ground with her eyes. The usual trash—plastic water bottles, chip bags—and shreds of red tissue wrappers: the leftovers of fireworks. Must be from the rockets those guys were shooting off. She found a few sticks too, some pink, some green, skinny as a match but as long as a ruler, also from bottle rockets. She put these things in her backpack and looked up.

The port was somewhere here along the water, but all she saw was rough buildings, metal frames, sand, nothing she thought made a port. There was no dock with sailors, no cranes to lift boxes the size of school buses. The port itself was somewhere off behind a gatehouse and a sign about Authorized Personnel Only. The morning breeze had dropped, giving way to thicker air and clouds of bugs. She pedaled to the gatehouse,

stopping a respectful distance away. She'd rather have an adventure with Juni, but Juni needed to rest her head.

A moment later, the gatehouse door opened and a woman in a uniform stood in the doorway. "Can I help you?"

"Yes, I..." What was she doing here? "Do you know anything about the new pipeline they might build here?"

"Pipeline?"

The woman left her hand on the doorknob and held a hat in her other hand. Then Portia remembered what she could say. "A friend and I are writing a story for our school newspaper. There were people here yesterday, protesting a pipeline that might get built. Were you... maybe you were here yesterday?"

"I was here yesterday." As she set both feet on the ground, the woman rolled her shoulders like a cowboy in a saloon, like Portia better not be wasting her time. She pulled her cap on. She wasn't any taller than Portia but her arms and legs were twice as big around.

Portia squeezed her handlebars. She should have a notebook. Maybe she had one in her backpack. "I wonder if I could ask you a few questions, like if you saw any of what went on at the protest. I'll just take notes on my phone." The guard's uniform was so much like a cop, Portia worried about pulling out a phone.

The guard nodded. Portia was relieved to have something for her hands to do. The woman crossed her arms over her chest.

"Okay," said Portia. "So can you describe what you saw?"

Taking notes seemed to make the guard feel better too, more official. Everybody had seen reporters on TV asking questions and and getting answers.

"I start at eight a.m. Around nine or so I noticed a few police cars, up there." She pointed to where the sandy road had left the residential street to lead down to the port. "But then a couple of police cars came down here. The officers let me know there might be some trouble."

Portia's thumbs flew. "What kind of trouble?"

“They wanted to warn me that people might try to get into the port and damage buildings or the facility.”

Portia had to stop typing to take this in. People weren’t protesting the port that had been there over 300 years, only the new pipeline that would bring gas, that could leak or explode, that brought oil to ships that would carry it across the ocean to be burned and further heat the atmosphere. Adults’ paranoia was so confused, exaggerating the possible danger to property, while they missed the biggest threat of all. But she could tell by the way the woman said ‘officer’ and ‘damage’ and ‘facility,’ that the guard took her job very seriously.

“Did you see any trouble?”

“I was busy with some paperwork, but I couldn’t miss seeing some mayhem.”

Portia looked up from her phone and waited. She didn’t want to push.

The guard was smiling. “You know you’re supposed to get the name of people you ask questions.”

“Oh! I forgot!” Busted, and she should’ve covered her mistake somehow but now it was too late. “I’m new. I’m nervous.” Lord, was she nervous.

“Serita Johnson. I worked at the port in Charlestown twelve years and started here last week. We wanted something, we needed to get our kids away from all the drugs they have up there. It is downright diabolical.”

Now Portia really didn’t know what to say, “Thank you, Ms. Johnson. That’s S-e-r-i-t-a?”

“That’s right. And mayhem, m-a-y-h-e-m.” Her smile reminded Portia of the assistant principal, it wasn’t exactly a smile of connection.

“Can you tell me what the mayhem looked like?”

“A mess. Some of the signs people were carrying went down. There was a lot of yelling. I heard whistling and explosions. You know about the bottle rockets? Uh-hmm. Then people were running around, trying not to get hit I’d say.”

Portia tried to think how to ask a question about the cops. “What action did the police officers take?”

Ms. Johnson tilted her security cap. The morning sun was shining into her eyes from the left. "They took appropriate action to restore order. It did become dangerous. An ambulance took somebody to the hospital."

She was using Juni to defend the cops. Portia's voice trembled. "Do you know anything about what happened there?"

"A kid fell and hit her head. Easy to understand in the tussle, but what a kid was doing in there, I can't say."

Portia really wanted to get away now, but she didn't want to miss something she could've gotten. She ventured a look at Ms. Johnson's face. The guard was looking off sideways with an amused expression that had nothing to do with Portia. There was something she was busting to tell.

Portia was wondering just what she could do to coax the secret out of her informant, when her phone fell into the sand at her feet. When she rushed to scoop it up, the bike between her legs swung one way while the front wheel dipped and shot backwards in the other direction. Portia barely got control of the bike before it hit the ground. Now the guard turned her amusement on her.

"Well, uh, thank you again, Ms. Johnson." She dusted the sand off her phone and cleared her throat. "Is there anything else...of note you'd like to say?" She stressed the "of note" in a way that implied the guard's answer would be important.

Ms. Johnson was smiling full on now, and Portia had to smile back. The guard's face was positively kinder now, and prettier. "Early, before the protest got started, I was out here checking a driver's credentials, when I noticed some men standing around with the police at this end of things. One of the guys had a bag and I saw him show inside the bag to one of the officers. The officer laughed, and must have said something funny because the other officers laughed. I didn't think much of it at the time, but it come back to me later, the motions they made, and when the bottle rockets came out, I had a strong feeling, I should just say it, I know in my bones it was fireworks in that bag."

"Did you happen to notice anybody wearing red shirts?"

“I couldn’t. I’m a little bit color blind.”

“Got it.” Portia was afraid to look up from her note taking. What if Ms. Johnson regretted what she’d just told? But then Portia realized something: Serita Johnson had spilled the tea because deep down, people need to tell their secrets. And what better person to tell than some nobody kid who takes a school newspaper seriously? And who knew? Maybe Serita Johnson had mixed feelings about cops. Maybe she’d seen them up to no good before. That kind of stuff happened all the time, and not only in Chicago.

“Leaf blowers! What the hell?”

On Sunday afternoon Juni was sitting in one of the three tree houses in her yard with a book about the Gaia theory, the hypothesis that the earth is one planetary-scale, self-regulating organism. But today she wasn’t reading. She lay on an old cushion, watching birds and daydreaming. Ezra had helped Titus and his friends build two of the treehouses when Titus was younger and Ezra was teaching him to design and make things. The first one had always been the Fort but the second was called the Bell Tower. Titus and a friend had found a big iron bell at the dump and constructed a top compartment especially for it and even drilled a hole in the floor for the rope. It rang and everything.

Then Alice Coltrane had to make one. Hers had two stories, kind of three if you counted the roof on top, which was sturdy enough for sitting quietly and observing birds and seeing all the way into the marsh. Lou had always been the inspector, testing the soundness of the construction and making sure that, if anything, they were overbuilt.

Suddenly the loud noise next door scattered the birds and disrupted Juni’s reverie. “I hate leaf blowers!” she said to no one.

“Why can’t you just use a rake like everybody else?” she yelled loudly, also to no one in particular, but the noise stopped.

“What?” came a voice.

Juni leaned out the side of the treehouse to see who was answering her. Her neighbor Joe Dan was holding a new leaf blower and looking around. He looked worried, but he always looked worried. Juni had figured out that he wasn’t particularly worried, he just had a worried face.

“Joe Dan! Why aren’t you using a rake?”

“Juni? Where are you?” He was always confused by the treehouses.

“Over here,” she yelled to Joe Dan.

“What’s your problem?”

“Why do you have to use fossil fuels to blow leaves around?”

“I’m not! It’s electric! I just charge the battery.”

“Where do you think that electricity comes from? Number one: it’s coal. Number two: it’s killing people. Number three: those leaves should just stay there and rot because it’s good for your soil!”

Joe Dan looked at her, slightly raising his fuzzy eyebrows that already slanted upwards at the center of his face, so that in addition to looking worried he looked positively alarmed. But he just started up the blower again.

Juni climbed down and went to the shed at the back of the yard. She took out a rake and climbed over the fence to Joe Dan’s yard and started raking leaves. After a few minutes Joe Dan noticed her and stopped the blower again.

“Juni, what is your problem?”

“I’m helping you, so you don’t use so much fossil fuel energy.”

“I don’t need your help! I have the leaf blower.”

“Is that why you let all these leaves sit here for months? So you could justify getting that machine?”

“Juni, I swear, you are the most ornery girl the good lord ever put in the way of a pilgrim’s progress.”

“Maybe the good lord put me here to stop the pilgrim’s leaf blowers.”

“Maybe he put you here to try my patience.”

Joe Dan started the blower up again, while Juni continued to rake the leaves into a pile. When it got big, she moved down the yard and started another one. Joe Dan kept his blower going until he was near Juni's first pile of leaves. He got down low and blew the leaves over the fence to her yard. She looked back at him and he smiled and waved without turning the blower off.

"I guess that makes you one patient pilgrim, Joe Dan," she muttered, but she continued to rake.

Lou came outside with a basket of laundry. "Joe Dan!" she yelled until he turned the blower off and looked at her.

"What now?" he said in an exasperated tone.

"Don't what now me! I just want you to be sure you don't blow those leaves and dirt into my clean laundry. And Juni what are you doing out here raking of all things, when Joe Dan has a blower? You need to rest."

"I find raking leaves restful."

"Well it's not restful enough to suit your mother. You get back in the house and lie down now."

"It's not like listening to a leaf blower is helping my head anyway." Juni set the rake on the other side of the fence and climbed over after it. She put the tool away and went inside as the leaf blower started up again. Titus was sitting in his chair reading, with his noise-canceling headphones on. Though it was quieter inside, she lay on the couch and put a pillow on her head, fantasizing ways to sabotage Joe Dan's leaf blower.

On Sunday nights Lou usually made a treat, somebody's favorite something. That Sunday, she was serving the rest of the chicken soup, but she also made cornbread with jalapeño peppers and cheese, and biscuits topped with strawberries and whipped cream, Juni's favorite dessert. Juni slumped on the family room sofa and the sweet sounds from the kitchen faded as she drifted to sleep.

"Another dream, Juni-tunes?"

Her eyes flew open. Titus was in his wingchair catty-corner to where her head rested against the sofa's arm. His reading light was on now and he held his headphones in his hands. "Déjà vu except this time your arms were floating around in a very disjointed maneuver."

She sat up and looked into the shadows blending together behind the TV, the other stuffed chairs, the books on the shelves. "It was about the Larsen B ice shelf. I could see it sliding off the rest of Antarctica in slow motion but not really that slow. We were on the beach watching it and it was making huge waves but somehow we were above them, like the whole beach was tilted. Alice Coltrane was there with a leaf blower and somehow she was talking through it like a machine. 'Get back,' the machine kept saying and she was blowing the waves back, so they just kept getting taller. A helicopter kept circling around and somehow it was sending energy down to the leaf blower through these bolts of lightning. Then it flew into the wave which made it start to bend towards us. I was trying to pull you but you wouldn't come and it was all making the most terrible noise." Juni curled up and sank back into the feel of the dream.

"Is that it?"

"What? Isn't that enough?"

"What did it sound like?"

"Kind of an ominous rumble and then screeching mixed with a roar like a leaf blower."

"That's so weird. I was just listening to the sound of the Larsen B calving. Someone recorded it."

"For real? What does it sound like?"

"Like a ghost ship, creaking and moaning and whistling. Like a chorus of ghosts."

"Wow, that's a lot spookier than what I heard. My dream took more from the leaf blower episode."

"Do you think it's spooky that you were dreaming what I was listening to? Even if it wasn't exactly right?"

The front screen door opened and Alice Coltrane, the eldest of the three, appeared in the hall.

“Well, if it isn’t the A-train!” said Titus. “Chugging in on the heels of a dream, as if called by the dreamer.”

“I just dreamed about you!” Juni stood for a hug. “And here you are. Is that spooky?”

AC held Juni back and scrutinized her face. “You don’t look so bad, baby sis. I heard you got clobbered.”

“She was weirder than usual,” Titus said, “but now she’s just weird the usual ways.”

Lou came out of the kitchen drying her hands on a dish towel. “Where have you been for the last forever, Alice Coltrane?”

“Working. We were tagging alligators all through the creeks for the last six days, and I barely stayed awake through my bedtime shower.” Alice Coltrane kissed her mother’s cheek and flopped onto the sofa with Juni. “What were you dreaming about me, Juni?”

“You had a kind of gun made out of a leaf blower and you were pushing a monster wave back away from the shore.”

“Maybe that was the tagging gun.”

“What do you mean, tagging?” asked Lou, “I thought tagging was what hunters do after killing an alligator.”

“In the preserve we keep track of the alligators by putting an RFID tag under their skin.”

“Lord have mercy, I think I might rather not know what it is you do everyday.”

“Aw Mom, it’s not like we’re wrestling ‘gators. We trap them ‘humanely’—in these baited underwater traps, hook the trap to a motor boat and drag the poor things back to the station, sedate them, and then we have this gun that injects the tiny tag. We measure their length and try to get a weight, check for injuries, look at their teeth, et cetera. When we’re done, we put them in shallow locks until we’re sure they’ve woken up, lift the gate and they swim out—as fast as they can, I might add.”

They gazed at Alice Coltrane and tried to picture it.

“I guess that does sound tiring,” said Titus, “for the alligators.”

“Tell them about the magic wand,” said Juni.

“Right. We have this wand that reads the tags, so we can see if any of the ones we catch already have a tag, then we measure them and compare their length to the last figures we got on that individual. We’re trying to see how long they grow—until what age. The university has some findings suggesting they grow almost until they die, which can mean for many decades.”

“Do they have names?” Lou asked.

“Some pretty stupid ones, let’s see, there’s Long Don, Theodosia, Gray Man, Spotswood, Fat Boy, that kind of thing.”

“Alice Coltrane,” said Lou, “you may be my daughter, but I just never met anybody like you.”

“What about me, Mom?” Juni straightened up and flashed a big, showy smile. “Did you ever meet anyone like me?”

“Of course not, but AC has had fourteen more years to surprise me.”

AC put her arm around Juni and pulled her closer. It was hard for Juni to size her up from so close. “What was she like when she was my age?”

“I thought she was a lot of trouble—until you came along!”

“What about Titus? Was he a lot of trouble?”

“Titus was... let’s say, that past a certain age, Titus was always very discrete.”

“So boys get to keep more secrets,” said Juni. “Is that what you’re saying?”

“Oh Lordy, don’t start on me please. I tried to raise you three without biases, and I’d say you’re all a testament to that. But other than running with the team, Titus spent most of high school reading, so no, he was not a lot of trouble. And unlike me, he remembers what he reads.”

“Fly-paper brain,” said Alice Coltrane.

“You forgot I was editor of the arts journal...”

“Editor!” Juni started and the sudden movement made her head hurt.

“You okay?” Lou bent and tipped Juni’s chin with her hand.

"I forgot I want to write an article for the school paper. Can I use what you said about the ghost ship, Titus?"

"Sure. I might use it in a poem first, but when my manuscript is published, then you can footnote me. You're writing about the ice shelves melting?"

"I'm thinking about it. First I have to write up the protest, but I'm not sure if I can remember it right."

"Did you know anyone else there?"

"Portia was there. Pete Pettigrew. He's the organizer. Otherwise it was mostly the Aging Army..."

"... of the Historical Left!" Everyone but Titus raised their voice in unison. It was one of his catchphrases.

"You could interview this Pete," said Lou.

"Yeah," said Titus. "You could add suspense by framing it with what happened to you and saying how you can't remember it all and then asking people to fill in the blanks."

Juni grimaced. "Pete's kind of intimidating. He worked on the Keystone Pipeline. He might've been at Standing Rock."

"Why don't you practice your interview technique with us?" Alice Coltrane said.

"Can't I just ask questions?"

"Yes, but you should get some practice. I promise it'll help you feel more confident."

"And y'all will give me tips?"

"Right. We can pretend we're what's-his-name."

"No, I hate that role-playing stuff. It's so fakey, I can never get over the acting part."

"Then let's just do a real interview. You'll be surprised how much you learn interviewing someone you think you know well. Who wants to be the guinea pig?"

It was decided that Juni would interview her mother. After the dishes were cleared, washed and dried, they gathered again in the family room.

Back in her spot at the end of the sofa near Titus' chair, Juni rubbed scheming hands together. "At last, I get the family story straight. Y'all treat me good, cuz maybe someday I'll write the family history."

"Remember it's only half the story." Lou gripped an armchair from behind and began to zigzag it into place across from Juni. "Ezra isn't here to interrupt me!"

"Nope," said Titus, "the men may write the history but in the South, it's the women that carry the people's stories."

Lou stopped grappling and contemplated her son. "Titus, you are rare and wonderful."

On the sofa beside Juni, Alice Coltrane flipped through a notebook for a blank page. "Let's start with a list of questions."

"What?" said Juni. "I like to wing it, you know, just have a conversation?"

"You wanted tips." AC said. "I'm telling you, it'll go better with preparation. You can still make it conversational. Believe me, I worked for the radio station in college."

"I forgot about that."

"I'll start. How did Mom and Dad meet?"

"What did Gustus and Hazel think of Dad?" said Titus. "Was it, like, 'guess who's coming to dinner?'"

"Where did you first live?" AC clipped Titus's question.

Titus came back with "How did you decide to be a midwife?"

"When did you move back to Three Rivers?" AC glowered at him in mock battle mode.

"Did you plan to have three children and was that connected to the three rivers?"

Juni clapped her hand on AC's notebook. "This is supposed to help me?"

"I hope we finish before I have to be at work tomorrow," said Lou.

Alice Coltrane and Titus slid their palms together over Juni's lap. "I won," they said simultaneously.

Juni snatched the notebook from her sister. "Okay, Mom, how'd you meet Ezra?"

“Isn’t there life before Ezra?” Alice Coltrane interrupted.

“There’s life after Ezra—” said Titus.

“Oh my god!” Juni looked to Lou. “Please tell them to go away. We’re the only ones who need to be here.”

AC and Titus sat back in their seats with a tacit promise to interfere no further. Juni cut her eyes toward one then the other. This was rich: her siblings on either side, giving her the floor.

She cleared her throat. “Ms. Poole, where were you born?”

“In this very house, in 1968, a time when all over the world people were losing faith in the system. There was the Viet Nam war, and people against it, and race riots in the cities, and rock concerts and nudity...”

“Excuse me, Mom, you were being born. You heard about that stuff later.”

“It was the world I was born into. It matters.”

“Let’s get to things you actually experienced. Skip to when you met Dad.”

“Good going, Juni,” AC whispered.

Lou clearly wanted to say more about the sixties, but let her daughter manage the interview. “It was the summer after my freshman year. I was home waiting tables and your father was working the midnight shift at the steel mill. In the evenings, there was this group who played music together, you know jamming on a vibe. We were into Dixieland, jazz that comes out of New Orleans. This gathering was one of the only places you could go where black and white, old and young, were doing something together. It was a truly intergenerational and interracial scene because it was all about the music. I got there the first night after I heard about it, and there was your dad, this tall, lanky guy with a radiant smile, green eyes and a cosmic afro, playing the meanest clarinet heard live in these parts.”

“So you hit it off musically at first. What were you playing then?”

“I was into fiddling back then—jazz fiddle. It’s not really a Dixieland instrument, but Ezra and I clicked when we got

going. And we were both getting into our faith. Ezra used to take me down to the gospel church on the Percival Street line. That little old chapel nearly levitated on Sundays. We were idealistic and our heads were full of the role the church played in the civil rights movement.”

“How about when you took Ezra home?”

“Your grandparents were tactful at first, welcoming with their habitual good manners. They were Christians and it helped that we were also into the gospel message. This was before the religious right monopolized all the politics connected to the church. For us it was more about the liberation theology coming out of Central America. I’m sure they hoped it wouldn’t last, but we both went back to the university when summer was over, Ezra for his last year and me to change my major to nursing. By my third year in college I was pregnant.”

“Wait,” Juni gaped at her mother. “What about getting married?”

“Juni, you knew that.” Lou’s voice dropped into a deeper place.

“I did not know that.” Juni looked at her siblings. “Did you?”

Titus and Alice Coltrane glanced at each other. “We figured it out,” Titus allowed.

“I remember the conversation when I brought it to Mom,” said Alice Coltrane. “She said it was planned.”

Lou took a deep breath. “Are you scandalized?”

Juni was not scandalized, but she did feel left out. It had happened so long before she was born that even the conversations in the aftermath happened before she was grown enough to be aware. But it was a substantial piece of news, and she hated being left out. “No one thought to tell me. I’m right here and no one thought to tell me.”

Her siblings were stiff beside her. She wished they’d say something but she hoped Lou wouldn’t reach out for her hand. If she cried, it would only be more evidence that she was a baby.

“If we didn’t tell you, I am sorry,” said Lou.

“You didn’t tell me.”

“I’m sorry. It didn’t feel scandalous to us because, well, getting pregnant first worked to our advantage. Marriage used to mean a big, white, proper wedding. We figured if we got pregnant, we wouldn’t have to deal with all that. And once there was a baby in the mix, your grandparents would have to get on board.”

Her children waited.

“And they did, they did. If my parents were upset about it, they were too proud to admit they were racists. It helped that Ezra was applying to law school. Then he and Gustus got along beautifully. Except they both liked to argue so it wasn’t always pretty.”

Juni pressed herself into a more distant journalist role. “And Hazel?”

“Mom was always very reserved. I’m sorry you didn’t get to know her better, a very complicated lady.

“I remember her,” said Alice Coltrane, “I guess she was sweet enough, but I was afraid of her.”

Lou was about to respond to this but Juni stopped her. Of course Juni hadn’t known that grandmother at all. “Stick with the story, Mom. You’ve got a baby...”

“Right. And I’m still in school. The year I was pregnant, I took extra courses so I could get done early. Alice Coltrane was such an easy baby and born in May when Ezra was graduating. He became the primary caretaker during my last year. It was a dream.”

“Was it hard?”

“Oh yes, just because we loved it, didn’t mean it wasn’t hard. Ezra brought the baby to meet me at school so I could feed her. Otherwise I had to pump breast milk by hand and carry a little cooler to store the milk on the go. But when you’re young, you can do anything.”

“Really?”

Lou paused only to give Juni a look to close that line of thinking. “So I graduate college, get a job at the university hospital, and before I knew it I was pregnant again.”

“Didn’t y’all know about family planning?”

“We were just carefree. We assumed everything would work out. Everything seemed do-able. But once we had two kids under two, we moved back here and lived in that little cottage where Titus was living for a while. Ezra got a job at Shelter.”

“For the record, please describe Shelter.”

“It was a small nonprofit that provided legal advice to people who couldn’t afford it. Mostly housing and immigration issues.”

“Why did your husband quit lawyering?”

Lou looked askance. “You’ll have to interview my ex-husband. At the time he was frustrated, and the people he was trying to help had so many problems. Maybe he didn’t take that much pleasure in legal thinking, it’s so practical and you know, your dad is really a philosopher, like Titus. Ezra was questioning the faith, so what does he do? Goes to night school to get his divinity degree. Go figure. He thought about being a therapist, but reckoned that in the church he could be a counselor and also a political organizer. We didn’t realize how much the politics of the church were changing, so that didn’t work out. I was chugging along, got to be a licensed midwife.”

“Then your willful resistance to family planning snuck back into the picture.” Titus pointed at Juni. “Thank God.”

“See?” Lou’s voice was tinged with relief. “Aren’t you glad? None of my pregnancies were planned, but all were wanted. You kids think so much about everything you do, as though you can know what any of it will mean. You never know what having a child will mean. It seems more realistic to just have them. You’ll figure it out as you get older.”

“I’m already older,” said Alice Coltrane, “and I’m not having any children.”

“And I’m not going to be—” Titus started.

“Yes you are! You have to!” Juni burst into tears.

“Titus has the kind of disease that people call a death sentence.” Ezra had told her when Titus was first diagnosed.

“So he’s going to die.” Her own voice sounded hollow.

They were sitting in her mom’s car outside the library.

“We’re all going to die. Most of us live in an illusion that makes us think we’ll live forever. But Titus knows for a fact that he will die sooner than later. Much sooner.”

“When?” Juni gripped the backpack on her lap.

“On average people with ALS live between two and five years after being diagnosed. By the time you’re diagnosed, you’ve had it a while. Nobody knows how long.”

“What about not on average?” She looked out the window where an empty plastic bag struggled in the branches of a Crepe Myrtle tree.

“That’s probably a matter for the Great Wheel. Some people go fast and some more slowly. Stephen Hawking had ALS it seems like forever. But that’s an unusual case. I guess Hawking had some real purpose in the world.”

“Titus has a purpose in this world.”

“I mean—”

“You mean what?” Her voice came back to her. “Can we use purpose to save Titus’s life?”

“No, I mean, what I was saying is that we can’t count on that, it’s what you’d call luck.”

“What I’d call luck? What do you call it?”

“Darling, there isn’t anything we can do. It’s one of those rarified moments—we have to face the truth of life, which is death.”

“But I don’t accept it.”

“Yes, but you have to face it, it’s inevitable.”

“I don’t have to accept it. And don’t pat me on the shoulder.”

“It’s so hard to be young.”

“Being young is not my problem. My problem is that you’re telling me my brother’s going to die in two years. Three years if he’s lucky!”

“I’m telling you because it’s the truth and we owe each other the truth.”

“Do you accept it?” She turned toward her father. Maybe that was sadness in his face. Of course it was sadness, but she also saw resignation. “Do you *accept* it?”

“I’m trying.” He looked away. “It’s difficult...”

“It’s impossible! How can you tell me, just accept it, stomach it, eat it!”

He drew his fist sharply to his abdomen. “That is what I’m saying. ‘Take it!’ says the Roshi. You have to take in what life gives you. It’s painful but avoiding it only makes it worse.”

“I didn’t say I was avoiding. I said I’m not accepting.”

“That’s okay. Accepting is something we work for. Accepting is an art.”

“I don’t think you can accept this either. You can’t be all ‘take it!’ about your son dying. Talk about young, he’s too young!”

“I accept what you’re saying to me.”

“Stop! It!”

“Juni, you’re mad at me because you’re mad at death.”

Just when she was on the point of strangling him, he came out with something true. He did see her. “You’re right. But I’m still mad at you.”

Portia had to go to church on Sunday night, but as soon as work was over Monday, she rushed to report to Juni, home nursing her concussion.

Portia found her at the kitchen table with her brother’s laptop. “Where’s Titus?”

“Probably out in the hammock probably. Get this: that guy I introduced you to at the protest, Pete Pettigrew? He was arrested!”

“Get out!”

“He texted me this morning to see if I was okay. He had to spend Saturday night in jail. While I was just sitting around scarfing chicken soup, he was being abused by the rough hands of the law.”

"You've been writing, haven't you?"

"Since I'm planning to be a writer, you ought to be happy for me."

"I'm sorry to break it to you, Ms. Writer, but I got the big scoop."

"What big scoop?"

Portia couldn't contain her smile, but when she started to answer she grew serious. "Juni, you are not going to believe this."

"What is it?"

"At the entrance to the port, right where the protest was, there's a little house with a security guard who saw the whole thing."

"We've got to interview her."

"I did."

"But this is my story!"

Portia's straight spine arched and she did her little head-waggle preliminary to adjusting Juni's attitude. "I guess I'm glad you've got your spit'n piss voice back, girl, but I wouldn't have minded Robot Cousin a little while longer. I was there too; it's our story. You can write it but I had to go back for Mom's car, and me and this security guard, we started talking." Portia left out the part about this being her idea.

"Sorry. Thanks, Portia, thanks, just tell me what she said."

"She saw the cops before the protest and they were talking to some guys, and you aren't going to believe this."

"Just let the story flow, Portia."

"The guys were showing the policemen a bag of something and they were all laughing, cops too, and Serita Johnson thinks it was the bottle rockets in that bag."

Juni was still. Portia was right, she didn't believe it. The cops were villain enough to be in on the rockets? They didn't care about the old man and his burn, his fear, or the lifeline woman's pain? All the horrible things she and Portia knew about the violence of cops somehow hadn't connected with her home. "Portia, there's something else too. Somebody told Pete that

someone told *him* they saw a cop hit somebody, like with a baton. But maybe it wasn't me he hit. Maybe he hit someone else." She looked at Portia. "Right?"

Portia sat down in the chair across from Juni. "Sweetie."

"Then it was Grimm. Maybe Grimm's an alien."

"I found out about him too, or at least about the badge."

Juni didn't respond. She wasn't sure what she wanted to know.

"The police don't wear badges in this town," said Portia.

"Their names are sewn on their shirts. Plus they had on all that black rubber padding."

Juni looked out the window. It was cool how when Titus got into the hammock, it transformed from an airy net, high and open and swinging in the breeze like a spook, to a tight, solid cocoon that barely swayed. It looked so heavy. "Maybe they were from somewhere else. I mean, we've never seen the robocop drill here in Three Rivers, and Pete thinks they imported those cops. Look Portia, I know it seems like I dreamed that badge, or my brain like, blipped when it got knocked." She turned her frown on her cousin. "But it didn't feel like a dream. It didn't feel like anything familiar. I wish you could believe me or something. You were there."

"I—I believe it wasn't an everyday dream."

Juni wanted something else but she let this be enough. Her eyes fell to the computer screen. "I've got to get back to this."

"What?"

"My article for the school paper, the summer edition. Portia, can we not tell Lou or Ezra that a policeman may have hit me? It's not like we're hiding anything definite. Nobody's sure what happened."

Portia touched the center of her chest, then her lips in their sign for a promised secret.

Juni touched her heart then her ear to signal "got it" and returned to the computer. "Those red shirts at the protest, it turns out the National Energy Independence Party is the activist muscle of a climate-denying think-tank."

“You wrote that? Or did Titus?”

“I wrote it. But I do hang with him a lot. I wonder if I have to credit him: ‘Research Magic by Titus Poole.’ Have you ever thought about a think tank? Now that I’m writing an article other people will read—”

“Might read.”

“Thanks, P.”

“I hope they read your article, Juni.”

“But now I have to think about a think-tank.” One of the things Juni was learning to love about journalism was how it raised the stakes. It made her have to know more, to be accurate. It gave her extra reasons to ask questions, not just in interviews but constantly, questions about the things other people assumed they understood. “I kept hearing about them, but I didn’t really know what they were.”

“Okay.”

“Portia, we hear about them *all the time*. When you think about it, they’re clearly a force clearly, and most of them are funded by the people with all the money, and those people don’t want what we want! But we don’t even think about how they work.”

“Tell me.” Portia seemed genuinely interested.

Juni did a double-take. “Are we growing up or what? We’re talking about something really serious and there’s no adult in the room.”

Portia regarded her with face cool, eyes warm. “It’s good, right?”

“Right.” Juni could’ve written her whole article on think-tanks. “It’s like, the world’s so crazy, we need experts more than ever. So these people get paid to be experts, to like, build their cred, get their degrees at the right schools and work with the right companies and convince everybody they’re experts and you can trust what they say. But they’re paid by people who want us to believe certain things...”

“...things like we can just keep burning fossil fuels.” Portia got it. “I truly hope you’re not joining the conspiracy kooks”

“This is just money, Portia. It’s the oil and gas industry that’re paying the red shirts. Number one rule: follow the money. Number two: follow the politicians who run after the money. Number three: what do people think corruption looks like anyway?”

Portia walked out onto the back porch. It was mostly used to store the canning jars and broken things they thought they might fix and even some toys Juni had outgrown. There was Titus’ bow. The stack of hay bales they’d set up was rotting out back, but you could still pin targets to it. There were cans of dog food left over from when Percy was alive, and his water bowl. How could Juni stand to see that everyday? She must not see it anymore, the way things became invisible.

She and Juni were pretty different. The ten months Portia had spent in Chicago had been a lot to deal with, but Portia was a pretty even-keeled person overall. Rosa said so. Portia had wanted to spend time with her father before she was too grown to live with a parent. She’d wanted to experience a big city. She’d wanted those ballet lessons. And she knew how to keep what she wanted in mind, how to keep quiet when her father’s new wife wanted her to wear something different, to wash the dishes differently, to show her stepmother her completed homework assignments. Norma also put limits on Portia’s video calls to Juni. Now she came home and found her friend wrapped up in climate change.

She wandered out into the yard to the hammock, not sure if Titus was awake until the bundle rolled toward her. “How’s the muckraking going?”

“Juni’s writing.” Portia dropped down to sit on the grass. “But I wanted to ask you a question.”

“Shoot.”

“Why is she so stuck on climate change? I mean, how do people focus on one problem like that?”

Titus closed his eyes and nodded, as he often did when he was thinking. “Well, think about her history. Your cousin has always liked to be outdoors, learning things about nature.”

“Yeah, that weird camp she went to that didn’t have cabins. I think they slept out in the rain. And the ones at the Science Museum in Bartram. I could never get into camp.”

“You guys have slept on the upstairs porch plenty of times but Juni sleeps on it all seasons, when conditions are acceptable to Mom. You grew up with her. You know all the birds and lizards and even snakes she’s rescued. And the crow.”

“That thing loved bacon.”

“I don’t think you can love nature and not be upset about the ecological devastation humans are causing.”

“But what about other people? I think I love nature enough, but I care about people too, and justice. All these other issues, like police brutality and opioids and teen suicide and poverty. Do they still count? We still have to live in this world.”

“You’re absolutely right, but it’s all related.”

“I don’t see it,” she said slowly, trying to put something else into words.

“Take this country...” began Titus

“Nature is for rich people,” Portia blurted, “and it seems like even if we could stop the climate collapse, the poor are still going to be poor.”

“Whoah, Portia nature is here! Look around you, look at these trees, they are truly a marvel, I just marvel at these trees every day. And you’re sitting on this nice grass and we can hear the birds sing...”

“That’s not what I mean, I don’t mean somebody’s yard, not even your yard; nature is like those mountains in the car commercials where rich people go in SUVs and do stuff like hiking. Or the rain forest or the coral reefs, it’s all those places people want to save and the rich people get to go have their adventures. The people who want to save those big nature places, they’re different from the people trying to stop police brutality. They’re just different.”

“That is very interesting,” Titus was closing his eyes again. Portia was embarrassed by the emotion in her own voice. How come Titus was always so calm? Portia as usual you hit the nail right on the head.” Puzzled, she looked at him. He seemed positively happy. “You have articulated a big problem, and it’s not just an economic problem or a racial problem.”

“Is it my problem?”

“Not at all! Well, it’s not only your problem, it’s everybody’s problem. I forgot what that feeling was like.”

“Which feeling?”

“The feeling that nature is elsewhere, it’s for somebody else, not where I live, not for me. I get that, and that is an enormous part of the problem.” He was smiling at her. “But it’s false.”

“I’m just saying how I feel.”

“You’re feelings aren’t false, but it’s a false divide, a misperception.” Titus was getting animated now. Lou said he looked like the old singer Cab Calloway when he got excited, and Portia could kind of see that, the black hair in loose waves, his dark eyes rolling up to see something compelling to him but invisible to others, his outsized smile gleaming like a lighthouse in a storm. “The nature culture divide! What a mistake! Because nature is everywhere. It is these trees and this grass, and it’s the air we breathe and the rain and all of the weather, it’s Three Rivers, the Loblolly, the Tullahoma, and the Combahee, it’s the scum on the edge of the marsh, it’s the beach and the ocean and the crabs, it’s your food, it’s the flies you have to wave off the watermelon...everything is an ecosystem. It’s all ecosystems, one inside another, everything is part of a larger system, but the humans have done their best to go it alone, to separate ourselves out of natural cycles.”

“Okay...” Portia always felt tentative in the presence of other people’s enthusiasm, “but why do humans act that way?”

“It’s probably because everything in nature dies! and we do not want to die.”

“So, the humans didn’t want to be part of nature, because then we would be part of a world where everything dies?”

“That’s what I’m thinking—today anyway. But that’s just the psychological angle. We also have to talk about history. Take this country—the European settlers wanted to exploit the natural resources and the native people were just in the way, you see it’s always related. It’s called ‘primitive accumulation.’ The rich and powerful want what nature has, and they don’t care who they have to run over on their way to the goods.”

“Like all the Indians they killed...”

“Yes, and look at the rest of the world, all of colonialism, the historical period that gave rise to the modern world—people and nature were exploited together. And slavery—free labor at a devastating human cost, slavery was used to drive the industrial revolution. Slavery was the earliest form of so-called cheap energy: the energy of other people! The prosperity of this country is built on genocide and slave labor.”

“I see that, but what about now? Sometimes nature seems so far away from the rest of our lives, our problems.”

“It’s never far from us! We depend on it, nature. We only think it’s far away.”

Portia looked skeptical.

“Okay, let me try a different approach.” He closed his eyes again. “Have you ever heard anything about environmental justice?”

“Maybe.”

“You can see situations right here in Three Rivers. Think about it Portia. Where is the papermill?”

“Over in the Prince George district.”

“And the steel mill?”

“Same.”

“And the Fraxair gas and chemical company?”

“They’re all over on the Southeast side, the poor side. It’s almost like a ghetto over there. It’s like in Chicago, all the crap happens on the south side where the poor people live.”

“Right, and if the rich people had to live right next to those toxic monsters, next to a coal plant, or a fracking well, these industries would clean up their act. Maybe then we could reconsider the whole deal. But as long as rich people can have their nice houses far away from all the nastiness....The rich people delude themselves that it isn’t going to affect them.”

“But it’s going to affect everybody.

“You’re totally not kidding, but if the sea levels rise, and there’s a hurricane who gets hit first?”

“The people who live down in the bottom lands by the bay, and near the port where this new pipeline terminal is supposed to go.”

“What I am talking about! And those people are already financially insecure, they will have the hardest time recovering from extreme climate events.”

“Ugh. This is bad.”

“It’s really bad.”

“What are we going to do?”

When Juni had almost finished her article, she called Suzanne, the senior who was editor of the paper. She left a message:

“Hi Suzanne, I’m about to upload an article about the demonstration where they want to build the pipeline terminal. The event got pretty chaotic and I got a concussion which made my memory a little confused, but Portia filled in the details. Also, I was thinking since this is the summer issue and there isn’t much going on, maybe we could give the paper a kind of special theme, like global warming. We really need to think about increased risk of flooding when sea levels rise, because, you know, since we are a coastal city. Call me back please.”

Fifteen minutes later Suzanne called her back.

“Hi Juni, you are wrong about nothing happening for the summer issue.”

“Oh. Like what?”

“Well the tradition for the summer issue is to feature the graduating class, you know, what is everybody looking forward to, if they are going to college, favorite memories of high school, you know, stuff like that.”

“But what about global warming?”

“What about it?”

“We, us, our generation, we’re going to have to deal with it.”

Suzanne was silent for a few seconds. “Juni, we’re trying to send this class off with some hope, and that is just such a bummer.”

“Yeah, but it’s true, don’t you believe it?”

“Of course, I’m not stupid, but people don’t want to think about the coming catastrophe just when they are embarking on adult life. We have enough to worry about.”

“But this is going to be the biggest thing. I think we need to publicize some of the resistance.”

“Hmm. It depends what you mean by resistance. If it’s about people doing something positive....Look, send me your piece. I’ll think about it.”

“I really pictured it for the front page.”

“Did you get any pictures?”

“Not really.”

“Is that a no?”

“No. I mean yes, it’s a no, I didn’t take any pictures, but I can get some!”

“How are you going to do that?”

“How about a picture of the port, where they are planning the terminal?”

“I suppose we could do a google earth grab and show it on a map. But isn’t that terminal and the pipeline and all going to bring a lot of jobs?”

“Oh come on Suzanne, they always use that argument to undermine our point.”

“But a lot of people around here, our graduates included, are going to want those jobs, and they have a point too. We need to report both sides of the issue.”

“But we hear the pro-pipeline side all the time. Everybody around here just listens to Fox News, and it’s so mendacious!”

“I hope you don’t plan to use “mendacious” in your article.”

“No, I don’t. But what about the people who live in substandard housing in the Prince George district, they are gonna be underwater soon. Our job is to represent the least powerful people.”

“Our job is to demonstrate journalistic standards, and interviewing the other side is just standard.”

“That’s the problem with it. It makes everything seem normal when it’s not! Then people think there is still some controversy about human-driven climate change.”

“Isn’t there?”

“No! 99.9% of the scientists in the world say it’s definitely a fact.”

“But most people around here think it’s still debatable.”

“No way, they’re just wrong. Who’s going to break it to them? Why not us?”

“Because I don’t want parents calling the school saying the paper has gone radical.”

“It’s not radical.”

“But people think it is. Three Rivers Tribune doesn’t print anything about global warming at all.”

“Well maybe it is radical in that context, but it’s true. What about truth?”

“Give me a break, I swear, you newbies are so dramatic!”

“Okay, I know it can’t be the theme of the whole issue, but can we please put my article on the first page please?”

“You sure are aggressive for a freshman.”

“I think I’m now officially a sophomore.”

“Well, the summer issue is about seniors.”

Juni was silent for a few seconds, what else could she say?

“But you know there’s a guy in the senior class, Suzanne went on, “who I think is really into the eco movement. His

yearbook profile says “most likely to hug a tree and save the world.”

“What’s his name? I could interview him. I know how to interview.”

“Anyone can do an interview. His name is Dillon Wilder. 383-9822”

“D-Y-L-A-N?”

“Not like Dylan the folk singer, it’s D-I-L-L-O-N, like the grocery store.”

“Oh, that’s dorky.”

“Dorky? Dillon’s a lot of things, but I wouldn’t call him dorky.”

As soon as Juni had the number, she dialed. “Hi, is this Dillon Wilder?”

“Who wants to know?” He spoke in a hushed voice. Maybe eco-activists were up to clandestine schemes and had to worry about people overhearing their cell conversations.

She lowered her own voice. “My name is Juni Poole, and I write for the *Swamp Fox Sentinel*, and I’m writing an article on the protest against the new gas pipeline terminal they want to build at the port, and you know, that stuff.”

“Hold up,” he whispered. The background noise changed and she could tell he’d gone through a door.

“What?” His voice was at a more normal level now. “The protest? Were you there last Saturday?”

“Yeah. Were you?”

“I wish! I heard the police were out in their new Darth astronaut gear and the Neep! Neep!— you know the N.E.I.P.? They showed up with rockets. Sounded like it was lit!”

“Well, the rockets were lit.”

“Haha.”

Juni belatedly got that N.E.I.P. was the National Energy Independence Party. They may be the ones who wore the red shirts at the protest. “So did you see a picture of the cops?”

“A friend posted one on Instagram.”

“Can you send me a link? Suzanne wants pictures— at the *Sentinel*.”

“I know Suzanne.”

“She told me you’re involved in similar issues.”

“More now that school’s over and I can start doing what I really want to do.”

That sounded like the perfect connection to this stupid summer edition of the *Sentinel*. “Could I interview you about all that?”

“All what?”

Juni couldn’t tell if this was going well or not. She needed to be clearer. “Your interest in environmental issues, what you hope to do now you’ve graduated.”

“Sounds fun. When?”

“The article has to be in in a week. We could meet at the new Subway on Front Street.” Juni hated Subway, but it was new and popped into her head.

“I hate Subway,” said Dillon. “Let’s meet at The Beanz on Highmarket. This thing I’m at is almost done. I can get there in ... about 45 minutes, like eight o’clock?”

“Tonight? Great.” Forty-five minutes! Was he sarcastic when he said the interview sounded fun?

Juni arrived at Beanz a little early, only to find that they’d closed at six, so she sat at one of the tables they left outside all the time. She guessed they were too ugly and heavy to steal. She took out her pad and pen and started jotting down questions.

When she looked up, a young man in a suit and tie was the only other person on the street. He was walking along the sidewalk in her direction. She tried not to stare at him but he looked bizarrely awkward. His pants were way too small; bare leg showed between the cuff and the top of his socks. She dragged her eyes away, and there was the moon through the branches, pale but getting brighter as the sky darkened.

“Hey— Uh, I somehow missed your name.”

He was talking to her. Juni jolted to a stand.

"I think I'm supposed to be meeting you here," he was saying. "I'm Dillon."

"Juni, I'm Juni."

"That's right. Want to go inside, Juni?" Yellow shirt cuffs showed at the end of the jacket's arms and the coat was wide open like it was never going to get buttoned.

"They're closed."

Dillion's eyes widened in exaggerated surprise, then his face relaxed. "That is so sad, so sad, and I was dying for some of their key lime pie. What are we going to do?"

"Maybe we should just throw a brick in the window."

"Ha! Should we make a run for the pie or run the other way?"

"I don't believe in running, pardner," said Juni, emphasizing her drawl. She was surprised at her own quick responses. She couldn't figure out if this guy was making her more nervous or more relaxed.

"Well, that's convenient. We can sit right here, right?"

"Sure."

He sat down in the nearest chair and stretched his legs with the too-short grey pants out in front of him. Juni really hoped the pants didn't rip.

"You want to talk political ecology?"

"Yes. What?"

"Environmental politics. You said you were at the protest against the pipeline terminal."

"Yeah, I wrote an article about it. I wanted the *Sentinel* to put it on the front page but Suzanne said the summer edition is always about the seniors."

"Okay."

"So I wondered if we could rewrite my article to seem like it's about you, about your interests, because then we might have a chance to be front page material."

"*Seem* to be about me?" His dark hair was uneven, very long in the front and falling over his glasses. It looked like he'd slept on it wet.

“Oh, that sounds bad,” said Juni. “It would be about you but it would also be about these crucial issues. They have to fit in with the senior theme is all.”

“So, you want to use me, use my senior status to get what you want.”

“No! Yes! I mean, I was hoping it might be something we both want.”

Was he teasing her or did he seriously believe she was using him?

“And what is it we both want so badly, Miss Juni, who I have only just met?” Juni suddenly realized she was talking to a senior. She wished she could start the whole conversation over.

“Getting front page publicity for something we care about?”

He leaned forward and pulled up his socks as if they could close the gap under the cuffs. The chorus of night insects and tree frogs rose and fell, and the streetlights came on. Juni studied the landscaping around the law office across from where they sat.

“Waxing gibbous,” said Dillon.

“What?”

“The moon. It’s waxing which means getting bigger, and it has a convex curve which is called gibbous.”

“I know what waxing gibbous is, I just didn’t hear you.” Juni was nervous and when she was nervous, she had to know everything before anyone told her about it. She didn’t want him thinking she’d never heard those words, especially under the circumstances.

“I can’t believe this.” He swiveled and leaned toward her, uncomfortably close now.

Juni clutched her notepad. “What?”

“What year are you?”

“Sophomore?” She hated him for making her feel shy.

“I got the email about this *Sentinel* thing, but I blew it off. I can’t believe some punk sophomore came up with a way to twist it into something useful.”

“Does that mean you want to help?”

“Tell me how it would work.”

“Well, you tell me what plans you have now that you’ve graduated.”

“You too? I am so sick of everybody asking me that!”

“You don’t have any plans?”

“I have a million plans!”

Juni gave him a genuinely sympathetic look. “We need to narrow down from a million. Can you pick some that have to do with the fate of the planet? Something inspiring we can link to the proposal for the terminal and the fight in Prince George neighborhood.”

“Which is where I spent my childhood,”

“That’s perfect!”

“Not really.” Dillon looked past her down the tunnel of live oaks and Spanish moss that was Highmarket Street. He dropped into a serious place again. “My dream, my hope, is to stop this murderous growth economy dead in its tracks. I want to crush capitalism and leave it in ruins, and then build a different universe on top of the rubble.”

“That’s quotable.” She wrote down his words. “But do you think we can stop the pipeline?”

“I’ve been going to the city council meetings every third Tuesday of the month. I’ve been to three so far, and they’ve got new stuff to say about the terminal every time.” He jumped up from his chair. “That’s why I’m wearing my little brother’s church suit. I just came from the City Council meeting. Some of us had on pants that were enormous. One guy had a hospital gown and high heels. This one girl, she put all these weird lumps and flashlights under her dress. It was ridiculous.”

Juni looked baffled.

“Mis-fits. Get it? After the last time we showed up, we heard that Councilman Screven called us a bunch of ‘misfits and clowns.’ His exact words! The issue we go to meetings about is the flood control and evacuation plans for Prince George. The plans are ancient history, and storms are bigger now and the ocean is rising. We want evacuation plans that match the changed conditions. The Council says they’re going to talk about

it, but they always put it off. We're not important enough. We need to get their attention."

Juni didn't know much about the City Council but it sounded like they took care of important things in Three Rivers. "Doesn't your group look a little demented?"

"Who cares? We really are the misfits!" He swept his arms open. "We are the failures! But you know what? We're *their* failures. They have to deal with us."

"Why?"

"Because we are asking them to do the right thing." He lowered his voice and took a stance like the statue in the park downtown, one foot a little forward of the other, chin up, head turned to indicate noble jaw line.

Juni grimaced. "Because ..."

"I was kidding. They have to deal with us because sure, we're citizens, we pay taxes, we vote, but mainly because we're asking them to do the right thing."

"That must take something, um, it must take a lot of guts."

"It's basic organizing. What have we got to lose? And I must admit, I love to see them squirm when we show up."

"Can I quote you in my article?"

Dillon frowned, "You know, I think using the school paper is a great idea, I really do, but the post graduation issue... I don't know if Suzanne and her minions are ever going to let you do it the way you want to."

"But..."

"Now hold on, because I have another idea." He sat down and turned to her again, "Since you like to write, I propose that we make our own broadside."

"You mean a newspaper?"

"A single sheet that lays out what's happening with this pipeline terminal and lays out the problems. We write it and we print it and we hand it out downtown. We make a sort of event out of it, so we get to talk to people, tell them stuff they don't know. We could say we're conducting an informal survey and ask people—"

“—how concerned they are about the coming floods!” Juni saw the whole thing in a flash of excitement mixed with anxiety. Would they need to bring table and chairs like for voter registration? Maybe they’d have to get a permit, but maybe they could just walk downtown and start acting official.

“Let’s do it on the Fourth of July! Everybody will be out!” He put his hand up to do a high-five.

Juni shuddered a little when she thought of fireworks, but Dillon’s enthusiasm was infecting her. Why not? She high-fived him back and it was a deal.

At eight a.m. Wednesday morning Juni showed up to her orientation at Pirateland, where her new supervisor was waiting for her at the front gate. Carrying a maroon briefcase and dressed in an oversized white shirt, plastic gold chains, Puma sweatpants, Teva sport sandals, he introduced himself as Buccaneer Bob. Juni found his weathered face and five o’clock shadow very pirate-like indeed, but she thought he could do better than the sweatpants and Tevas. He led her down a side path to the “employee’s cove,” a large but run-down trailer parked in the trees, alongside a couple of other sheds and spare generator parts. The arms of the live oaks lifted feathers of Spanish moss into shady patterns.

“This is where employees can take smoke breaks.” He lit a cigarette and waved it towards a collection of battered aluminum lawn chairs scattered around the sandy clearing. He put the maroon briefcase down on a picnic table that was peeling pink paint, and pulled a red bandana off his head along with a mass of shiny black hair. Under this complete pirate headpiece a hairnet covered bleached blonde hair in startling contrast to his dark leathery face. He wiped his neck with the bandana part of his topper.

“And here’s where you can find all you need for a proper costume.” When he opened the trailer door, they were hit with a hot blast of musty air.

“Oooh,” clucked Buccaneer Bob, “that is not savory. Ever since Crystal left and they didn’t replace her, well, they can’t expect me to do everything... oh dear, there even might be a little mildew creeping in here. We’ve got to get that dryer working again.”

When Juni’s eyes had adjusted to the dim light inside, she saw an unholy mess of textures and colors, all kinds of props, including cutlasses, muskets, brass and leather treasure chests, skulls, skeletons, shackles, bottles, goblets, jars of coins, strings of beads, clothing hanging on half-collapsed racks and piles of more clothing on a set of slanting shelves.

“Maybe I could bring something from home,” she ventured.

Bob was not deterred. “It just needs a tidying touch. Do you have such a touch?”

“Me? I just got here.”

“Hmhmhm. Look sweetie, even if you have the perfect get-up at home, you’re going to have to pick out something for today. I can help you.”

“Maybe you could go in there and pull out something appropriate. I don’t even know what I’m looking for.”

“I’d take you for, I don’t know, what size are you?”

“Something small. If it’s junior sizes I wear about an eight, but if it’s ladies I need a size two, but not too short, not petite. Petite sizes are always too short.”

“Come to think of it, we don’t have sizes like that.” He dropped his cigarette in the sand, went inside and started riffling through the clothes. “How about this?” He tossed a pink ruffled tuxedo shirt over his shoulder in Juni’s direction, and immediately after it a red vinyl belt with a big gold buckle. “And what about these? They’re just cleaned.” He turned around and held up a pair of amber velveteen knee breeches that looked as big as a sleeping bag. “The belt will help.”

“I think I can just put these on over my clothes.” Juni was wearing shorts and a tank top.

“It’s going to be hot, but suit yourself,” said Bob, “—literally! Lol!” he laughed.

She stood holding the makeshift pirate wear while Bob tried to straighten one of the stacks on a shelf.

“What am I going to be doing?”

“I almost forgot the hat! You can’t be who you need to be without the hat.” He pulled a round box off the top shelf, opened it and pulled out a brand new tri-cornered hat of molded black plastic with painted gold trim and black faux dreadlocks attached to the inside edge. He stepped out of the fetid air and placed the hat on Juni’s bronzing curls.

She adjusted it, stuffing her thick hair up over the goose egg on her head to make a padding. She found the elastic band that went under her chin, “Who or what is it I need to be?”

“A scoundrel of the high seas! A rebel and a renegade! Do you think you have a rascalion in you? Do you have enough chaos in you to give birth to a star?”

Juni paused to think about these unexpected questions. Bob grinned and beat her to the punch, “Of course you do! I can see it! Now don the right clothes, because clothes work magic on our imaginations. I promise you’re going to feel the part.”

“A rascal,” muttered Juni. She unbuttoned the top two buttons of the pink shirt and slipped it over her head. She pulled on the breeches and held them up awkwardly. Bob handed her the red belt and she threaded it through the loops. It was made for someone at least twice her size so she tied it in a knot, cinching the folds of excess material around her waist.

Bob stood back and surveyed the effect. “Try raising both arms and spinning around.”

Juni swung her arms back and forth and did a couple of pirouettes.

“Those britches are really fabulous but they’re wasted on you. Don’t feel slighted, it’s just that you’re drowning in them. Give them to me. I’ll find you something else,” and Bob was back in the trailer changing his sweatpants into the velveteen breeches. He tossed her another rag. “Here we go!” This time it was a moderately sized pair of khakis cut off in crude zigzags below the knee. She pulled them on over her shorts and

threaded the red belt through the loops. This was much better. "What about shoes?" She was wearing generic sneakers.

"Oh, anything safe and comfortable."

She scrutinized Bob's sport sandals. "Don't you think boots would be more... pirate?"

"If you have some, bring them tomorrow. Sneakers are fine for today." Bob lit another cigarette and sat at the picnic table. He opened the briefcase and shuffled through some papers. "So Louisa Belle Poole, do you like adventure?"

"Everyone calls me Juni. Louisa's my mother's name. I mean, it's my name too officially, like on paper."

"Okay Juni, I don't know how Louisa Belle becomes Juni, but it's none of my business."

"My parents called me Junior when I was in the womb. When I turned out to be a girl, they called me Juni."

Buccaneer Bob squinted at her through his cigarette smoke. "What about a pirate name? Pirate Juni... I think Pirate Louisa Belle is closer to the mark. You are by no means a junior pirate." His raspy laugh sent him into a fit of coughing.

"Are you okay?"

He stood suddenly and produced a loud "Aaargh!" which seemed to clear his pipes. "Aaargh!" he said again this time tilting his head and shutting one eye. "Can you do that?"

"What?"

"Aaargh! That's the pirate code. You've got to be able to give a good Aaargh! to, to communicate, to concentrate and encapsulate the essence of pirate."

She nodded.

"Now you try it, go ahead."

"Aaargh."

"Clench your fist and shake it a little! Stick your chin out and bend one knee. Lean into it."

Juni took a step forward and tightened her fists. "Aaargh!"

"See that's the warm-up, you'll get it. We'll do that together when the rest of the pirates get here. Aaand, and and and..." He drew out the words like a drum roll while he shuffled

through his papers until he found what he wanted. He handed her a paper and her heart skipped a beat. She was looking at the lyrics by one of her favorite singer songwriters, Beluga.

"This song is called 'When I'm the Greatest,' and we like to sing it every morning. Do you know it?"

"I do." Juni always grew uncharacteristically shy around things that were precious to her. "It's one of Beluga's songs."

"Terrific! But I like to call her Belita Zimmerman, her real name, because, I don't know, it's her official name. You understand that."

"But this song is sad."

"It's about ambition! The highs and lows of ambition. I can see how a young person would find it sad, but to a person my age this kind of melancholy is just the truth of life, it is the b-side of our daily optimism."

"Maybe I've never really understood that."

"That's the thing about art! Everybody gets to understand it in their own way. We must find a time to talk about that later. But do look closer with your eagle eye, because I've rewritten some of the words."

"Can you do that?"

"I can! Can you?"

"It's not stealing?"

"You mean copyright? It's overrated. Creativity is for sharing. But let's take a quiet moment because now, your fellow pirates will be showing up here soon."

Juni sat in one of the lawn chairs and studied her sneakers, trying not to look at Buccaneer Bob. He was humming the tune to "When I'm the Greatest" with his eyes closed. Creativity is for sharing, Bob had said. But you aren't supposed to take other people's ideas.

But there was sampling. So many songs she knew used bits of other people's songs; maybe they asked permission. Maybe she should write Beluga and ask if it was okay to use her

song for a specific purpose. She tried to get used to the musty smell of the costume hanging on her and racked her memory of her own closet for replacements.

Soon enough her co-workers started showing up, some already in costume, others putting themselves together in the bargain basement that was the trailer. Everyone called Buccaneer Bob “B-Bob” with evident affection, and he acted like each person’s personal cheerleader, admiring their attire and adding suggestions for improvements. When the crew was assembled, B-Bob led the group in a chorus of Aaarghs. He then plugged his phone into a pair of dinky speakers to accompany an effortful rendition of “When I’m the Greatest.” The singers did seem to be trying their best, but the song was not an easy one if you weren’t Belita Zimmerman herself.

Portia joined Juni and contributed her share of eye-rolling to the scene, but everyone succumbed to the unfettered enthusiasm of B-Bob. Portia wore a dress that managed to patch together several different printed fabrics, with a studded belt that sat low on her hips. Under the dress she had on a pair of vintage bloomers, knee socks and her own boots. Her tri-cornered pirate hat was made of black felt. “Where’d you come up with that ensemble?” Juni wanted to know.

“B-Bob brings in some new stuff every Tuesday. If you come early on Tuesday you might get to change. But that shirt looks totally on brand for you.”

“Doubtful.”

B-Bob was clapping his hands to get their attention. “Everyone to your positions!” He noticed the cousins comparing the virtues of their pirate garb. “Louisa Belle! You go with Pirate Pensive and Lily today. They already know what to do.”

“Pirate Pensive?” whispered Juni.

“I didn’t really feel like talking for the first two days. If I get it together, maybe I can turn into Pirate Perky.”

Juni gave Portia a look that said, “Come on now, don’t be sarcastic, Buccaneer Bob is nice.”

“What? I’m being snarky about myself, not anyone else.”

They were each given a musket and little ribbon of caps that, when inserted correctly, would make a popping sound and smoke when you pulled the trigger. Juni tried hers out.

Buccaneer Bob was horrified. "Don't do that! Please don't waste the caps!"

They filed along the sandy path with the other pirates heading to the island. Their band of five had to be ferried across a narrow place in the Lost Lagoon so they could take their positions on the derelict ship parked on that side. The water was dyed an unnatural turquoise but a pump kept it flowing. A scrawny pirate waded in the lagoon with a bag and a net, scooping up the garbage thrown overboard the day before.

The shipwreck was an actual defunct ship that had been installed on the edge of the island with part of the hull cut out to make a door. This was on the side the patrons couldn't see. On the inside were ladders leading to three different hatches. Portia, Juni and a slip of a girl named Lily were supposed to climb out to the deck on their cue.

They lay low inside the hollowed hull while a fourth pirate perched above watched for the *Intrepid*. Two British soldiers at the helm were priming their passengers, the tourists, with pirate stories. When the unsuspecting ship came around the bend, the pirate on watch blew a little whistle that sounded like a tropical bird. At this point the girls below were instructed to count to ten, grab their muskets and emerge ready to shoot.

When she gained the deck, Pirate Portia announced loudly, "You've fallen into a trap! Surrender!" Whereupon the shooting commenced and one of the British soldiers clutched his chest, fell overboard, and was dragged ashore by a pirate who made a big show of going through his pockets. The other officer produced a white shirt tied on a stick, meant to be a sign of defeat. Pirates waiting in a dinghy half hidden in the brush paddled out to the ship in a cacophony of hooting and shooting into the air. They climbed upon the hapless ship, raised a pirate flag, and commandeered the tourists to their next adventure around the bend.

Meanwhile Juni and Portia had died in the fight, and Lily sneaked away along a path in the trees to take part in another drama on the other side of the island. Buccaneer Bob, in the amber velveteen britches, his kerchief full of curls, and his Teva sandals had been one of the pirates leading the attack but he didn't get on the *Intrepid*. He did logistical tasks like rowing the dinghy, holding the ladder while the pirates boarded the British ship, and rowing the dinghy back to shore. Instructed to remain dead until they received the signal, the girls lay motionless atop the derelict hull.

The husky drawl of B-Bob rose from down below. "Come on, ladies. It's time to rejoin the living."

"And I was just getting to like being dead." Portia sat up and brushed sand off her hands and knees.

"Yeah, it's kind of like, meditational, lying there without moving."

"We gotta work on our death falls though," said Portia, the dancer.

"You thought you came back from Chicago to get away from people all shooting each other," Juni teased. "You got gangsters up there but seeing as we are about 200 years behind, we just have pirates and some stuffed wool with British flags."

"And slavers."

"Right! I wonder if pirates stole slave ships too."

"Of course they did." Buccaneer Bob appeared on deck. "The slave ships were big mothers, and a lot faster than you would expect, and they could hold a huge crew. They could be what you call an asset."

"What about the slaves?"

"Sometimes they joined the crew. There were lots of African pirates, definitely living a better life than plantation slaves. But some of the pirates could find a buyer and life as property went on as the devil planned it."

"I have an idea," said Portia, "We could open a place called Plantation Pirate Land where the pirates are in cahoots with the high and mighty plantation owners, selling them bargain bodies."

“No,” Juni said, “the pirates were outlaws. I bet they just told the slaves, ‘work for us or we throw you overboard.’”

“Pirates were outlaws,” said Buccaneer Bob, “no doubt about it, but their society was democratic. You’d be surprised. The captains were elected and if they didn’t rule the ship fairly, mutiny was always an option.”

“That’s all cool, but I don’t think pirates can save us from global warming.”

Buccaneer Bob looked at Portia. “What did she just say?”

Portia sighed, “Juni has more important things on her mind than pirate play.”

“That’s marvelous!” exclaimed Bob. “I’m glad somebody is thinking about it. You kids are gonna have to face this Armageddon since your elders have finked on the challenge. But time’s a wastin’. Get ye to your next post.”

Juni liked the Fulla Beans coffee shop better than the Beanz. The owner had kept the old screen doors from its past life as a hardware store. They slammed in the spring and fall and this made Juni feel at home. But today in late June, the outer glass doors were shut tight, the screen doors inside propped open with iron coffee kettles, and the air conditioning cranked up. Today the shop didn’t feel like a cozy refuge because she was feeling unsettled. She sat in a booth that gave her a view of the door.

She hadn’t known what she was getting into when she started writing for the *Sentinel*. It had been so exciting to imagine her words printed under a bold headline, her own name as author. But when Suzanne had questions about the article, the whole thing felt precarious. She realized once it was on paper, someone could hold up that sheet of wood pulp and point to a line of crisp black letters and say, “But this right here isn’t true,” and Juni couldn’t correct it. She’d just be wrong.

By the time Dillon arrived, she was sitting sideways against the wall with her legs stretched along the bench seat, her laptop in her lap open to a weather.gov page about hurricanes. He dropped onto the opposite bench, and she twirled into a conventional sitting position, a move she'd seen Portia make.

He'd gotten past her and was already carrying a cup of coffee and a doughnut. "Your article was good."

"Thanks, but Suzanne took stuff out of that version I sent you."

"Like what?"

"Like about you dressing up crazy for the City Council meeting."

"Why?"

Juni's conversation with Suzanne had wound around. "She said kids look up to the seniors and putting this behavior in the article could encourage kids to disrespect town leaders."

"Uh huh." He looked at her like, get to the real reason Suzanne took it out.

"Then she said it was the parents who thought the seniors were role models and the paper would get complaints from the parents."

"Uh huh." He tapped his spoon against the cup.

"Maybe it was just Suzanne. It really bugged her that you guys would mock Mr. Screven and Mr. Cheney and Ms. Poliakoff. You know, she owns the Low Country Ace Hardware, which is the last hardware store surviving in our town since Home Depot opened out on the Uncle Ben."

"Does that mean it's going on the front page, now she's sanitized it? With the title you gave it?"

Juni gaped at him. "I— I'm not sure." The feedback session with Suzanne got her so rattled, she didn't remember the outcome. Her title seemed ridiculous now. *Can this Graduate Save Us from Ourselves?* She hoped Suzanne had scrapped it.

Dillon was studying her face. She didn't know what kind of understanding might be behind his own face, a pretty ordinary face, a manageable face that didn't call attention to itself or demand much.

"I feel so responsible," she said. "I want to be right. I mean, accurate. Well, I want to be right, too."

At seven o'clock, the lowering sun had gotten a fiery toe-hold on a little sofa in the window. The girl there moved to an armchair.

"I believe being right is easy, it just has to be based on accurate information." Dillon said it with a modest, common sense tone, not like it was some dramatic principle. "Accurate information is what people need to make good decisions, like about pipelines. I know there are some powerful people, and companies, that persuade people with lies, but that isn't accurate and it's not right."

She smiled at him and took a big, visible breath. "Do you have brothers and sisters?"

"Two of them older and gone off, so now I'm the oldest with four younger and guess who they all turn to when they need a ride somewhere."

"Oh my god. Seven kids for real?"

"Pretty exciting. Excitement never stops. What about you?"

"One of each." She steadied her smile to avoid giving away anything about Titus. "Both of them a lot older than me."

"How much older?"

"The next one is twelve years older.."

"Shoot, there could've been at least six more kids in between." He dipped his doughnut in his coffee. "You know I could tell you have a big brother. You've had some excellent role models. Let's do this broadside. What are we going for?"

"Right." Juni got down to business. "Like, what do you mean?"

Dillon laughed. "I mee-ee-ean what's our approach? We have to decide if we want to show our outrage, lay on the guilt, talk about the dangers to grandchildren. We could try to scare people, go dire. We could cozy up first with nature's beauty and then lead them around to it so they don't realize they're agreeing 'til suddenly a trigger word comes up, but we hope it's too late for them to slam on the brakes."

“Trigger word?”

He whipped his head this way and that checking for eavesdroppers and his chopped hair rearranged itself oddly on his head. He leaned in to whisper. “Words like ‘tree.’ Or like ‘protect.’ People think ‘tree’ means ‘tree-hugger’ which is just a crazy, weak excuse for a human being. ‘Protect’ means regulations in which we want the government to squash business and livelihoods so some tiny colorless clam can carry on its tiny colorless life that nobody can see and nobody cares about. Words like that.”

Juni’s gaze wandered toward the feet of some people standing at the door. She loved tiny colorless clams. She had no idea how to appeal to people who didn’t.

A pair of shoes came toward the table, sandals that looked a lot like the ones Portia had shown Juni in an online ad.

Juni looked up and recognized the lead in the school production of *Guys and Dolls*, but maybe that was because the girl’s face was so bright and commanding.

“Did I just see you whispering, Dillon Wilder?” The girl looked at Juni, not friendly but not unfriendly. The people she was with shuffled over, mostly familiar from Tullahoma High.

“Hey, Natalie.” Dillon nodded to the rest of them. “Whispering? I did no such thing.”

“It’s like that, is it?”

“Well, I don’t want to have to kill you.”

Natalie raised an eyebrow at Juni, as if to say “but you trust your secret with her?”

Dillon’s response was to introduce Juni to all of them. “We’re in the middle of a writing project.”

“School is done, Dillon!” Natalie said. “You are so slow.”

“I am so slow.” Dillon agreed in a completely agreeable way. “So here we are.”

Natalie laughed and gave up. “We’re going to lounge over in the window if you feel like joining us. After your project’s done of course. But I guess that could be next week.”

“No way,” Juni spoke up. “At least one of us’ll make the deadline.”

Natalie gave her a smile. “Sounds serious.”

The group split, some to claim the couches, some to make orders at the counter. The sun had gotten low enough that it reached the coffee table and glared off the finish, putting halos around Dillon’s friends.

Juni came back to the subject. “Which approach do you think will work the best?”

“Let’s see what we’ve got. Why don’t we want the terminal here?”

“It’s a threat to our town. And Three Rivers is not even a safe place for it. It doesn’t make sense to build it where we have hurricanes and big storms and floods. Also, in general it means more methane released into the air and that adds to the warming and the sea levels rising which is not good for our town situated low and near the ocean. And pipelines just encourage people to keep drilling and fracking instead of switching to renewables.”

“Don’t say that word!”

Juni clapped her hand over her mouth before she realized he was kidding. “I need to learn these trigger words. Maybe Pete’s group has a glossary of them I can study.”

“Pete Pettigrew, right? Petrol Patrol. I figured you knew him from the protest. He’s been working in Prince George. But yeah, I think you’ve summed up enough information for the broadside. We don’t want it too wordy.”

“Otherwise I think you’ve summed up enough information for the broadside. We don’t want it too wordy.”

She liked the way he said “we.” It put them on a team together. The barista came out from the counter and began winding a thick yellow shade down over the window. On it, Juni could see the outline of the clocktower across the street and once in awhile, the shadows of people walking by on the sidewalk.

Half an hour later they were debating whether to write that a weather event “could rupture the pipeline” or “can rupture the pipeline” or— Juni’s choice— “will rupture the pipeline.” Her view won out because the others were just too easy to dismiss.

Juni didn’t want to focus on the money losses, only the losses to animal life and plant habitat. What was money next to those miracles? Talking about money wouldn’t help people remember what their lives really depended on. Dillon won this one.

And though he said the resolution would be bad when they made copies, Dillon liked the photo Alice Coltrane had taken. She’d gotten low to the sand behind a few loggerhead turtles that had just hatched and were scrabbling toward the water. The view was over their backs to the surf that loomed in the path ahead of them.

SAY NO TO THE PIPELINE TERMINAL AT OUR PORT!

Hurricane Hazel
Hurricane Hugo
Hurricane Floyd
Hurricane Charley

Three Rivers is no place to build a terminal:
Our town is the site of floods and hurricanes.

A weather event will rupture a pipeline
releasing known and unknown toxins into
our air, our water, our soil.

METHANE is released
during routine transfer to ships,
from small leaks,
or from a rupture.

Methane in our atmosphere is a major cause of global warming,
contributing to the ocean's rise and climate instability.

This hastens a state of PERMANENT FLOOD
in our historic town.

Three Rivers could be found liable for these damages
and face MASSIVE legal costs and fines.

WE CAN SEE THESE LIKELY EVENTS.
WE CANNOT IGNORE THEM!
THINK OF YOUR CHILDREN!

COME TO THE HEARING AT CITY HALL
THURSDAY, SEPTEMBER 20, 6:00PM

Juni had always looked up to Titus. She loved to go with him to the marshes and walking in the woods, or even just doing errands. Doing something with her big brother always felt special, like it was a special thing they were doing, a special place, a magical kind of time. She liked to do things with Alice Coltrane too, but Alice liked to have a plan, and she always had a purpose. If she went out to the marshes, it was to catch crabs for dinner, or to take samples of water and mud to look at them under a microscope, or to hunt for some kind of frog she'd read about. Time with Alice Coltrane was more like time with her mom. Juni learned a lot from her sister, and most of it was very practical. With Titus she was never sure what to expect.

"Hey Juni, want to do some ghost stalking?" It was mid morning on her day off and she'd slept late, but as usual Titus had been up for hours. He would take a nap later in the day.

"You know somewhere we can find ghosts?"

"You have to be very quiet."

"I can do that. Where is it?"

"We have to take the car."

"Do I need anything special?"

He looked over her outfit. "Everything's fine."

Juni looked down at her shorts and sneakers. "What was that about?"

"You just have to be very quiet. Heavy boots or clothes that rustle will give us away."

"Are we going to sneak up on the ghosts?"

"In a way."

They drove south on the Uncle Ben Highway, but Titus wouldn't tell Juni anything about where they were going or how they would conduct themselves when they got there. Unable to get any answers, Juni watched the papermill trees line up into perfect rows as they drove past them. The coastal country where they lived was full of ghost stories, mostly of people who were swept to sea in a hurricane or were helpless to save loved ones swept to sea. Forever after they appeared on the eve of hurricanes to warn the living about lethal weather on the way.

She wouldn't put it past Titus to get her out to some lonely place and scare her with stories. "I always thought the ghosts only come out at night."

"Oh no, they're at their haunts night and day. The whole thing about being a ghost is that you're stuck. You have nowhere to go and that's the problem. You're attached to this world when you should be moving on to the next one."

"Maybe they don't want to detach."

They turned off the Uncle Ben going west, down a road Juni didn't know. They turned on a gravel road that led to a surface of packed sand, then to a weedy clearing in some woods of pine, oaks and palmetto. "This is good," said Titus, turning the car off and unbuckling his seat belt. He sat for a minute just looking around.

"Don't ghosts want to be left alone?" Juni asked.

"We're not going to bother them!" Titus stepped out of the car and Juni followed, "They won't even notice us if we act right. So this is how you are going to do this. First your gaze."

"My gaze?"

"How you're looking at the world. Direct your eyes straight ahead."

Juni looked ahead and noticed an old carriage road leading off the right side of the clearing. "Hey there's a road."

"Yep, that's our road. Keep looking straight ahead but soften your eyes and without turning them, concentrate your attention to your peripheral vision. It's a thing you do with your brain."

Juni looked slightly down and focused on two twigs in a Y form. Why? But she also became aware of how much she could see to either side without moving her eyes at all. She closed her eyes.

"You okay?"

"It feels like I have other eyes in my head and they've been asleep. Now they wake up and they're looking out these little side windows, but my usual eyes are looking ahead. It's the strangest feeling."

“You’re catching on really fast. Do it again but while you’re looking out of your side windows, stay aware of what’s in front of you, so that all together you have a panoramic vision.”

“Okay, I think I have it.”

“Now walk.” Juni stepped carefully forward away from the car, towards where the road started. “I’m doing it!” She felt a flutter in her stomach.

“Now I’ll show you a stalking pace. It’s a different way of walking.”

She waited patiently, turning to watch him. “First you start to step forward, but you put your toe down very gently without shifting your weight onto it. You feel the ground with your toes to see if there’s a twig or some leaves or something that’s going to make a sound. If the coast is clear, you put your heel down and move your weight to that foot.”

“What if you think something’s going to snap?”

“You move your toes over to the next spot of ground until you figure you’ve found a safe place. It’s very slow.”

Juni shook out her arms and hands. They were feeling the tension of trying to get something right the first time. “Let me try.”

She straightened her spine and felt forward with the toe of her right sneaker. It was quiet underfoot so she allowed herself to transfer her whole weight.

“That’s good. You’re a natural. Don’t forget your vision. You have to do the panoramic vision thing at the same time. You don’t want to be looking down at the ground all the time.”

“Oh, okay, let me do it again.” She was feeling the excitement she usually felt when Titus paid a lot of attention to her, and also the mysterious sensation of the new way of seeing and walking. She held her head up and let her eyes go soft. She felt the strange expansion of the visible world while her toe felt for a clear spot in the sandy brush ahead of her.

Titus watched her proceed. “That’s good, but the whole thing needs to be even slower. You know what this is.”

“Patience training.”

Titus had introduced the idea of patience training years ago as a way to help her when she felt like things were moving so slowly she was going to get wiggy. ‘You got this,’ he would whisper in church, ‘it’s just patience training.’ She loved the idea that she could get better at something just by doing it purposefully. She would find images in the church windows she could trace with her eyes. And now her eyes were doing a new trick.

“Besides patience training, what is this for?”

“We have to be very unobtrusive. We don’t want to send out an alarm to the ghosts and the plants by crashing in like a tractor.”

“The plants?”

“Even the plants! Plants can feel the vibration of a foot step and they kind of shrink—but just a little bit, like you would only notice if you were paying superhuman attention. But other creatures notice and it alarms them.”

“And my gaze?”

“Ghosts and other wild things don’t want to be looked at directly. It’s like a challenge and it’s disrespectful. When you turn your 180 degree vision on, it diffuses your gaze. It’s not sharp. You see what I mean?”

“Like your vision is usually a point.”

“But you make it soft, like a sphere, a half sphere. The eye is round anyway.”

“That is so cool I can hardly stand it.”

“A thing you want to want to look for with your vision turned on that way is motion, motion and light. If your eyes catch some motion, freeze. If something is moving out there, you don’t want to call attention to yourself. It’s called ‘holding cover.’”

“Can we practice a little more?”

“You’re ready to go now. Better not to overthink it. Turn all your senses on. We walk to that road and then go. I’ll start out leading. We’ll go kind of fast at first and then ease into the snail pace.”

Juni filed after her brother, newly aware of how much noise even her soft shoes made in the grass. It had been very dry the last few weeks, so much that people were almost starting to call it a drought. “What about bugs?” she whispered.

“What about them?”

“What if they bother us?”

“You have to ignore them.”

Itch training. Or maybe just misery training.

Titus started out using the stalking walk about as fast as it could be done, but every ten steps or so he moved more slowly, until they were progressing so slowly that Juni was afraid she would lose her balance.

“One more thing,” Titus whispered.

She strained to hear him.

“If you see something, stay silent.”

They continued to move forward in silence. Juni could hear the wind in the trees. At times the pines creaked, and she could even hear the long hanging moss rustling. When the breeze died, the sun was hotter, and she heard the chorus of insects raise their volume as though the day itself emitted a buzz. When she saw the wind move the leaves again, she anticipated a slight drift of cooler air to follow. She began to feel that she was moving in currents of water, that she was moving as fast as she could but the air was resisting her. She had never felt the atmosphere to be such a presence in itself, coming and going in response to forces beyond her.

She heard a kind of snort and Titus stopped. Her vision slipped out of the peripheral mode and back into a sharper focus. A wild boar rooted in the sand, turning up darker organic material underneath it. A flicker of fear disturbed her, but when she heard Titus whisper almost inaudibly, “Go to wide-angle,” she slid her gaze open again. Now the boar was situated in a wider, softer frame. Titus was beginning to back up, so she did the same.

Suddenly he stopped. The boar stopped rooting and lifted its head as though to listen, but it wasn’t looking at them. The animal was tracking something moving off to the right. To

Juni it felt like a door had opened and cool air came through. The animal suddenly snorted and trotted off into the brush. Titus held his stance. Although she was behind him and he didn't move his head, she could feel him looking up. Her eyes floated upwards until she saw the outline of a large black buzzard perched in the highest branches of a dead tree. Her heart felt like a little bird whose wings beat against the inside of a drum. The bushes to the right definitely moved but she didn't feel any wind. A chill ran up her neck, and she wanted to turn and run. She waited for a sign from Titus. They walked backwards slowly a few paces.

He sat down on the ground, motioning to her to do the same. "Let's just see what happens if we stay very still."

She sat as still as possible and listened to the world around her as though she could breathe the whole scene—sights, sounds, smells—into her lungs and bloodstream. She forgot about the ghosts, rather wondering what insects, birds and tree frogs contributed to the complex drone rising and falling on the morning air.

She became aware of movement on the branch of a bush immediately to her left. She turned her head slowly keeping her vision soft, until she had something in the periphery, but she couldn't decipher exactly what she was looking at, something like a tight knot of leaves or a hanging pod but swaying and starting to crack open. Very active feelers, no bigger than a pen line of ink, swept the air. Legs, arms, antennae pawed at the void until the husk cracked wide and a smear of bright orange began flowing out. Just color at first and then snap! It found a form, the edge of a wing, and then another. She forgot herself, watching until the butterfly itself was still, resting from its labor of transformation, perched on the twig and pulsing.

She looked over at Titus who'd also been watching. He stood up and said aloud, "I guess we got what we came for."

She cocked her head and looked at him quizzically. "Did you see a ghost?"

“Never have. It’s all right here, all the mystery and strangeness, and complexity and beauty. You’ve always known how to look for it, I just gave you a couple more tools.”

Juni was at the wheel and she felt like the expedition leader. It was seven o’clock in the evening and she was driving her family to the Sally Murphy Wildlife Preserve where Alice Coltrane worked. Alice Coltrane said there was a very good chance they would see a loggerhead turtle lay her eggs on the beach.

About fifteen miles south of town they had turned off the main road and onto a parallel road running narrow and straight between walls of trees on either side. Juni tuned out the drone of conversation between Lou, half-turned in the passenger seat, and Titus in the back. Once in a while a driveway or a little house broke the unvarying trees, but mostly the road went on and on through the slanting evening light.

AC was going to give them a tour of the Center and then they were going to find a spot on the beach to wait until someone let them know by walkie-talkie that a turtle had been spotted. What mattered to Juni was witnessing a wild sea turtle lay a new generation on the beach near where she herself had been born.

Whenever she remembered the chance that no turtle would come, Juni just threw that doubt into a closet and slammed the door.

AC said they’d see more of the action if they came on a full moon, and Juni had watched the calendar and the weather closely, coordinating with AC for a time she’d be free to escort them. It was all worked out, but still Juni had to be resourceful to make the trip happen. Lou and Titus said they wanted to go, but it could be hard to get Lou back out of the house once she was home from work, and these days Juni was never sure of Titus’s mood. If he was down, there was only so far she could push him. She was relieved he appeared in the family room while

she was packing snacks and insect repellent by the front door. She even made dinner so they could eat soon after Lou got home. Lou wouldn't want to disappoint Juni when she'd put all this effort into it. And Lou was always glad when Juni practiced driving. Still, so many stupid things could get in the way.

It would be dark in about an hour. Juni tried not to press the accelerator. Her patience training taught her to break the thread of events into the fragments she could control and those she couldn't. Driving well was within her control. A turtle coming out of the Atlantic Ocean onto the beach at Sally Murphy was not, but out of that whole enormous ocean, they just needed one. And then of course, they all needed to be willing to wait as long as it took.

The road felt remote until it ran straight into a big parking lot with a crowd of cars all there for the boat ramp into the intercoastal waterway. People were coming in from a day of fishing or birdwatching or water-skiing or any of the things people like to do in boats. "There's the water, straight ahead," said her mother. "This looks like the ferry crossing. Anywhere around here is good."

Juni hated parking lots, and even worse than parallel parking, she hated the narrow angular slots where she had to get their old station wagon around the corners of the other cars without her car touching them even a little bit, even though they jutted out in her way. Why had no one thought to invent soft, puffy cars? They'd be less deadly to the people and animals they hit. She was relieved to find two empty spots side by side and whipped in handily.

"Juni, darling," said Lou, "you've taken up two spaces."

"Okay, okay, I'm not finished yet." There was enough space to back up and pull in closer to one of the neighbors. Done. She moved the gear shift to park.

"Once more, with feeling," said her mom.

"What? Don't we need room to get out?"

"This is enough room for a buffalo."

"A buffalo family," said Titus from the backseat.

Juni bristled a little. "Human families. They're all about support."

As soon as her job passed inspection, Juni ran to the dock. Across half a football field of water, Alice Coltrane was walking down a ramp toward a floating dock where a jon boat was ready to come and ferry them across to the island. She looked like a park ranger: dark green shorts and matching baseball cap and vest, a gray tee-shirt. Juni's heart jumped to see her across the water like this, imagining living on an island without a bridge, living with other researchers and alligators and endangered birds and even carnivorous plants.

"AC!" Juni shouted. Her sister looked up from unhitching the boat and waved to her. Juni ran back to the car to help with their gear and the chair for Titus, listening for the jon boat's motor as she hurried ahead of the others back to the dock.

By the time Alice Coltrane had thrown a rope around the cleats on the dock, Lou and Titus were at the crossing. Juni held the boat steady at the other end, and Lou sat on the edge of the wooden dock with her feet inside the boat pulling it close, making sure of Titus.

He put his hand on her shoulder as he lowered himself in. "No worries, Mom, I'd be okay even if I fell in the water."

Lou didn't respond to this but addressed AC. "You're not on duty now, are you? You're wearing the uniform."

AC turned the throttle of the outboard motor and eased away from the landing. "I didn't want to be too casual. I've never had my own private guests here and I don't want anybody thinking twice about you guys watching the whole turtle thing. If we luck into that. Because Juni, you realize there's a chance no turtle will come up tonight."

"I know. I know."

"Or a turtle might come up and not lay."

"That happens too?"

"Yeah, like if there are two hundred nests, there might be a hundred false crawls. We don't know why." Alice Coltrane

held the boat at a strolling pace, the motor at a low hum, so they could hear each other, but AC rarely hurried.

"You look tired, Alice Coltrane," their mother said. "What'd you do today?"

AC laughed. "Trail maintenance. We replaced a whole section of boardwalk that was really a bridge. It's hot to be hauling and hammering!"

"Hot to be hauling and hammering," Titus echoed dreamily. He leaned over the side of the boat to drag his hand in the water. His hair was getting longer and the waves that usually lay close to his scalp had expanded with the humidity into a mane of ringlets.

Juni dipped her hand in the water on her side. It seemed the same temperature as her skin and felt thick, laying its tepid flesh against her palm. Juni was tired and excited at the same time and liked the way that felt. "Even if all we get to see is the turtle going back to the water. I just want to see a big turtle in its home."

"You mean not in an aquarium," said AC. "Land isn't their home. They spend pretty much a hundred percent of their lives in the ocean."

"A hundred percent? Why do they even lay their eggs on land?"

"Why do toads lay their eggs in water?" AC countered. "Evolution turns some awkward corners."

On the island landing, they transferred to an open jeep and Alice Coltrane gave them each an official VISITOR tag encased in a plastic sleeve. The logo was a turtle even though the center did research on lots of other fauna and flora too. AC drove them along a straight road through the trees, a lot like the one Juni had driven to get to the preserve, but this one was all packed sand and led deeper and deeper into a wild island. Juni turned around and rested her chin on her hands along the seat back, watching the parking lot across the river shrink and sink out of sight. Her eyes drooped to the sandy road until the jeep felt like the pull tab of a long, straight zipper running up, closing up the stretches of green, sealing up the mysterious island.

The jeep slowed and Juni whirled around to face forward.

AC caught her eye in the mirror. "Juni! You sleeping?"

"She's a teenager," said Lou, "and she spent the day terrorizing vacationers who paid for the fun."

Juni yawned. "Don't leave out the part about me getting paid. Fun fun fun."

Once parked, the heavy air and mosquitos settled on them. They were at an old gray house set way up on stones leaning into a porch almost too big for it. Just beyond the house, the trees on either side of the road ended and the road itself melted into the beach. Beyond that a stretch of ocean was visible, an inky stripe painted between pale sky and pale sand.

AC led the way up the steps. "Go ahead and get your insect repellent on so you can wash your hands inside."

At one end of the porch there were picnic tables and a pass-through cut into the side of the house, into the kitchen, but heavy shutters were closed on it now. At the other end were three metal bunk beds and a pile of sleeping bags.

"A sleeping porch! Is it like at camp?" said Juni.

"Sort of," said AC, "for the interns at least. I have my own room in a cabin down the way."

"I'd come to camp here in a heartbeat."

Inside AC showed them the kitchen and a big room with tables for eating and wicker chairs with cushions for hanging out. The research room was full of computers, clipboards and sticky notes, reference books and journals. Through there, an equipment room had shelves packed with gear ranging from sunscreen to tagging devices. The furniture was worn and mismatched and not much wall showed through the layers of posters, some of them faded with yellow tape residue at the corners and old thumbtack holes. Grasses, feathers, shells on strings hung from nails.

"Not much quality control on the decor," said Lou. "Makes me feel better about our mess of a house."

“They let it be the place of the folks who live here,” AC shrugged, “but actually there is some quality control—we have a rule about what goes on the walls.”

“Let us guess the rule!” Juni stepped back and renewed her focus on all the pictures and the odds and ends of wildlife. Alice watched Titus as if he were the only contestant, and it didn’t take long for him to pinpoint the unifying theme.

“Okay,” he said, “everything, the pictures and specimens, have to be from here. Or maybe from some migration destination, like here’s the Sargasso Sea. And apparently the quotes can be from anywhere.”

“What’s the Sargasso Sea?” Asked Juni.

Titus pointed to where a map showed an expanse of the Atlantic Ocean. Long, curving arrows depicted different currents, swirling through the area and out again.

“That’s the middle of the ocean!” said Juni. “Who migrates there?”

“Loggerheads,” said Alice Coltrane.

“What? But I don’t see any islands out there.” It was unsettling for Juni to imagine her own turtles GrouchoFrodo swimming into the vast waters with no rock to clamber onto.

“The babies hang out in the seaweed.” AC threw an arm around Juni’s shoulder and walked with her back down the hall to the door they’d first come in. “I was thinking we’d go hang on the beach. As soon as they spot a turtle, the interns on patrol will call the teams with the processing equipment and then they’ll buzz me.”

“They’ll remember to make an extra call like that?”

“We have visitors like you from time to time, people who come to watch the turtles, and the staff who do the tagging have worked here awhile. I think they’ll remember. Looka heyah, what luck.”

As they came down the steps from the porch, two people in the same uniform were starting up. “Hey, Kara,” said AC, “DeMarius. This is my family: Lou, Titus, Juni. Family, Kara and DeMarius are the trained experts who handle the turtles. They’re the folks the interns on patrol call first tonight.”

“Awright!” said Kara like she was leading a cheer at a football game. Her long ponytail swung. “Come on, Mama Turtle!”

DeMarius shook their hands rather formally. “I hope you get to see everything you came to see.” Juni tried to catch his eye and look friendly. She didn’t want him to forget them when the turtle came onto the beach.

“We’re going in for equipment,” said Kara, “but we’ll be hanging out with you guys later for sure!”

“Except Kara will be a lot quieter then.” DeMarius smiled at his co-worker.

Juni could tell right away that the island was wild because the forest grew all the way to the beach. There were no trees on Plankk’s Beach where her family spent time in the summers. At Plankk’s the tide came up to dunes with houses behind them, or even straight up to houses if the dunes were washed away. Here a narrow fringe of grass separated the ranks of trees from the stretch of loose sand above the high tide line.

Lou and Alice Coltrane spread a quilt on the sand and and they settled in. Juni pulled out pretzels and opened a bag of turtle shaped sugar cookies she baked for the occasion. The sun was low behind them, glazing the tree tops with brilliant red and casting the eastern vista into pink and aqua.

Titus reached for a cookie. “In the open like this, I can see why people used to think the sky was a big inverted bowl. There aren’t any clouds above us, they’re all out there.” He pointed to a band of rosy clouds slumped along the ocean’s horizon. “Those clouds slid down the glass sides of the sky and landed on top of each other, mixing to make one big metamorphic cloud. It’s the formation of a new continent. Nebulosity!”

“Nebula city?” said Juni, “what’s nebula city?”

"A nebula is hazy celestial object, clouds of interstellar dust and such. Nebulosity, one word, is the quality of being nebulous."

"Nebulosity," repeated Alice Coltrane, "just one of the marvels you might observe here at Murphy Nature Preserve."

Even as a joke, Juni squirmed at the promotional language: "Just one of the characters you might encounter here at Pirateland!" The preserve was different. It felt sacred to her because it was real.

"What are you doing, Mom? Please don't lie down."

"Why not?"

"You might fall asleep."

"I'm highly skilled at waking up." Lou eased back. "I'm a professional."

"True," said Juni, "Do we need to be quiet when the turtle comes?"

"Yep. We're a crowd and we won't be the only ones there. We just need to kind of lay low and stay out of turtle mama's line of vision."

"But she'll be doing the different things and it'll get dark," said Juni.

"I'll make sure you get to see each phase. And once she starts laying, she's so focused, she tunes out other stuff. The team messes with her then and it doesn't bother her. You can get closer." AC turned up the volume on her walkie talkie until they could hear its scratchy hum.

"Should I major in biology when I go to college?" Juni asked. "To get a job like this?"

"Do you like biology?"

"I haven't taken it yet."

"I'd wait 'til I knew I liked it."

"I know I'm going to like it."

"You have some time to see what you like."

"I'm in a hurry."

AC unlaced her shoes and pulled off her socks. "Because creatures like turtles need your help?"

"Yeah."

Titus was starting on his own shoes, and Juni noticed he was using only his right hand. "I think you're ahead of the game, Junissima. You've been keeping notes on nature pretty much all your life. You've got the activist thing going with Pete and now this Dillon dude."

"What happened to the journalism thing?" said AC. "And what Dillon dude?"

"Oh, just— we can go see the turtles barefoot, right?" Juni had kicked her sandals off.

"No problem." AC was sifting dry sand through her fingers onto her feet.

"I got an article in the summer edition of the Swamp Fox Sentinel," Juni continued, "It was about the protests against the gas terminal, but it's on the next to the last page, and Suzanne Scissorhands cut the heart out of it. Dillon is this senior who sort of helped me get it in." She wasn't thinking about Dillon, though now she wondered if he'd find this expedition exciting. "I was thinking I could be a science writer."

"That sounds good," said AC. "Study environmental science and journalism both. But first see how biology feels."

Juni became aware that they were talking about just one of Juni's many possible futures, the long life she assumed she had ahead of her. So many conversations that used to feel normal now seemed inconsiderate with Titus present. Running up against this over and over made Juni question her usual conversations. Maybe there was always more going on than meets the ear. The walkie-talkie sputtered. AC grabbed it and moved away. Lou sat up.

"Already?" Juni began throwing supplies back into the bag.

"Slow down! Kara was just checking in." AC was back.

Lou stretched out again. They were mostly quiet for a little while all watching the surf coming and going as the night came on. The top edge of the full moon was peaking out above the low wall of clouds which was silver now, a silver cloud continent.

"Say us a poem Titus," coaxed Alice Coltrane.

“Ok. Let’s see, this will be a little bit improvised. For now I’m calling this ‘On the Beach with Lou Reed.’”

“Who’s Lou Reed?” asked Juni.

“Rock n’ roll. Punk before punk. A song of his just happened to be on my mind tonight and a couple of sentiments sneaked in from an early album, but if you don’t know them, it doesn’t matter. Sometimes I like to refer to part of my process. Ok, ready? It might feel kind of long.”

Every one murmured their yeses, and Titus began to recite what was in his head.

“The white lace edges rush –
toward me and dissolve
the safety where –
my chair commands the seas.
The waters rush away
and back to bait me where –
waves grip the shore,
pulling out to leave
a yellowing heaven,
a hollow underneath
my two feet before
the waters reverse,
refill the sandy floor –
grain by grain
whittling my breath
goading my brain
to focus on infinity.
What the world puts
out of reach
the ocean reaches –
into my veins
all the gone is gone
wave after wave,
closing in
to focus a truth,
that death is ordinary

and breath
is all we have.”

No one spoke. Juni felt the heaviness flood into her, she was sinking into a dark pit. Don’t go, she thought, don’t go there. Closing in to focus on a truth. When would they be able to talk about this plainly? Instead the weight sank inside her.

“Did you just make that up?” asked AC.

“More or less, I already had the line ‘death is ordinary,’ and the rest kind of gathered since we started sitting here.” Titus paused, “So it’s a rough draft if it’s anything.”

“Do you have a little table in your head with pencil and paper?” asked Juni.

“Ha, that’s a good idea. They start in my mind, but I do need paper when I really get to work on them.”

A loud rasp made them all jump. AC stood and walked downwind with the walkie-talkie. She returned clapping her hands softly. “There’s a turtle not even far from here. This is great, and the moon is only gonna get brighter. You okay to walk along the beach a little?”

“Oh my god yes!” Juni threw shoes, socks and snacks onto the quilt, ready to fold them together and drag them up toward the house.

“I saved my energy for this,” said Titus.

Juni opened her mouth and then shut it again. In conversation, Juni’s first impulse was always to ask the questions that occurred to her about anything that came up. But her family worked to temper this impulse with consideration for others. Titus had made not asking questions part of the patience training they’d devised together. Juni wanted to ask if not exerting himself for awhile meant he could do more later. Then she wanted to ask if getting tired now was different from getting tired before he was sick. She conjured some of her brother’s advice. He wasn’t a subject of study. He had feelings about the answers. He would tell her what he learned about his disease when he felt like telling her. But it was hard not to be doing the patience training with him. It was hard not to talk about how it

was going, so he could tease her, encourage her, give her new reasons to bite her tongue. Not asking her brother questions was one of the hardest things she'd ever done in her life.

She caught up with her mother and took her hand and leaned against her as they walked.

As they hiked south, they watched for Kara and DeMarius and for a mound moving up the beach from the surf.

"There they are." AC pointed. "The turtle is already up near the high tide line."

The four of them walked along the water then came up to join the team. Juni squinted to make out the turtle. The shell was lower than she'd expected.

"What's up?" Alice Coltrane spoke in a low voice.

DeMarius turned to them. "Y'all know about the process?"

"Alice Coltrane told us," said Lou, "but I don't mind hearing it again."

"I remember," said Juni. "First she digs the body pit in the dry top sand and then she digs the egg pit deeper down."

AC's eyes were on the turtle. "She's facing the trees?"

"Yeah, we can go up closer." DeMarius turned to Juni like he was going to add instructions especially for her.

"I know: quiet and still, and out of her line of vision." Juni tried not to sound annoyed. She could tell DeMarius was extremely serious and possibly even a mansplainer. He probably had his hair cropped close so he didn't have to waste time pushing it out of his eyes when he could be teaching somebody something.

He and Kara led them toward the turtle but stopped about fifteen feet away. The shell was still. Then it rotated a degree and was still again. Then it rotated a little in the other direction, a little more, then back in the original direction, like the numbered dial on a safe when someone's trying to figure out the combination and open the door for the treasure inside.

“What’s she doing?” Juni asked her sister.

“Just getting settled. She hasn’t started digging really.”

A spray of sand flew out. She ratcheted a few degrees northward. Another spray.

The evening air was still and the waves small and purring. They could hear the light spray of sand scattering across the packed beach. Juni touched her sister’s arm and motioned a question about getting closer.

“Soon,” Alice Coltrane mouthed.

They waited. The turtle continued to inch in a circle and spray sand, each spray a little surprise because there was no rhythm to it. Then she started flailing more steadily. In the moonlight Juni felt she could even see colors: the green trees shining softly, the deep brown pine trunks almost purple, and the creamy sand everywhere in between. Being there in the dark ignited feathery explosions inside her chest, like chills except the air was too warm for her to be chilly. And the turtle was so close, so close that she and Juni almost shared the same space except... except maybe they didn’t. Juni didn’t know. She shuddered.

Alice Coltrane whispered to her colleagues. “Seems like we can go closer now, don’t you think?”

“Sure.” Not even bothering to whisper, Kara hoisted her bag, and they walked right up to the turtle, close enough that the sand she threw stung Juni’s legs.

“I bet it’s Surry. See the chip out of the right side of her shell? I think that’s where an alligator almost got her.”

“Where does the name ‘Surry’ come from?” asked Lou.

“Ten dollars says it’s short for survivor!” said Titus.

AC rolled her eyes. “That’s worth a dime, but—and this is stupid—I think it was after Tom Cruise and Katie Holmes’s kid!”

The survivor stopped, raised her head, and took a deep dry breath in and out. Juni looked at Alice Coltrane in alarm.

“She’s okay,” AC murmured.

The head had disappeared again. She was like a long-buried rock the waves had just washed sand from, like she hadn’t

moved in centuries and wasn't about to move now. Even when both her front flippers whisked sand at the same time and the back flippers twisted one after another, her hulk of a shell seemed fixed in place.

"She's like the tip of the iceberg," said Juni.

"Turtle Island," said Titus.

"She's one of a keystone species where the iceberg is the whole ecosystem at stake," said AC.

The team opened their bags and pulled out the contents. Kara held an electronic device about the size of a cell phone and passed it over the turtle's back flippers. It beeped, she held it out to DeMarius, and he wrote in a notebook. "Meet Surry." They measured her various dimensions. All this time the survivor worked her flippers as though she were trying to swim in the sand with a great weight on her back, once in a while inhaling and expelling a rush of air. It made Juni's own breathing difficult. The turtle's lungs must be so different from human lungs that, instead of a steady breath as she worked, she heaved in periodic gulps. It was kind of overwhelming to Juni how different her lungs were.

By now she was nestled into the sand. She stopped working her front flippers. DeMarius turned on his red headlamp and they could see that the back flippers were wheeling around in a complicated motion. First one flipper then the other dove vertically into the sand, folded up a scoop of it, and finessed some way to cast it out behind her.

"Wow," Juni breathed.

"Hey watch, y'all," Alice Coltrane whispered.

They leaned over the deep hole the turtle had dug beneath her tail and in the red glow of the flashlight they saw a few eggs drop into the hole. Even in the red light, Juni could tell they were as white and round as ping pong balls and there was slimy stuff on them, sometimes in strings like thick saliva. Juni's mom delivered babies. It was pretty gross. She became aware of being part of a crowd of humans staring at a big turtle while she pushed slimy eggs out of herself. Juni glanced at her sister. She

imagined that AC was smiling, easy to do since a smile usually hung just under the surface of her features.

AC whispered to Juni. "Turtles have been doing this since millions and millions of years before humans even existed. This is really old. This is part of the Big Picture, right?"

"Yeah," Juni exhaled. Sometimes the Big Picture was hard to get her human-sized head around.

DeMarius and Kara went around to her side and felt along her flippers and shoulders. Juni gingerly moved around with them to get a better look at the face. In the red light, she saw the mosaic pattern on her skin, lopsided square and pentagonal tiles fit together with moonlit mortar.

The team took a blood sample. The turtle raised her head but the weight of the dome didn't shift and her breath whistled like a gust of air scouring a stone chamber. She dropped her head back down into the sand.

DeMarius cut his headlamp and the observers stood focused on Surry, though they could no longer see the eggs falling into the pit. As their eyes adjusted, the turtle's shell became radiant with the light of the moon. The turtle huffed. The glow on her shell grew. Human shadows lengthened on the sand around her. Juni shuddered again.

Then the turtle began pitching sand wildly with all her flippers, thwacking herself in the face and along the sides of her shell.

"She's hiding the nest?" Juni asked.

"Yeah." Alice hesitated. "That's what makes sense but we don't know what's going on in her head. Her brain is just so different. She knows what to do, and what she's doing is making the sand all messy, and that ends up hiding the nest, but how does she see it? Maybe she has a whole other way of knowing."

Even going crazy like this, Surry seemed to be always struggling against the weight of her stone body. Juni slipped around in front of her for a good look at her eyes. Tears streaked the scales around them. They were large and dark as coal, glistening with moony light.

Then the turtle lurched forward and stopped. Had she become aware of them? Was she looking around? She pivoted ten degrees, then another ten degrees toward the moon and the ocean, and started off. She had finished. The team made ready to put a fence around the nest to protect it from marauding varmints.

Juni walked beside her, careful not to get ahead. Whenever Surry stopped and her breath scraped inside the stony dome, Juni imagined her head swinging in Juni's direction, her big teary eye shining like a polished fossil, and looking right at Juni. Surry lumbered ahead.

What would the turtle see if she looked her way? Juni wished they could at least look at each other. Juni would be asking questions of her, and Surry would be asking a question back. Some basic question that couldn't come out in words, something like, what are you? What do you mean to me? It was breathtaking to imagine the turtle's head turning in her direction. It wasn't physically threatening, but it made her feel woozy to have no idea what she might be in Surry's eyes. What could I mean to this creature? She turned the question on herself. What am I?

Juni came down the stairs Fourth of July morning and rested her forehead against the wire bars of the canary haven like she did every morning and with the same three purposes she'd listed for Portia. One: to look at them closely for any changes to health or mood. They were still subdued with their molting. Two: to get her nose close. It wasn't fair to breeze by their cage while they had to live in a stinking home. And three: to greet the dear, sweet birds because that was what it was all about.

Satisfied, she went into the living room. Titus was in his chair, his lamp dark. Immediately Juni knew two things: Titus was in a low mood and Titus did not want to talk.

"Hey, Tye." She used the shortened name by way of warmth.

He watched her.

Her breath caught like she might cry: he didn't want to talk but he wanted to be in the midst of them, instead of in his own room.

She moved on to the kitchen and got out the milk, then opened the cabinet above the counter and pulled out random cereal boxes. She hated this. It was too complicated. Everybody wanted to protect everybody else from the terrifying sadness. But everybody wanted everybody else to know they were brave enough to talk if talk was needed.

She closed the cabinet and her palms came down on the counter and bore her weight. She bore down on her hands hard, lifted her feet, and hung over the counter.

"What are you doing?"

Titus was in the doorway. She dropped her weight back onto her feet. "Um... strength training? What are you doing?"

He rolled his eyes up at the transom above the bathroom door. "I tried to play the guitar last night. My left hand has lost some precision."

Juni felt her eyes go wide, so wide the skin at their outside edges might tear. "It was late. You were tired."

He shook his head. "Don't you fret, little sister."

The refrigerator started up with a rattling. Juni listened for it to settle into its hum, waiting for Titus not to look like he was on the point of tears. "How long have you been in that chair?"

"Since about two in the morning." He cleared his throat. "A dark night of the soul."

Juni steeled herself. "What was it like?"

"Mostly I don't believe what's happening."

"Me neither," said Juni.

"The times I do believe, I'm usually alone and it's dark outside my windows. It feels so inescapable but I want to escape and also lonely, no one can be with me in this."

Juni knew this was true. "But—"

She stepped into the center of the kitchen so she could see around him to the chair he'd just left. She wished he'd had the light on. The chair looked so gray.

"What?" Titus prompted.

"But we're all going to die. I know you're the only one now that's watching it come at you. I don't mean you're not."

"But you want me to know I'm not so alone. We're in this together that way at least."

It felt like such a paltry connection. "And now you can't even play your way through one of the dark nights."

He slumped a little and she was sorry she'd said it.

"Well," his voice was heavy, "you know what musical skills got Orpheus."

She waited.

"A free pass to the Underworld." He gave her his crooked smile. "Wasted on me." Juni didn't say anything. "You having a cereal party?"

Juni had put five boxes of cereal on the counter. "Yes I am. It's an Independence Day thing. Freedom to choose."

The conversation seemed over but Orpheus was nagging at her. She reached for Titus' hand, his left one, and felt for the pulse in his wrist like Lou had taught her years ago, a thing she loved to do from time to time with the people she loved. She found the little flutter. Orpheus had to return alone, without his Eurydice, but he had gotten to walk back out of the Underworld, to walk among the living a while longer.

Juni thought she loved the Fourth of July until she saw the decorations downtown. She was surprised that instead of warm memories swelling up, she felt annoyance. This was such a boring show, silly Pirateland was more interesting. The red white and blue streamers; red white and blue napkins, plates, cups; red white and blue music didn't even rouse nostalgia.

She stood at the fountain in the "park" downtown a few minutes after nine. Everybody she knew put quotation marks

you could hear around the word because the park was just a gap in the stores along the water. It wasn't much bigger than a store front, but it did have a couple of live oaks old enough to give shade, a brick path long enough to wind, a historical marker about how much history Three Rivers had, being so old. The fountain at the center was the size and shape of a giant's teacup, like from the ride at Palmetto City. Water poured down the outsides of it into a gutter hidden in the grass at the base.

Dillon wasn't there. Maybe he'd given up on her. She'd lost track of time in her conversation with Titus and was a little late. She discreetly checked her cell and tried not to look worried since Dillon might see her before she saw him. Oh, lord, there was Mrs. Pringle, her fifth grade teacher, retired from teaching but still treating everybody like ten-year-olds under her finger. She was scolding someone out in the full sun of the intersection.

"Hey."

"Oh! Hey." Dang, Juni didn't have a chance to be cool with Dillon startling her like that. Like her, he was wearing the blue jeans and white t-shirt they'd agreed on. The mostly red neckties she'd found at Rory's Reruns thrift store filled out the patriotic palette.

She'd wrapped both the ties in bows around her neck because she couldn't manage the traditional knot and she wasn't going to ask Titus for help that morning. She tugged them off and gave the longer one to Dillon. "Can you show me how to do this?"

"No problem. Put it around your neck and take one end and—Wait, is that how I do it? Make it about this long. That's not right. Which hand do I start with?" Then suddenly he lifted up on his toes and lifted his arms loose at the shoulders and elbows and bobbed his head loose on his neck then let his whole body flounce down, like he was a jellyfish moving upward in the water.

"Reset." He stepped to one side of her. "Let's try it like this. I'm not going to think about explaining. I'm just going to do this like you're not even there and you do what I do."

"I don't have to start with what you just did, do I?"

His laugh was as loose as his joints and meeting his eye dispelled a little of the gray around Titus's chair.

He had to run through the tie process by himself quickly to get his hands back on track, then he did it in slow-mo so she could follow his movements. "I didn't think to budget time for this," he said. "We'd screw up Mission Impossible in the first tick-tocks. You got the broadsides?"

For a second she thought she'd walked out of the house without them but of course they would be in her backpack. She swung it around to open it.

He scanned the flyer. "I wonder which way this holiday is going to cut for our mission." Dillon rested his hand on the edge of the fountain and jerked away when the water ran over it. "Maybe patriotic fervor will open the people's hearts and minds. Maybe love of country will tenderize them so they feel all protective of the water and the air and the soil and the little children. What do you think?"

"I just feel determination to get these messages across no matter what mood people are in."

"That's the spirit."

With Dillon's eyes on her, Juni tried to feel the outlines of the current shape of her hair but she was holding papers and couldn't quite get a read. Together they took a step toward the street and both stopped short.

"Uh..."

The street was littered with people now, and though they moved in various directions, they seemed pretty intent on getting somewhere, not ready at all to stop in their tracks and listen to what Juni had to tell them. The usual clueless Juni, Portia would've said..

"Have you done this before?" Juni asked Dillon.

"I have, but it takes some warming up. Or more accurate, some diving in."

Juni spied someone who didn't look familiar at all, a woman about her mom's age who wasn't in a hurry and didn't have kids in tow. Juni, armed with the broadside and its very decent photo of brave baby turtles facing a vast and powerful

ocean, moved into her path. "Good morning, ma'am. Did you know some people are planning to bring a gas pipeline into our town and build a terminal for it up at the port?"

The woman frowned. "I think I heard about it." Her frown deepened and she aimed it at Juni.

Maybe Juni should've rehearsed. "Well, are you worried about it? Like are there things you're not sure of, like how it might not be a good thing? Are you plagued by questions?"

One of the woman's eyebrows twitched with a cheerful hint of suspicion. "Did someone put you up to this? Is this a dare or something?"

"No!" Juni protested. "We're trying to make people aware that this is happening near their homes, near their schools and libraries and water sources. This thing carries serious risks. And there's a hearing at City Hall on September 20th."

Juni's mark tried to look respectful but Juni had lost her. The lady surveyed the crowd. "That's really nice, I mean it, but I'm meeting someone."

Juni didn't want to give up; the woman said her offer was really nice. Juni could include whoever she was going to meet, but Dillon was on the curb motioning to the broadside.

"Sure," Juni said with reluctance, "You can take this paper. It's just a few points to get you thinking."

Juni watched her pass a few people then stop to say hello to someone.

"So Juni." Dillon got her attention. "How'd that go for you?"

"Frustrating. She didn't want to take the time."

"When they say they think they've heard about it, it means they haven't. We might run into ladies like that a lot today. People are here to celebrate."

"Celebrate what?" Juni scowled at the clock above them. 9:15.

"Old ideas that don't have a lot to do with our problems now?" Dillon suggested. "At least you've gotten past what most people think is the hardest part."

"And what would that be?"

“Approaching a stranger and starting a conversation the person didn’t ask for. If you can’t do that, it’s over.”

She glanced at him to see if she could really take this as a compliment. His manner made it solid. He was so cool for a senior. Or rather, it was so cool that he treated her like she wasn’t three years behind him in school which most seniors did in order to force their own cool.

He drifted toward one of the oaks in the park, out of the traffic. “Let’s come up with some starts for these conversations. Maybe we could go right to what they’re celebrating, like ‘Happy love-your-country-day. Do you cherish the purple mountain majesties?’”

Juni was as patriotic as the next citizen. At least, she loved Three Rivers; she didn’t know the U.S. of A. “What if we started with ‘Do you love Three Rivers?’ Or maybe something like, ‘Did you know that Three Rivers— Did you know our home town is threatened? But we can do something about it?’” She was ready to try again.

A group of half a dozen people came speed-walking by. They wore headgear like the Statue of Liberty’s made out of foam rubber and painted the expected colors. They were probably the lead in the Friendly Five-K race that wasn’t supposed to be a competition. Juni wondered what the hell those spikes were on the statue’s head but she didn’t ask Dillon. She’d handed out a single broadside so far and was starting to feel that desperate dig inside her, a drive to act.

She fell into step with an old man strolling along in no hurry.

“Good morning, sir,” she said. “Do you live in Three Rivers?”

“I do.” He didn’t quite turn his head. Now that she could see under the shadow of his straw hat, she saw she’d misjudged how old he was. He was very old.

“Did you know people want to bring a gas pipeline here and build a terminal for it at the Three Rivers Port?”

“Who people want to do that?”

He kept strolling, focused on his neon turquoise running shoes. She focused on them too. “An energy company based in Ohio, and the steel company that’s based in France, and the paper company— I think they’re based in Washington State.”

“Anybody in town want this thing?”

“Yes,” Juni had to answer. “Some of the City Council people, some of the businesses. The people who run the port.”

“I’ll bet so. I’ll bet so.”

They moved along together. He was in no hurry.

Juni spoke. “What kind of sense does it make to build a pipeline in a town that floods and gets hit by hurricanes?”

“There’s always disasters and there’s always accidents.”

Juni couldn’t tell if he meant to discourage her with his short answers or he just didn’t have much energy. “Liquid natural gas in a pipeline could be a very serious accident, with lasting damage and contamination.”

He didn’t respond so Juni kept talking. “If we build the pipeline then the energy companies will keep pulling oil out of the earth. The world will keep getting hotter which affects lots of things, like our crops, and the oceans will keep rising, which will put Three Rivers underwater.”

As she described what was happening, the tears she often felt in a deep mist inside her began to gather. She knew where they were. They had a ways to travel. She usually had time before they reached the surface.

“I— Does that make you sad?”

He stopped and shuffled his body around to face her. His eyes were murky. “Everything makes me sad.”

She blinked. “I’m sorry.”

“No need to be.” He shuffled into his strolling direction and set off again.

She followed. “I’m sorry to have bothered you, sir.”

“No need to be.” His gait didn’t look like a stroll anymore.

An hour later, Juni had an illegible tally she'd started on the fly. She rewrote it into a list organized by categories that Dillon could read:

positive: took paper, smiled/thanked 1111
neutral: took paper, blank look 11111 11
agreement: gave yes signals 1
conversation with curiosity: listened, asked questions 11
negative: nasty look or word, didn't take paper 1
hostility: asked contentious questions/worse 11

Dillon looked it over. "Jeez, you move fast."

"How's it going with you?" She'd watched Dillon and seen that he considered who to approach while she jumped right to the next person.

"I guess about the same with the categories," he said, "but fewer over all."

"It's weird," Juni said. "Like, I wish they'd all agree with me, but we're here to give information to people who don't have it. So I don't think about who to talk to, I just go to the next person. That way I'm not only talking to the nice folks. My mom said if they ask questions at all, they're thinking about it, and even if they blow us off, we got them to think on it."

"Your mom sounds like a rad lady."

"She's pretty cool."

"People in Three Rivers aren't quick to be mean. The polite thing lasts a while."

That was mostly true.

Juni moved away to start with a lady carrying a bright green umbrella for shade. "Good Fourth of July morning to you. Do you love Three Rivers?"

"I do indeed!" The lady peered at Juni's red tie in a cordial, distracted way. Juni was distracted by the parasol's hot green color reflected on her target's face.

She focused. "I love this town too. I'm paying close attention to a gas pipeline an energy company wants to construct in the port. Like, right over there."

Her hand nearly clocked Ms. Milbry, her ninth grade English teacher, who apparently had a date with the green-faced woman.

“Sorry, Ms. Milbry! I was just showing your friend where they propose building a gas pipeline terminal.” Uh-oh. Ms. Milbry loved to make a big deal about how she did not suffer fools. Well, Juni was no fool.

“Hello there, Juni! Connie, I know you know the Pooles.”

“The midwife? Louisa Poole delivered my daughter’s second child.”

“That’s so wonderful.” People said things like this to Juni all the time. “There are a lot of problems with this terminal, different kinds of problems, but anybody would care about any of them. They’re all bad for all of us.”

Connie peered into Juni’s face. Maybe she craned her neck that way at everything. “What’s the one you think is the most important?”

“Good question.”

“What are y’all talking about?” The edge of Ms. Milbry’s sun hat brim flopped slightly and covered one eye as she turned to her friend.

“The pipeline they’re bringing to the port,” Connie answered.

“What about it?”

“This girl says it’s dangerous.”

“How?” Ms. Milbry was already bristly. Ezra had taught Juni a lot about staying calm with other people. She primed herself now, pumping patient thoughts into a place kind of beneath her brain, infusing her mind with “I can’t make something happen in another person” and “Cups can fill one drop at a time.”

Too slow. Ms. Milbry responded to her own question. “We already have miles and miles of pipelines. We’ve been building pipelines to carry different things for probably over a hundred years. You realize that water pipes are pipelines.”

"But these pipelines carry stuff that's explosive, stuff that's poisonous. And the—"

Ms. Milbry broke in. "We've had oil pipelines for over a—"

"—contents contribute to global warming."

"—century, probably close to two centuries, Juni. Get the facts."

"Natural gas is a greenhouse gas." Juni finished.

Connie was clearly on the point of thanking Juni and saying good-bye, but Ms. Milbry hadn't taken her sharp eyes off her ninth grade diagrammer of sentences. "Juni, you're looking at a selected little picture of the situation. If we don't use pipelines, what? Are we going to let trucks carry these dangerous materials? Or trains? Those are much riskier ways of transporting it. Look at the bigger picture."

Juni mashed down on the desperation in her voice. "Global warming is the biggest picture there is. We need to leave the fossil fuels in the ground completely, because a warmer planet is worse for us than the biggest gas explosion there could ever be."

Now both women had the exact same shocked expression on their faces. No one could suggest leaving perfectly good oil buried where people couldn't put it to use. Ms. Milbry looked like a broken wind-up toy. Her face was stuck in a quizzical expression, and she turned away in a series of jerks. "That's enough now."

Connie didn't even say good-bye. Juni sensed they weren't trying to be rude. They weren't really even broadcasting disapproval. They just weren't able to react. Juni's words had shut them down.

This shut Juni down. She looked around her. No Dillon in white t-shirt, red tie like hers. She checked her phone: 10:34. She continued to stand in the bright summer morning, in the town her body had made familiar over the fifteen years she'd walked and biked it. Now all these people were passing her, moving in the same direction together, to hear a speech about what Three Rivers had been up to on July 4, 1776, and how great

it had been ever since. She looked down at the papers in her hand and didn't know what they were about, not really.

She started across the street, across the oncoming people.

"Juni?" It was her aunt Rosa, Portia's mom. "Are you alright?"

It was the kind of question that could make a person cry. "Yes, ma'am! Just— I'm a little hot." They stepped back onto the sidewalk.

"I know you've got water in that backpack." Rosa cocked her head and leaned back slightly, indicating that she was going to stand there as long as it took until Juni pulled a bottle of water out of her pack.

"Yes, ma'am, and I haven't been drinking it." Juni produced the bottle and drank deeply. Then she caught sight of Dillon. He must think she was talking to Rosa about the pipeline. She waved to him. She wanted Dillon to meet her family.

She introduced them and explained what she and Dillon were doing. Rosa smiled, proud to see Juni putting herself out there. Dillon smiled, glad to be putting himself out there.

"Pleased to meet you, Ms. Aunt Rosa, though I have not had the pleasure of meeting your daughter."

"You still haven't met Portia!" said Juni. "She was with me at the pipeline protest."

"Where Juni got a concussion." Rosa put her arm around her niece.

"Right," said Dillon, "where the policemen had to knock girls down to protect the empty lot."

"A policeman knocked her down?"

"We don't know what happened." Juni tried to shoot Dillon a "shut up!" look.

"Because if a policeman knocked you down, I'd say that is very serious."

"That totally would be." Dillon came across very chill, he wasn't overdoing the denial.

"I really don't remember what happened," Juni said again. "People like to make a story more dramatic."

"Hm hmm." Rosa didn't look too suspicious. "And what kind of drama are y'all cooking on these hot sidewalks today?"

"Just informing."

"Well, be careful and don't antagonize anyone. If they don't want to hear it, it's their problem. Just be nice."

"Don't you worry, Ms. Aunt Rosa! We're just as nice as biscuits!"

After Rosa left to find a seat for Mayor Bennett's address, Dillon put his hand on the knot at his neck. "You probably don't know how strange it feels to wear a tie without a collar."

"And you don't seem to realize how strange it feels to wear the same ensemble as another person you're not, like, doing a dance recital with."

He started walking. "We could do a mirror schtick but we'd have to come up with a new message."

"Where are we going?"

"Food trucks. I can't think about what I'm going to do next without food and sugary drink."

Okay, that made sense. That didn't mean anything else about why he might have lunch with her. Did he really think this wasn't out of the ordinary for a nonstellar upcoming sophomore? But they were kind of working together, it was a work thing.

They chose All' Aperto Pizza among the trucks in the parking lot behind City Hall. The First Baptist Church was on the far side, and the canopy of a mammoth live oak spread over the corners of the church parking lot as well as the bank's lot next door. There were a couple of well-established picnic tables up near the trunk, but today the city had added lots of tables and chairs in the shade of the tree. Plenty of citizens preferred to eat

rather than listen to Mayor Bennett's talk, but Juni and Dillon found a place to sit.

Dillon pulled a piece of paper from the back of his stack of broadsides. "One of the people I talked to traded me."

"What is it?"

"Declaration of Independence. Original on one side, modern-day easy-to-read on the other."

To fit both versions, the paper was longer than a notebook page and folded. Juni examined the facsimile. "This isn't even that hard to read, and I usually have trouble with cursive. Is it Thomas Jefferson's handwriting you think?"

"What about felf-evident and necefsary?"

"Where? Oh, when a word's got two *s*'s, the first *s* has to be an *f*?"

"Whoah. Jefferson knew about frogs in boiling water."

Juni would have remembered a mention of frogs in the Declaration of Independence. "Explanation necefsary, please."

"He pretty much says that thing about if you plop a frog into a pot of boiling water, it jumps out before you can slam the lid down. But if you start the frog in cold water and heat it up slowly, it gets all comfy until it's comfy to death."

Juni stopped chewing.

Dillon continued to review the forefather's work. "Otherwise, this thing is way out of date. It's crying out to be fixed."

Juni managed to swallow. "Let's fix it" popped out of her mouth before she knew what she was saying.

"Yes! Brilliant! Mr. Jefferson just needs some help catching up!" He pulled a stubby pencil out of his pocket. "Shall we?"

"*When in the course of human events*— We need something more inclusive than *human*. *Creature* maybe? *Creature events*?"

"What about plants though? *Earth inhabitants*? *Those nurtured by the earth*?"

Dillon wrote on the paper and Juni didn't ask what he'd chosen.

"It becomes necessary for one people to dissolve the political bands which have connected them with another— How about it becomes necessary for a people to dissolve the political, economic, and..."

"*Cultural!*" said Juni.

"Oh, nice." Dillon added the words. *"...political, economic and cultural bands— Or should it be chains. We aren't the victims of an empirical power anymore, not a foreign one, anyway. We're victims of a system. Bonds which have connected them with such a limited, blinded, blinding system. Let's see... a limited, misguided—"*

"Stupid and destructive," put in Juni.

"What project is it this time?" said a self-assured voice ready to play. It was Natalie and some seniors. Maybe some of them were the same seniors Juni had met at Fulla Beans, but it just looked like a lot of people she didn't know, holding plates of tacos and nachos and waiting for an invitation to sit down at the table. Juni waited for Dillon to respond.

"We're fixing the Declaration of Independence. Really, after all these years we're seeing what a shoddy job they did. It's like they never heard of inclusion and diversity."

A guy with a Live Fuck Die t-shirt put his food down next to Dillon, and then they were all climbing over the benches to fit in.

"What do you call this thing anyway?" Sara, a girl Juni knew slightly from the *Swamp Fox Sentinel*, held up her paper container. Lettuce strings dangled over the sides. "A food boat?"

"Goo canoe," said the guy who sat beside her and leaned against her and brought his lips very close to hers when he said "goo canoe."

"Nick!" She pushed him away but only slightly.

None of them paid any attention to Juni.

"Mmm... good goo," said the Live Fuck Die guy.

Dillon was preoccupied with the flyer. He looked across at Juni. "So we're on the part about assuming *among the powers of the earth, the separate and equal station to which the Laws of Nature—* What other laws should we bring in? *Laws of Nature, and of Reality* since the system isn't paying attention to reality."

"*Truth,*" said Juni.

Dillon was scratching out words and writing in the ones they came up with.

“Let me see that. Can I see it?” Natalie reached across the table for the paper.

“Just lemme finish this first paragraph.” Dillon scribbled. “*Beings* should do nicely here.” He handed Natalie the flyer and crammed the crust of a pizza slice into his mouth.

Natalie was sitting on the same bench as Juni, past two other people hunched over their paper boats. Juni worried she was going to derail the rewrite. Rather than put the flyer down on the table to read, Natalie held it in front of her uplifted face. She was not one to hide her light under a bushel basket.

“You got extra hot sauce?” Trades and embellishments were made. Juni ate and waited.

“*We hold these truths to be self-evident,*” read Natalie and balanced a loaded chip next to her mouth.

We hold these truths had always been a warm mental image for Juni. She thought of holding a baby, as if truth was something you have to take care of. It was sort of like she and a bunch of other people were standing together, in the light of the words, and holding these truths safe in their bare hands.

Natalie finished off the bite. “*That all men are created equal.* That one’s obvious: *people.*”

“Not big enough,” said Dillon.

“*LGBTQ?*” said Nick.

“*LA,*” Juni finished. “And they’re all already people.”

They looked at her. She repositioned a pepperoni.

Dillon was visibly pondering. “This part seems crucial. It needs to be spelled out but expanded too. Not just people but all life and things like bioregions and habitats. And cultures” —he lifted his chin at Juni— “indigenous and remote tribes and stuff, people without TVs and credit cards. And the question of fossil fuels. We could include natural resources. Can I have that back now?”

Natalie passed the flyer to him. “Hey! When we finish it, we could read it on the stage over there!” In her enthusiasm, she scooted on the bench this way to face these folks, the other way

to face other folks, bumping her immediate neighbors. “We’ll just go over there and ask one of the MC types—you can always tell who they are—we just tell them we’re going to do a rendition of the Declaration of Independence. What? It’s not a big deal. Everybody loves it when “young people” participate in something patriotic. Even if every inhabitant of this town came with their dog, there wouldn’t be but a few thousand people there, and that’s not gonna happen. Did you ever see the videos of Coachella? Now, that’s a crowd.”

While each of them tried to imagine what Natalie proposed, the seniors kept their options open, their expressions noncommittal. Who was going to say yes first? Juni suddenly understood the “second the motion” thing at meetings. That second vote was key.

“I’m in.”

It was close to noon and they were nearing the park, the park where she could see Rosa using the program to fan up under her neck. A hot chill swept over Juni. She scanned for Ms. Milbry and the green umbrella lady. Juni wondered if it mattered that she was still in high school. She was the only one in the group that could be subject to Principal Bono-Carlyle’s discipline. Maybe she was stupid to think her position on the school paper wouldn’t suffer. She hated being stupid, but there were so many things she didn’t know. She tried now to think into the future, into tomorrow when she’d know how people reacted to what she and the seniors were doing now. She’d know what people saw when they looked at her, after she’d done this thing, but for now it was such an unknown!

And now she and these seniors she didn’t even know were pushing their way toward the small park set between two brick walls and the harbor beyond. The breeze had started coming from inland and bearing the sulfurous fumes of the paper mill. That would be a good reminder of the poison they lived with—if people even noticed it anymore. Juni was terrified,

but that didn't mean this was literally dangerous. She was also terrified when Titus told her a ghost story on the porch then disappeared into the dark yard, promising to come right back. He always did.

She couldn't get Ms. Milbry's expression out of her mind.

Mayor Bennett was still speaking. This was test number one for their plan, such as it was. If he was still speaking, then maybe they had time to follow him before the next act. If he wasn't, they would have to demand attention to pull the people back in, and that might cast them in a rabble-rousing light.

But the mayor was enjoying himself. "Well, the people of Three Rivers just weren't having it from King George!" The crowd laughed, because they were sure they wouldn't have been having it from King George either.

The kids stuck together along the right hand edge of the park, following Natalie through a tight crowd. Natalie was spokesperson, a clear choice. She was poised, attractive, and she was a champion voice projector, having starred in more than one school play. She got Juni's support because it had been her idea; Juni believed Natalie's heart would be in it. Why that was, Juni didn't care.

Natalie was going to read it alone, except for a section Dillon would repeat at the end. Some of the seniors voted for a chorus reading, figuring if the audience couldn't hear clearly what was being said, then the performers would be less likely to get in trouble. This hedging of bets was outvoted, but nobody finked.

Juni was determined to stay right behind Dillon. They were getting close to the stage. She tapped him on the shoulder. "What are we doing at the end?"

He took her by the upper arm so he could talk to her as they wriggled through openings in the crowd. His hand was warm and damp. "I'm going to repeat that part about suffering and then we're all going to yell—I mean project with authority—" "We will not be frogs in boiling water!"

“Right.” Juni was still repeating this to herself as she watched Natalie size up the people at the edge of the stage then step close to an official-looking lady who herself was casting size-it-up glances at everyone around her. Juni tuned in for any hesitation from Natalie. This was test number two. Would the woman buy it, and if she didn’t, would Natalie persevere? The speech was still going, so Natalie kept her voice low. The woman pulled back to get a good look at Natalie then she talked for a minute and Natalie listened with an earnest expression. Then Natalie laughed—in a restrained way—and nodded in earnest again and laughed with a disarming scrunch of her shoulders and then she pointed to the rest of them.

“Breathe,” Dillon said in Juni’s ear. His breath smelled like pizza, but she appreciated the feeling of solidarity. She tried to move with some kind of confidence, that was the thing. If she was going to leap off the cliff, it would be ridiculous to then flail around in the air as if she could get back up to familiar ground.

They gathered near the foot of the stage steps. Juni breathed as the Mayor talked. She silently repeated the words they were to shout with confidence. At last people were clapping and Natalie looked ecstatic, like the applause was for her. But as they filed up the steps, Juni panicked: she would stand out as younger or different in some way! There was no turning back now. At least she and Dillon were dressed alike; that meant she belonged to this posse.

Natalie waited for the group to divide on either side of her, then she began. Her voice was clear and unhurried, which Juni realized allowed her to make sure she got the squeezed-in edits.

“When in the course of human events it becomes necessary for a people to dissolve the political, economic, and cultural bonds which have connected them with a limited, misguided, and destructive system and to assume among the powers of the earth, the separate and equal station to which the laws of nature, of reality, of truth, and of nature’s god entitle them, a decent respect to the opinions of all beings requires that they should declare the causes which impel them to this separation.”

Juni stood straight and looked over the heads of the audience. These were good words. These were words she believed. She was so glad to be here at this moment.

"We hold these truths to be self-evident, that all life and ecozones, bioregions, habitats, cultures, and natural resources are created equal, that they are endowed by the Universe with certain unalienable Rights, that among these are life, liberty, and the pursuit of well-being..."

There were stirrings in the audience at the part about over-influence of advertising, twisted financial incentive, propaganda of the plutocracy. Juni wasn't sure what a plutocracy was but everyone knew that commercials aimed to make you feel you had to buy something and buy into something because you weren't good enough without it. And greed was a sin.

Juni felt a little awestruck as Natalie's well-trained voice mastered the air. The people of Three Rivers were still listening while a group of young people got up and said what needed to be said. She was standing on a stage with a bunch of seniors sending a message to the whole town.

"...and accordingly all experience hath shewn that humankind are more disposed to suffer, while evils are sufferable than to right themselves by abolishing the forms to which they are accustomed."

Juni hoped people remembered this was a long document. And that staying polite, like Dillon had predicted, would last until the end of it.

"But when a long train of abuses and usurpations, pursuing invariably the same object, in this case, of concentrating wealth in few hands; fragmenting, oppressing, and depriving of livelihood the majority of the population; inciting hatred among factions; plundering the commons of land, water, air, evinces a design to reduce them under absolute despotism, it is their right, it is their DUTY, to throw off such purveyors of a death culture, and to provide new guards for their future security."

Her eyes on the second floor windows across the street, Juni willed the audience to be moved by this duty. No one questioned the Declaration of Independence. If believing in it was so patriotic, why couldn't they act on it? The question was, what would altering the system look like. This was some rich

material for imagination. Everyone, everyone, would need to work together.

Natalie was starting the last paragraph.

"...The history of the present United States is a history of repeated injuries and usurpations, all having in direct object the establishment of an absolute Tyranny over the freedom of animals, plants, ecosystems, non-'white' and non-American cultures, to restore, develop, and maintain their well-being. To prove this, let facts be submitted to a candid world!"

Natalie was a damn rock star! She was a star and she was a rock. Juni couldn't help breaking into a beaming smile.

Natalie gave Dillon the paper and he took her place at the mic. "What Thomas Jefferson meant in 1776 was 'Anybody's who's been watching can see that as long as it doesn't actually kill them, people would rather keep suffering what they've been suffering than take difficult action to fix life-threatening problems.'"

Then the rest of the seniors and Juni, with no hedging or shyness, raised their voices in unison. "WE WILL NOT BE FROGS IN BOILING WATER."

[The full text of Juni and Dillon's updated Declaration
can be found at the back of this book.]

As she rounded the corner onto Meeting Street where her house was just the fourth one on the left, she kept her head down but her eyes cut toward the front porch. Her mother was on the swing. The way her chest wouldn't let the breath in told her this was not going to be good.

She coasted into the driveway pretending not to have noticed the figure on the swing, and went on to wheel her bike under the back porch. The skipping of her heart was annoying! She grabbed the bottom post of the porch stairs and swung herself around onto the third step, then with her hands on the railing, she hoisted herself sideways like a gymnast getting up on

a balance beam. Up the remaining steps, two at a time. Lou was at the top.

Juni gasped. "Jeez, Mom! What the—!"

"The phone's been ringing."

Juni looked at her with a face drawn up like she was squinting at something she couldn't quite make out. She was nearly Lou's height but with half the mass and about a third the age, but Lou had cut through the house from the front porch to catch Juni easily.

"I've heard a number of stories from other people. I want to hear it from you."

Juni continued to look at her with the same pained quizzical expression.

Lou led Juni to one of the collected chairs of the back porch and pulled another chair close for herself. She pointed to Juni's lips and then touched one of her own ears. "Right here, Juni."

Juni sat with her bare, knobby knees straight out before her, both feet flat on the wide floorboards, her forearms on the arms of the chair. "So I met Dillon and we talked to people about the pipeline terminal."

Lou said nothing.

"So we did that and then we got hungry so we went and got pizza at the food trucks behind City Hall."

Lou said nothing.

"So somebody had given Dillon a copy of the Declaration of Independence and we started, like, updating it, to include what's been going on or really, what we need independence from if we're going to fix the problems."

Juni's narration picked up speed. "Then some other seniors came and they helped and then somebody got the idea to read it at the park where people were so we did."

"Were you on the program, you and your group?"

"The program?"

"The program, Juni, printed up with the names of the speakers and reciters and choirs and bands. The committee's been gathering performers and scheduling them to make sure

the show ran a good length of time. They had to turn some down and try not to crush any child or adult's spirit when they told them there wasn't room for their song or poem. Or declaration."

Juni winced.

"The program," Lou went on, "of people who've been writing a speech so it would be entertaining and fresh but historical and inspiring, memorizing lines and rehearsing with their groups, worrying the music or the poem wouldn't sound as good as they hoped, fighting the stage fright for their moment in the spotlight."

Joe Dan's cat strode up the steps and into the space between Louisa and Juni, glancing up at their faces, but moved on to her pillow on top of the chest freezer, already coated with cat hair.

"Were you on that program, Juni?"

Juni shook her head.

"Ms. Alston just could not understand what happened. You know who she is? I think she's mortified that she let herself be tricked into doing something that wasn't fair to the other performers. She's embarrassed."

"I'm sorry! I didn't think about all that!"

"I know that, Louisa Junior, or you never would've done it, but you did do it, and now you can think about all this."

Juni ground her big toe in a knothole on the floor. If her mother was waiting for her to cry, she'd hold out as long as she could.

"And then there's what this Declaration says." Lou addressed the top of her daughter's head. "I'd like to see a copy as soon as possible. Something about oppression and propaganda. Mr. Costagrava heard the word 'plunder'."

"But it's true! This country exists by stealing land from the Indians and it got rich off slavery! Are we supposed to just ignore that?"

"Juni! The invasion of the stage was thoughtless, it was inconsiderate of other people's feelings, but the content of your

Declaration sounds rebellious. Is that what you want? To be a rebel?"

"The Fourth of July is about a rebellion." Juni's voice was low and stubborn. "It's about a revolution." Then standing tall and speaking out with the seniors came back to her and planting her elbows on the tops of her thighs and her face in her hands, Juni set for a long and copious cry.

Lou was quiet. Maybe she was surprised Juni argued with her in the wake of this fiasco. Maybe she would have to get to know a different daughter.

"Think about all this and what you're going to do."

"What I'm gonna do?" Juni's words were now sloppy with tears.

Lou got up and pulled a washcloth from a pile of clean laundry sitting on an old cooler and pressed it between one of Juni's hands and her wet cheek.

"Juni, one good thing is that you're not trying to point the finger at someone else. I hope this is the result of your integrity and not some misplaced loyalty. I hope you're not being unduly influenced by these older students."

Juni cried on.

"You think and come up with some options." Lou sank her hands into the soft pile of hair on either side of Juni's head, gave her head a gentle shake. "We'll talk later. Unless there's something you want to say now."

Juni did not respond.

"Maybe you're as baffled as I am, but I know you'll make some kind of sense of it soon. I'm going back to the clinic. I've got a patient going into labor. I left some sandwich fixings in the fridge. Titus said he would make a picnic for y'all to take to the fireworks."

"I'm not going."

"I think the sooner you get back out there and show your face the better. Get it over with, but figure out how you are going to respond, and consider how you are going to apologize."

"Apologize?"

"Yes, I said apologize."

“But how? Who to?”

“You’ll figure it out. I love you, baby.” Lou shut the backdoor behind her.

Juni sat on the back porch until she heard her heard her mother’s car pull out of the driveway. She went into the kitchen and rinsed her face, then wandered out to the front porch. Titus was napping on the glider. She sat on the swing and let the breeze soothe her burning face. She wished the canaries felt like singing because she could use the cheer. Frodo swam around in his tank chasing the minnows with no apparent intent to catch one. Groucho sat on the ramp under the basking light. The turtles could always mesmerize her, and she was grateful for it now.

“Juni-tunes.” Titus was awake. “What’d I miss?”

“You don’t want to know.”

“Mom didn’t read you the riot act?”

“Nobody rioted!”

“It’s an expression. From the Riot Act of the early 1700s in England. Any public gathering could be declared unlawful, but you had to read the Act. ‘Reading the riot act’ just means letting folks know they’re now officially subject to discipline.”

“Discipline. She’s good at it. She’s always like, ‘think about it.’ It’d be easier if she just punished me instead of making it clear how guilty I am and leaving me to stew in my own guilt.”

“Four out of five disciplinarians recommend it. It’s about you internalizing the lesson. But I want to hear about your crime. That’s what really caught her off guard.”

It was like she was rolling along just fine, getting stronger on the path of what needed to happen, and then things like Ms. Milbry’s shock and her mom’s anger jerked her into a parallel dimension where she was a serious mess-up. A mess-up on the scale of an earthquake. It was hard to bring the two worlds

together, to feel on the right path while she was still in the dimension with people like her mom.

"I feel so bad about upsetting Mom or hurting all those performers. But the things we said are true. I don't see why we should celebrate a revolution and then scold people because they can see we need another one. Her generation has finked out on the challenge of climate change!"

"Sounds like bravery training."

Juni let herself smile a little. "Does that mean you're on my side?"

"I'm always gonna be on your side, little sister, and I do think you're brave. But I'm sympathetic to our mom's side too. You scared her. About who her daughter might be. What she might be capable of."

"Why are you talking about me in third person?"

He laughed. "Maybe because you doing this made you kind of a stranger to Mom."

"Oh my god! It's not such a big deal!"

"Parents care way, way much. A baby comes with free installation of the freak-out trigger." He looked past her and his face lightened. "Look who's here."

Portia was riding her bike across the lawn, under the trees. Juni lifted her hand in a sluggish wave.

Portia was out of breath as she came up the stairs and plopped down in Titus's chair. "Sounds like you got a new posse and you're already out of control."

"We are entirely in control, it's everybody else going apeshit."

"Well, no one was in control over at Pirateland. Some crack-brained kids broke in last night and sprayed graffiti on the Intrepid, so B-Bob had to get the pressure washer out and we had to help which meant everybody got wet and we had to carry on in wet clothes which dried out in about an hour in the damn sun, but then everything was kind of muggy. You're gonna love what the graffiti said."

"It's still there?"

"We disappeared it, but you won't believe. 'Lifelines not pipelines'!"

"That's not crack-brained!"

"You have comrades out there, Junior Fudd." Titus twinkled at her.

"Happy Fourth of July! Long live the revolution!" came a hearty voice from the yard. They all started, and Portia jumped up to look over the railing.

"Uh-oh here comes your dad. Has he had his turn with you yet?"

Juni groaned. He must not have heard. Maybe she could make Portia tell him.

He came up the steps without provoking the creaky board. "Why so sulky? I thought you'd be celebrating."

"But... Lou told you?"

"I got an earful. She's gonna be alright, but you know she was born in the social matrix of this town. These things affect her."

"You aren't mad?"

"That my daughter is asserting our first amendment? I'm proud of you! Don't forget your mother and I were rebels in our day. Use it or lose it." He sat down next to Juni on the swing and put his arm around her. "It's all part of our aimless wandering through the cycles of birth and death, caught up in a veil of ignorance."

"That's what we were trying to do! Tear up the veil of stupid, willful ignorance. They know about the problem and they want to ignore it. It's *ignore*-ance."

"I'm not going to ignore our picnic. I bet you haven't made sandwiches. I've been looking forward to this." Ezra rubbed his hands together and stood up.

"I'll help," said Titus. Juni watched him drag his left foot a little on his way to the kitchen. Was it a half shuffle? Was it more or less shuffle than he showed yesterday?

Portia got down to it. "So what's your version?"

"Me and that guy Dillon rewrote the Declaration of Independence and a bunch of us stood on stage while this senior

girl read it. We didn't gloss over stealing the Indians' land and kidnapping Africans for slaves and ruining a beautiful continent."

"Juni, that sounds epic." Portia's elegant face was pretty delighted and Juni wanted it to stay that way the rest of the evening. But she couldn't get her mother's weary and disappointed face out of her mind.

"Mom is so upset. Dad's right that what I do in the town affects her. What if it's bad for her business?"

"I don't know why everybody expects parents to control their children all the time. As though we never made a decision for ourselves. It's demeaning"

"I'd rather they blame me than blame Lou for something I did."

"Girl, she really did a number on you. You are in for some guilt for breakfast, lunch and dinner."

"I don't regret it. Portia, it was so cool. We really said those words. And I believe them."

"And it was all seniors up there with you?"

"Totally."

An hour later they were lying on blankets in Loblolly Park, a long, narrow piece of land that hugged the bay on the southside of town. The city had the fireworks operation on a barge some ways from the shore, so that the pyrotechnics were doubled by their reflection in the water and brightened by the well of darkness in that direction. Mercifully, there were a lot of people they didn't know.

"Cheer up," Portia had said on the way in, "maybe everyone who was out this morning is at home still stricken with the shock of teenagers speaking their mind."

"Ha ha. Thanks."

Ezra smiled at them in his beneficent way. "I think everyone who witnessed this morning is still a bit cheered

something out of the ordinary happened. Something they can be impressed by, or maybe just scandalized.”

People they ran into acted pretty much as usual, displaying only the familiar excessive cordiality that characterized their region. Except that every once in a while, a different sort of look came at her, a curious and prolonged stare. She wasn’t sure how to read it.

“Did you see that Juni?” Titus whispered to her as he smoothed a yellow and turquoise paisley quilt. “That whole family was staring at you.”

“Your hair is on fire Juni,” said Ezra brightly. “People meditate for years to achieve a state like that.”

“All is changed, changed utterly,” quoted Titus, “‘a terrible beauty is born.’ Yeats.” He draped his napkin over her face, then yanked it off. “Ladies and Gentleman, a terrible beauty is born. And you saw it erupt here in that famous community of somnambulists, Three Rivers.”

“Somnab...what?”

“Somnambulists. Sleepwalkers. If your aim was to wake people up, I’d say you might’ve tickled a nose with a feather. Maybe a listener or two actually sneezed and opened their eyes for split sec.”

Ezra was reading materials posted on the board at the entrance to Harriet Tubman’s Bog Preserve. “‘Fine longleaf pine savannas.’ Doesn’t that sound exotic?”

Juni was still in the backseat of the car, her legs out the open door. She was wrapping packaging tape around where her pant leg cuffs met the tops of her socks.

Titus stood over her, watching as though fascinated, but his mind seemed elsewhere as it often did these days. “You really think that’s going to seal out chiggers?”

“And ticks,” she said cheerily. “It’s not hard to put on and it’s worth a try. Can I put some on you?”

“Sure.” He did a little hiphop move to bring one foot near her.

“There used to be ninety-two million acres.” Ezra’s voice resonated across the empty parking lot. “Now there’s only point five percent of that.”

“Are there pictures of the plants?” Juni called.

“Lots.”

“Maybe you could memorize them. The more eyes searching, the better chances finding.” She worked on Titus’ other foot then zipped the tape inside her backpack and picked up her folding chair. They each had one, so they could sit comfortably as long as it took to see a venus flytrap snap on a bug. Titus’s chair was a cloth sling chair, and he had made a simple rig to mount it on a small rucksack.

“There’s some rope in the car Juni, I can fix yours too. Hey, Dad, are you going to carry your chair?”

Ezra had hooked the aluminum frame over his shoulder. He turned and held both hands out to demonstrate that he had it all under control. They joined him at the board.

He pointed to the pitcher plant. “This one’s the most normal. But it doesn’t really look like a pitcher, more like a vase, one of those fancy, skinny vases.” The photo showed a few tall tubes, narrow at the base and growing wider at the top where the petal bent over the opening.

“I like to think of it as a Lalique champagne flute, myself. Does that lid snap shut?”

“No,” Juni said, “it’s got hairs pointing downward on the insides and the prey can’t get back out. It ends up in the bottom, in a pool of stuff that digests it.”

“Yum,” said Titus. “We’ve got deadly pools inside us too, but the food’s not struggling anymore when it gets there.”

“The sundew looks like little aliens.” Ezra was on another picture. Juni hoped he was spending enough time with each one to be able to spot it. She hoped he found them beautiful and fascinating and worth spending a day in the July heat to explore. A day with her, doing what she liked to do. A whole day.

The sundews were like yellow iced-tea spoons with their handles stuck in the ground. Red bristles poked out of the bowl of the spoon and each bristle was tipped with a sparkling clear drop. Juni was getting excited.

Her father had moved on to a large map that showed some boggy areas, a single trail that didn't loop, and some strips of boardwalk.

"According to this, the trail's only a mile long," Titus' voice held a hint of relief that stirred a little devil of dread in Juni. Her brother was built for covering distance. He made running look easy. He made it look almost like flying. Now he was worried about walking a mile. She looked to see if her father felt what she was feeling but he'd started on the trail.

"Look here, Juni-tunes," Titus was saying. Half the board was dedicated to warnings: pictures of venomous snakes and poisonous plants, information on tick-borne diseases. A stark black and white laminated sign reminded visitors that removing a carnivorous plant from the preserve was a misdemeanor and punishable by law.

"Are you thinking what I'm thinking?" said Titus.

Juni nodded. "Too dangerous. Race you to the car."

Titus called to their father. "We're ready for Dairy Queen, Dad,"

"What?" Ezra turned from the path.

"Just kidding," said Titus, and aside to Juni, "What are we gonna do with him?"

"Well, he is at the head of the line," said Juni. "He could—"

"—be the one to step on the venomous snake," Titus schemed.

"What are you two muttering about?"

"Just matters of life and death," Titus assured him.

"Okay," sighed Ezra, "let me know if it's anything important."

They caught up with him and walked along a wide and ranging trail that was often barely distinguishable from the sand between the shrubs. The heavenly host of cicadas roared then

purred. From the back, Juni watched Titus for signs of fatigue until she remembered that she wanted to be looking at the ground.

Ezra stopped on the path ahead of them. "It's not much to look at, is it." He was already sweating and the heat showed in rosy patches under his eyes. They hadn't walked far but the tall pines didn't cast much shadow and the sun beat down on his shaved head.

"How come you didn't wear a hat, Dad?" Juni asked.

"I thought we were going to be in the woods."

"He forgot it," Titus said, "is more accurate." For all his mindfulness, their father was kind of spacey. Well, he did call it mindfulness practice; maybe he was still practicing.

Juni walked past her brother, pulling off her cap and loosening the band so it would fit Ezra.

"No, sugarbaby." Of course he would say that.

She mashed the cap on his head. "Some of us have more hair than others. I swear, Dad, I'm gonna be pissed if you make us leave before we've seen anything."

"Okay, okay." He left the hat on his head. "You lead."

Juni walked slowly. It was hot! Except for the Fourth of July, she hadn't worn long pants since May.

Ezra was right, the preserve wasn't much to look at. The land was flat, the plants sparse and low to the ground except for the pines and some scrubby stuff. The plants looked like all they could think about was a dash of rain or a good cloud between them and the sun, but she liked it. She just liked to be outside.

Now she was at the front and had to find the subtle trail, it made more of a difference that it wasn't clear. It wasn't her idea of a trail at all. Paths were so inviting when their packed dirt led a person between rocks and around corners, always clearly there so that you didn't have to think, you could keep going and going even though you'd never been there before.

"Why did you two want to come here the first time, back when Juni was just seven?" Ezra asked from the back.

“Juni wanted to see the killer plants,” said Titus. “She’s gruesome that way.”

“Doesn’t everybody think that’s amazing?”

“The first time I heard about it,” Ezra said.

“Why didn’t you give me a hard time before we came instead of after we got here?”

“I’m not giving you a hard time. I said I thought it’s amazing.”

“It feels like you’re protesting in a passive aggressive kind of way.”

They walked in silence, Juni trying to make as sure of the path as she could without pausing. A glitch might give her dad another reason to wish he hadn’t come. She was equally worried she would miss the plants, so her pace might have seemed excruciatingly slow to her companions.

“Oh my god, look!” Next to the trail was a sundew. Its surroundings were messy with tufts of grass and fallen gray stalks, and maybe the drops didn’t catch the light perfectly the way they did in the photo, but still they glistened minutely. Juni was overwhelmed with tenderness. The crazy red bristles couldn’t even move but they stood up in the messy field and waited for insects that were nimble and could actually *fly* for god’s sake, to come along and prove again that the food-procurement system the little plant had come up with still worked.

She squatted and pulled out a hand lens to inspect the droplets. “I can see carcasses! Want to look through this?”

Titus squatted while Ezra got on his knees so they could take turns with the lens.

“There’s another one,” Titus said. “And another one.”

Now they saw a dozen. Ezra stood up and brushed the dirt off his palms. Juni counted the yellow stems on the plant by the trail: twenty-six. She took out her notebook and jotted. “Do you think it’d be okay if I touched one of the dew drops?”

“What?!” Titus shrieked in terror. “You might get stuck! Do you think we want to leave you here like a fresh virgin sacrifice to the plant gods?”

Juni was giddy at seeing the little community of aliens and now something about the thought of herself as a virgin sacrifice made her laugh until she let herself fall on her butt into the path. "I meant, I meant! Do you think it would mess with the plant too much? I don't know how much energy it takes them to form one of these little spitballs."

"I think you could touch one," Ezra said.

Juni carefully moved closer to the plant. Her eyes picked out a sphere. Maybe it would pop like a bubble, it was so perfectly round. She carefully put her finger to its edge, and the sphere oozed onto her skin. It was sticky. She brought it to her nose and inhaled.

Now Juni could settle into a state of mind that shut out worries about her father getting antsy or Titus wearing out. They walked through what must have been the savannahs. The landscape was light and airy because it was made of just two elements with lots of space between them: grasses below, and maybe two stories up, the tall, scraggly branches ending in pine needle pompoms.

One savannah was super dramatic with bold black strokes from the grass to the lowest branches because the pines had been charred by fire. Out in the field there, she saw pitcher plants reaching taller than the grass, clear shapes leaning this way and that out of the blurred green ground. She pulled out her binoculars.

"Why don't you go closer?" Ezra said.

"Banned," she mumbled. "Ecosystem's too fragile."

Ezra and Titus sat down in their chairs.

Time stopped. Across the field the pitcher plants were aware of her. They were calling, silent like magical horns. They dared her and watched to see what she would do. They called in a way that told her she could not come to them. Calling, calling no, you can't come to us.

At last they came to a boardwalk which reassured her they were on the trail. The wooden path led into thicker vegetation though here the trees were young and short. And when they came to a pond, here too, on the shores the plants were either thick but short, or tall but almost bare. There was no shade anywhere.

By this time, they were seeing stretches of plants that ate bugs or plants that didn't eat bugs but drew Juni's attention for other reasons. They paused often, so she could touch bark, crush and smell a leaf, take notes, sketch quickly, or stand looking.

After about an hour, Juni halted at a cluster of venus flytraps beside the trail. Ezra looked confused. "What's up?"

"This is a good place to stake out. You want to watch? Titus?"

"Of course."

"What are we talking about?" Ezra asked.

Juni set her chair next to Titus'. "We're going to wait for a bug to fall victim to this vicious plant. Are you brave enough to witness the carnage?"

Ezra contemplated the landscape. "Tell you what. I'm going to see if I can find a shadow and do some meditating."

"Sounds good," said Juni, a little relieved.

"And good luck with that," Titus said in a hale-and-hearty voice. He sat down and leaned over the plant. "Is this one plant or a bunch of plants?"

Juni wasn't sure. She perched on the very edge of her chair and bent over to count. "There are like seventy trappy things here. How would you describe them?"

"Like leaf clams or flower petal clams. But there's that stiff fringe all along the edges. They're like eyes with spiky lashes. And no eyeballs."

"Oh my god, that messes with my mind. Now I see seventy eyes, some wide open, some closed up, some in between and all of them blank! Some kind of superhero's villain."

"With a hundred hairy eye sockets, enchanting the hero and then..."

“Snap!” Juni clapped. “She closes her eyeball-less eyes over the superhero’s...”

“Exhalation which of course carries his...”

“Very soul,” she finished, “or maybe just his superpower.”

“Maybe the soul itself is the superpower. The more soul you have, the more super.”

Talking wouldn’t have bothered the plant or the bug but they fell quiet to concentrate. Something buzzed by Juni’s ear, too high to notice the plant’s inviting perfume. The longer Juni looked, the more she saw: bits of dead bug here and there, bugs crawling around the traps, bugs crawling in the nearby debris. She focused on a beetle resting on a closed trap, but it descended into the brush without incident. She followed it to see where it went so purposefully. It ran into a jumping spider. She loved those guys! Their gray and black pattern was like granite and their faces, set back into their chests, so ferocious. It popped away from the encounter with the beetle and suddenly was among the flytraps. Juni was mixed about the prospect.

“Titus,” she whispered.

“Mm?”

She pointed. Titus leaned closer, just in time to see the petal clam snap shut on the chunky little spider.

“Oh no!” Impulsively Juni’s hands shot out to pull apart the eyelids. Titus caught her forearm.

“But he’s inside there, Titus! He can’t get out! It’s horrible!”

Titus didn’t say anything.

“He’s right inside there,” she repeated in a sullen voice. She stared at the closed trap. “How did I react when I was seven?”

Titus laughed. “You relished the horror of it! You couldn’t get enough. We were out here all day, it seems like, and saw the end of many lives.”

He shifted back and got comfy in his chair, the canvas one with canvas arms and the only one you could slouch in. “Thanks, Juni, this is so great, to be out here like this again.”

The cloud in her chest swirled. “No, Titus, you’re the one who got the idea to come. I’m thanking you.” She stopped and hunched over the plants, feeling a little like a vulture.

It was a while before Ezra came back. He mimed that he’d fallen asleep and pointed at Titus napping. Juni pointed to the plants, worked her hands like a trap closing, and held up four fingers. Ezra gave the thumbs up. Then he stood there. He assumed it was time to go.

Juni frowned. She wasn’t ready. Titus was asleep. They didn’t have to leave yet.

“Juni,” her father broke the silence. “We’ve been here a long time, we’ve seen it all.”

“No, Dad, we haven’t seen it all.”

“I’ve seen all I need to see right now.”

“You could go back to the car. Do you have a book?”

“The car would be sweltering, sugar, and there’s not really any shade. And—” he anticipated her next suggestion, “we’re in the middle of nowhere, there’s no Dairy Queen nearby.”

Titus stirred.

“There could be a—”

“There’s not.”

“But you don’t know what I was going to say.”

“Sorry to interrupt you, but I’m so ready to leave this hard scrabble place.”

Juni erupted. “But that’s how it works, Dad! It has to be like this for the carnivorous plants to live here. It had to be like this for the whole carnivorous thing to even get started! The whole reason they turned into predators is because the soil’s so bad, they can’t get enough nutrition from it.”

“Okay, that’s cool.” Ezra’s cool voice usually just made her more annoyed; she could never get a rise out of him. “Your fascination with nature is a thing of wonder, Juni. I’m glad to be here with you and your nature napper.” He smiled at Titus, now awake.

“Can’t you appreciate how unimpressive it looks?” Juni would not be calmed. “When you look at this place you think is

so *worthless*,” she said the word with contempt. “It’s—you can’t see it’s everything everywhere doing amazing things together for millions of years, even in *boring* places like this with *stupid* trees that don’t give any *shade*. The plants can’t do their thing without lots and lots of sunlight! The trees are dealing with the same un-nutritious set up the other plants are. It’s all wrapped together, Dad. And they’re all taking chances. The plants gave up other things so they could have traps! They took such a risk!”

“Juni, Louisa, I get it.”

Juni fought the tears. “You don’t get it! And if a person like you doesn’t get it, what the fuck chance does the world have!”

Juni was quiet in the back seat on the ride home. She didn’t mind falling asleep. In her dream she saw her father with his arm over a boy’s shoulder. She didn’t know the boy. Something was rising out of the sand, a kind of mist. It was all around them. It thickened until she could hardly see her father or the boy. She thinks it will suffocate them or squeeze, even crush, them. She yells to her dad but he smiles and puts his finger to his lips to hush her.

She opened her eyes and gazed out the car window at the racing landscape, remembering a boy she saw once at the state fair. In the midst of all the kids around him squealing about cotton candy and fried Oreos, skipping to rides, complaining about lines, he sat in a wheelchair, and still he looked so tired.

“I think I’ve found a zombie cure.” Juni bounced into the kitchen. Titus and Lou were at the kitchen table having a cup of coffee. A couple of weeks had passed since the fourth, and everyone seemed to have recovered more or less.

“A zombie what?”

“A cure! A cure for zombie-ism.”

“Ok, but just a minute because you have to hear what Mom is saying about the pipeline terminal. This is something you need to hear.” Titus looked at Lou.

“What is it?” Juni felt alarmed. This is how it was when they told her about Titus’ illness.

“Explain it Lou...”

“I was just saying that I think it’s cynical of them to promote this pipeline coming to Three Rivers and the terminal. I don’t see how they think they’re going to make a go of all that when the port is breathing its last.

“What do you mean breathing its last?” Juni leaned on the counter.

“Oh honey, that port is shriveling up and dying.”

“How can a port die?”

“It gets filled with silt over time and it’s too shallow to bring in the big boats. They’ll hit the bottom.”

“Yeah but someone said it will come back when they do that thing they’re gonna do.”

“What do you mean?”

“They’re going to fix it. Just like they fix everything.” Juni pulled herself up to sit on the counter.

“That can only mean dredging,” said Titus.

“That’s it! Dredging.”

“But everybody knows the port is too polluted to dredge,” said Lou.

“What does that mean?”

“If you stir up the bottom where all the poisons have settled you activate them again and they...” but Juni interrupted her before she could finish.

“So why would anyone be talking about dredging it?”

“But they shouldn’t dredge it. That’s what I’m saying.”

“But they are talking about dredging it, because we heard them. We heard them at the city council meeting. They’re working on some kind of deal with the county and some port company, but they have to get it tested to see get the go ahead.

“I can tell you right now what that test is going to reveal. Anybody’s who lived here all their life, like me, knows you have

decades of toxins in there, PCBs, dioxin, I don't remember what all, but we are talking about the steel mill, the paper mill and Crowder Chemical and Praxair, don't forget them."

"But this is great," said Juni, jumping off the counter, "I mean, it's not great to have all that evil stuff in our water, but it means the terminal makes no sense. It's a setback for them, right? I mean don't they know? Why aren't they talking about that? And Lou you're giving me that look I hate..."

"What look?"

"The one that is so sympathetic."

"I can't do anything right."

"Don't worry about it Mom," Titus intervened. "Your heart's in the right place."

"Will somebody please tell me why I am in need of sympathy?" Juni was getting impatient.

"You aren't really," Titus spoke slowly, "It's just that I wouldn't be surprised if they found some way to do what they want no matter what that test says."

"See what I mean? Totally cynical!" said Lou, jumping up and putting the kettle on, but then sitting back down, agitated.

"I don't understand. Cynical like sarcastic?" Juni was trying to sort out the new information.

"Cynical like when you don't believe that good can happen, so you just do what you want, you do the thing that serves you. And devil take the hindmost." Lou struggled a bit to explain what she meant, "And maybe you pretend you care. But in the end it's like, you don't believe people will do good."

Juni was only half listening. She was processing, "But I can't see how they can dredge if it's going to spread the poisons, I mean if they poison the bay, the tide is going to push all that bad water into the marshes and our wildlife will be all poisoned."

Lou looked at her sympathetically. "Well, maybe they won't. What do I know? I mean, there's an economic issue too. Three Rivers tourist industry—the fishing and crabbing and oystering and duck hunting—would for sure suffer if the place was all fouled by toxins."

Everyone was silent. "And bird-watching too. A lot of birders out there." Lou continued.

"Not to mention the locals who still take fish and seafood out of the marsh to put food on the table," added Titus.

"But you said everybody knows?" Juni was still putting it together.

"Everybody knows, but the question is, who is paying attention?" said Titus.

"We have to make them pay attention!"

"Uh huh. Now what were you saying about that zombie cure?" said Titus, looking down at the linoleum floor and almost smiling.

Now Juni smiled too, "Oh yeah! Something to wake people up! That kind of zombie cure!"

Juni walked into Fulla Beans and scanned the clientele. Dillon bent over the newspaper in a booth near the window. "Hey Dillon? What happened to your hair? I hardly recognized it."

"It's a favor I did for my mother. She let me leave it for graduation, and I promised that afterwards I'd get a real haircut. Hey, but I'm glad you showed up."

"I've been trying to call you for the last hour."

"Right, now we get to the problem why I haven't called you yet. I can't find my phone, a temporary set-back I'm sure."

"Never mind. Dillon, you know that dredging of the port they're talking about? They're not supposed to do it because the bottom of the port is too polluted."

"That's why I wanted to call you. I just heard the same thing. At the barber, I talked to Mr. Windfield..."

"The librarian."

"Mr. Wifi, like, the oldest person in Three Rivers who's into everybody's bidness. He explained to me that if they're going to do it, there's supposed to be this whole process with lots of testing and research and planning so they can figure out

how to keep from stirring up years of toxins that settled on the bottom.”

“But first they have to have it tested to know if they can even go ahead.”

“Right. Mr. Wifi said they were going to do the test soon, so they can rush the clean-up.”

“Lou told me that everybody knows about all this! Do people think it’s too complicated and the authorities will take care of everything?”

“Probably. We gotta talk to Pete. He’s been organizing in Prince George for months.”

“What does that mean? Organizing for what?”

“You know, it’s that thing I go to City Council meetings about. To fight to get the stupid city to make a new evacuation plan for them because they’re in a flood zone and the old one is about 50 years out of date. If we have ‘extreme weather events’ like they say is going to happen more and more because of global warming, Prince George’ll get clobbered.”

“What does it have to do with the port?”

“Prince George is so close. It affects them majorly. Pete and his group can get more people to come out and make noise about all this.”

“I still don’t really know what we’re going to do. I’m new to all this.”

Dillon looked at her sympathetically.

“But it doesn’t mean you can look at me like that.”

“Like what?” said a familiar voice. Juni and Dillon hadn’t noticed Natalie walk in.

“Ugh,” said Juni.

“Well, excuse me,” said Natalie.

“Oh no! I didn’t mean it for you! I was just thinking how everyone keeps looking at me sympathetically because I’m such a newbie at this political stuff.” Juni struggled to recover. “And I hate that sympathetic look. It’s, it’s...”

“It’s patronizing. I think I know what you mean,” Natalie put on an exaggerated face of deep sympathy.

"I don't know what you girls are talking about," protested Dillon.

"It's a gender thing," said Natalie. "You wouldn't understand."

On Saturdays Juni went to her Dad's for movie night. Ezra lived in an apartment above the Sangha, the place where what he called "the Buddhist community" came to meditate together. Three Rivers and Waccamaw County had enough interested people they could call themselves a community and rent a building. Ezra was the caretaker, and the center had a video projector for the days that the Roshi skyped in from Japan. They projected his image so that everyone could see. They rarely used it Saturday nights, so Ezra could bring it upstairs and project a movie on the wall.

On this particular Saturday, he dropped by around six to see if she was ready. He lived within walking distance. He found her in her favorite tree house, which they called the bughouse because Juni kept a lot of her insect specimen jars there.

"Are you coming down or am I coming up?"

"I'm coming down." She slid down the rope until her feet reached the old tire at the bottom. Ezra caught the other swing and they each sat, hanging from one of the biggest trees in town.

"Why don't you invite your friend Dillon? I'd like to meet this person who inspired the hijack of Ms. Alston's program."

"Dad, you are so wrong. First of all we wrote it together. Second, the program wasn't hijacked, because it started up again as soon as we got off the stage. And third, he's a senior."

"He's a senior?"

"He's not even a senior, he's graduated. And he doesn't want to watch movies with some sophomore and her dad."

"You're stereotyping him."

“Maybe. But really, he sees enough of me as it is. And if he’s here, I’ll be worried the whole time that he doesn’t like the movie we chose, or he’s not having a good time, and then I won’t have a good time.”

“He sounds cranky!”

“It’s not that, it’s just that, he’s different. With him it’s serious.”

“If it’s serious, I really would like to meet him.”

“No, no, I don’t mean it like that! And I don’t mean he’s serious all the time. I just mean that when we get together, we’re working on something. He’s a fun guy but we aren’t just playing around.”

“I think I get it. So do you want to watch a documentary? We don’t have to play around either you know.” Ezra could barely cover his teeth when he gave even a little smile.

“Maybe we should just read some really depressing news.” Juni was scraping a design into the dirt with the toe of her sneaker.

“There’s no moon tonight. We could go out to the beach and look at stars.”

It had been such a long time since they’d done that. “But Dad you sold your car. How can we go to the beach?”

“You know the sangha has a van!”

“You never told me you have a car.”

“It’s not mine. I just have the use of it.”

“I have a learner’s permit you know.”

“Yeah, well, I don’t have a permit to let a fifteen-year-old drive a big old van.”

Juni sighed. “At this rate I’m never going to get enough practice to pass the license test.”

“I’ll tell you what. Let’s call Alice Coltrane and see what she’s up to. Maybe we could talk her into being the training driver.”

Juni was ringing her sister before she could say “Yes!”

“We’ll find some drinks and sandwiches,” said Ezra, “and when we’re tired of driving, we can go out to the beach and wait for the stars to come out.”

Within the hour Alice Coltrane collected them and they’d picked up sandwiches, chips and sodas.

They drove south on the Uncle Ben to give Juni some highway practice while it was still light out. She was steering them back toward town and the car was more comfortable on the road than it ever had been.

“Hey, let’s go down and look at the port.” Juni moved toward the exit. “We can practice parallel parking in the big parking lot they have down there.”

“The port? I thought we were going to find a beach for star gazing.” Ezra was sitting in the back seat.

Juni glanced at Alice Coltrane. “I kinda want to see if my friend Pete is working there tonight, at the port. He was going to do some investigating.”

“Hmm hmm,” Alice Coltrane mused. “Is that the Pete that got arrested at the protest? Why would they hire him?”

“I don’t know. I didn’t think to ask him.”

She drove down the access road to the port in the dying light. The guard house was dark. Juni pulled up to the water’s edge and parked. “That’s weird.”

“What?” said AC

“This is new asphalt isn’t it?”

“It sure is. Does that figure in your story?”

“It wasn’t here before. When I fell and got the concussion.”

“I guess they really think they’re going to get the port going again.” Alice Coltrane got out of the car and stretched. “This isn’t much of a picnic spot, but I’m hungry...” She pulled three folding beach chairs out of the hatchback.

Ezra got out the cooler to make a table and helped AC set up the chairs. “Look at the sky!”

The sun was setting behind them and an intricate layer of pink and apricot shreds stretched before them.

“This might work,” Ezra said. “It’s pretty clear for a summer night. I think it’ll get dark enough down here. You won’t get spooked, will you, Juni?”

“Not as long as we’re all together.”

They sat in their chairs and ate in silence as the sky reddened up and swifts dipped to the water’s surface for insects. The quiet was punctuated by an occasional fish jumping and an occasional question from Juni.

“What are they eating, AC?”

“This time of day it could be aphids, flying ants, mosquitoes, hoverflies... Right now anything over the water to catch a drink is fair game.”

“We’re fair game if you ask me. Do you have any bug spray in the car?”

“In the dash.”

“I should have worn long sleeves.”

“It’ll be better when it gets dark. Use some of this for now.”

Ezra adjusted his chair to recline, so that he had a more comfortable view of the heavens. “Okay AC, I’m counting on you to be our guide to the constellations.”

“I can try out some of the new ones we’re making up out at the wildlife center. We decided that a new geological era needs some new constellations.”

“What’s a new geological era?” Juni asked.

“You know how the history of the earth is divided into eras, periods and epochs. You’ve heard of the Jurassic, the famous period when ‘dinosaurs roamed the earth.’ We’ve been in the Holocene except that now according to the International Union of Geological Sciences, we’re leaving the Holocene and entering the ‘Anthropocene.’”

“I heard of that! Anthropocene.”

“You don’t say.” Ezra took all news in stride.

AC continued, “The idea is that we’ve made such an impact on the planet that we’re leaving marks in the geological record. Nuclear fall out, topsoil erosion, acid rain, acid oceans,

dead coral reefs, melted glaciers, skyrocketing CO2 and methane in the atmosphere, unheard of weather events..."

"Stop!" Juni covered her ears, "Is it still Gaia after all that?"

"Do you know what Gaia is, Dad?" Alice Coltrane always made sure everyone was included in the conversation.

"It's the earth as a living being, a super-organism."

"It's one thing to think about making marks on a geological record, but if you think of the planet as a living thing, it's like we've been beating her up, poisoning her, torturing her. It's so ugly," Alice Coltrane bemoaned.

They sat in silence and watched the stars begin to glimmer.

"I hardly even got a chance to know her." Juni said, barely audible.

"Who, baby?" Ezra reached to put his hand on the back of her neck.

"Gaia."

"She's still here, you can't kill her." Alice Coltrane tried to be reassuring.

"But you can skin her alive," said Juni.

"And cook her and wrap her in plastic," Ezra added.

"It's too awful. What are we going to do?"

"I think we need to study this planetary scale organism and all its parts," said AC, "so we can help it through this. That's what we're trying to do at the wildlife center."

"I'm keeping a notebook with some of my favorite plants and animals. I have it in my bag."

"AC, show us some of your new constellations."

"We were trying to think of the survivors of past extinctions and then finding star patterns that look like them."

"Like sharks!" Juni jumped right in.

"Ooh yeah, right there, that looks like two sharks chasing each other." Ezra was in too.

"And crocodiles," said Juni.

"And ferns," said Ezra.

"And tardigrades."

“What are tardigrades AC?”

“Popularly known as water bears. These little microscopic creatures that can withstand any hardship. Freezing, boiling, drying, drowning, sending into space.”

“But what is it?” persisted Juni, “Can you make a sketch in my notebook?”

“I have to show you in the microscope, or you can just look it up on the internet. It’s a little eight-legged microarthropod you find all over the place, but they mostly like wet places.”

“How do they endure drying?”

“They do this trick where they roll up into a little shell called a tun and they estivate, which is like hibernation except during heat and drought instead of during cold months.”

“Estivate. Sounds kind of like meditating,” said Ezra.

“They go back in the fossil record about 530 million years. They’ve survived all the major extinctions we know about.”

“Water bear! Maybe we could convert the big dipper. Its other name is Ursa Major, you know, the big bear. How about those over there?”

“That’s Bootes, the plowman, but he won’t mind playing a water bear if it’ll get him through this extinction event.”

Their reverie in the dark was interrupted by a light coming from the guard house. The door was open now, and a tall figure was silhouetted by the light inside. A flashlight danced on the new black asphalt, followed by a man advancing toward them.

“Hello? Who’s there?”

The star-gazing picnickers instinctively froze in their chairs, afraid to make any move that might be interpreted as aggressive.

“We’re just looking at the stars,” said Alice Coltrane in the most unthreatening voice she could muster.

"You could've picked a more picturesque spot," the voice was friendly and familiar.

"Pete?"

The flashlight had politely avoided their eyes until now when it pounced. "Is that you, Juni?"

"It's me. I was hoping... I couldn't wait to find out what you're looking into, so we came down here."

"Who are your friends?"

"Oh, this is my dad, Ezra, and this is my sister, Alice Coltrane." Juni paused. "They're cool." She didn't know why she added that; it just seemed called for given the awkwardness of the moment.

"Pleased to meet you, Mr. Ezra, Miss Coltrane. Pete Pettigrew. Juni and I know each other from around town." Pete was standing very near them now, his flashlight pointed at the ground. "I'm picking up some shifts on guard duty here."

"I meant to ask how you got hired here. Didn't you get arrested at the protest?"

"Oh, it wasn't the first time, and it won't be the last. They do their best to intimidate me, but the charges are routinely thrown out. Anyway I've been working for this security company since before any of my benevolent arrests, and I finally finagled a few shifts over here."

The silence returned. "Want a soda?" offered Ezra.

"Thanks. Y'all must have come in sometime after I started out the other way, to make rounds." He paused.

"We've been out here a pretty long while." Juni tried to dispel the air of vague embarrassment, but unable to resist the awkward question.

"Oh yeah? How long have y'all been here?"

"We saw a ravishing sunset, ate sandwiches and chips and now we're redrawing the constellations." Ezra was ever the voice of calm cheer.

"Where were you?" Juni persisted, ever the voice of sustained curiosity.

"Well, it's kind of a strange thing. I've been watching a boat out in the harbor just north of here."

“Shrimpers?”

“Do you hear that low droning? It’s easy to ignore with all the noise pollution in the world.”

“I do hear that,” said Alice, “I thought it was the highway. The way sound travels at night.”

“I thought it was the highway too, but it gets louder if you walk up that way.”

“And?”

Pete held back, “For now can y’all keep this under your hats?”

They stared at him in bewilderment. Juni stood up, heartbeat quickening. She tried to catch the eyes of the others but it was really too dark, so she turned back to Pete, “I think so.”

“I wonder if I should be telling you this ... but since it’s you, Juni...”

“What?”

“It’s a dredging boat. It was out there last night too.”

“Someone is dredging the port?” asked Alice Coltrane.

“Last night was the first time I saw it and this is my second week here. I borrowed a decent camera to get some snaps of it, but it seems what I really need is a tripod.”

“But how can that be?” Juni’s mind raced. “Number one, they’re waiting for a report to see if it’s feasible. Number two, I thought they had to get a permit. And three,” she paused, “who are they?”

Pete spoke slowly. “If it is dredging, it’s illegal.”

“But how can they just come out here and do that? Isn’t anyone paying attention?” Juni stamped her foot on the asphalt.

Alice Coltrane tried to collect the facts. “Where are they dumping the dredge material?”

“It looks like they’re tugging it over to the contained area they used when they dredged it about twelve years ago. It’s what they call a spoil site and it’s not really contained. Up near to the Prince George neighborhood.”

“Of course!” exclaimed Juni.

“So... that’s illegal dumping on top of illegal dredging?”

“Look, I’m not saying anything for sure. That’s why I wanted to get pictures of it.”

“But we’ve got to tell someone, tell the newspaper!”

“It sounds like Pete wants us to wait Juni.” Alice Coltrane was one step ahead. “Pete, what do you have in mind?”

“We don’t know who’s behind this.”

“Seems like just about all the powerful people in town are in favor of jumpstarting the port again,” said AC.

“Yeah,” said Ezra, “where do you start to look for blame when that many people have a motive?”

Juni sat back down and looked up at the stars again. She traced patterns with her eyes, trying to imagine something called a water bear. She hadn’t even seen one yet, but she had a feeling about it. It was older than all this mess. Extinctions came and went, but the water bear was still there.

Juni walked slowly down the sandy path to the employee’s cove. She was lingering late at work, waiting for Pete to pick her up for a meeting in Prince George. Buccaneer Bob was still there, bustling about in the trailer.

“Pirate Louisa Belle! Why are you hanging around looking so glumski?”

Juni figured Buccaneer Bob’s -ski flourish was just part of his exuberance, more than the usual words could express. “I guess I’m getting a lesson in corruption.” Juni plopped down on one of the rusting folding chairs and started to change to her sneakers from the heavy black boots she’d located at the thrift store and which were always damp now.

“Oh, corruption! That sounds exciting. Does that mean intrigues and secret bank accounts and smoking email evidence?” Bob had laid a heavy grey coat out on the picnic table and was cutting the black buttons off it.

“Um, well, there are secret things going on that’s for sure.” Juni was dying to tell what she knew.

He looked at her expectantly, then returned to his task, spilling several varieties of brass buttons out of his button box. “You don’t have to tell me if it will compromise the mission.”

“The mission?”

“Don’t you have a mission in all this, Juni Louisa Belle? Because I sense that you do.”

He poked around in the brass. “I think if we can make the usual kind of epaulets for the shoulders, this coat will do nicely. We need another dry suit every time this admiral goes in the drink, and I’m getting sick of making and remaking this costume. Maybe we need a new script.”

Juni had stopped listening. She liked the sound of a mission. “Okay Bob, can you keep a secret?”

“Honey, my life is a bunker of secrets.”

“Wait, Bob— ‘honey?’”

“Sorry, I always forget. My mama called me honey and it’s just ingrained in my vocabulary.”

“I’m sorry I have to correct you but it’s for your own good. Girls my age are less likely to trust you if you can’t get your vocabulary up to date.”

“Absolutely and I appreciate your good-hearted discipline. And speaking of trust, I have a heavy safe at the bottom of my heart full of secrets that have been put in my trust and I don’t ever even open it. I can’t remember all the secrets deep-sixed in my psyche. So even if I called you honey, you can trust me!”

“But I don’t want to tell you so you can bury it. I want to tell you because you might be able to help us. With the mission.” Juni still hadn’t fully articulated the mission.

Bob squinted at the needle as he pulled thread through the eye. “Tell me more.”

“You know how they want to bring a gas pipeline to Three Rivers and build a terminal at the port?”

“Yes, and I know you are a warrior in that battle.”

“Right. So, here’s the first secret: someone is dredging the port at night and they haven’t even made the environmental impact study on whether it’s safe to dredge. As far as we know,

they don't have a permit and they definitely don't have a permit to dump the dredge material, but we're still figuring out where they're dumping. The second secret is something everybody knows, which is that the port is polluted and if they dredge it, all the toxic silt will be stirred up and poison the marsh."

"So that's why they're supposed to be waiting for the EPA impact report. Oooh, tisk tisk! The moths have been in this coat; there must be some wool in the blend. I'm going to have to do more repairs than I wanted to." He turned the coat over and smoothed the fabric to check for more holes. "What's the third secret?"

"The third secret. Well, that would be our plan. Only thing is we don't have a plan yet." Juni stepped over to the table to get a closer look at what Bob was doing. "I always wondered how you fix those holes."

"I'm going to take some fabric out of the hem and cut it into some dainty little patches to put on the back of the holes. When I get finished with it, no one will know the difference."

"The third secret is still being worked out. See, we have to stop them somehow."

"So you're taking it into your own hands?"

"I don't know. I think we should tell the press, but we don't know who all is involved. It's got to be some powerful people, and they might have a way to silence it. And then we'll just be kids making noise."

Bob sat down and lit a cigarette. "So you've got to make a noise that no one can forget. You have to create something, a song, a gesture, an image that resonates." He drew long on his cigarette oblivious to Juni's customary effort to wave the smoke away from her face. "We must devise *an event!*" and Bob emphasized the word as though introducing it for the first time.

"An event?"

"We'll make a scene! We must catch them in flagrante delicto!"

"In what?"

"In blazing offence! We must catch them in the act! Red handed! So there can be no scuttling of the truth."

“So you’ll help us?”

“I will, but if.... If and only if the plan meets my standards for a respectably dramatic event.”

“Right! And we’ll call the whole thing Operation Zombie Cure!”

An hour later Juni was sitting in a different kind of rusty folding chair, this time in a church basement in Prince George. The room was crowded with people, mostly middle aged or older. Owing to the heat, they had not turned the lights on though the evening was creeping in, making shadows in the corners. The windows and doors were all open and the electric fans were turned down to a low hum so people could hear each other talk. Pete, hat in hand, was sitting next to Druscilla Healy who was making a steady effort to run the meeting despite the eagerness of everyone to speak their piece. Druscilla was a large woman of indeterminate age, whose gray wire tendrils had a tendency to peek out from under her smooth black wig. Respected elder and chairwoman of the group called Prince George Rising, she cast her measuring eyes over the room.

“One at a time!” Druscilla said firmly, raising her voice just a little. When she spoke, people did tend to listen, and they grew quiet.

“Mr. Jeeter, am I to understand that your traps’ve been coming up with dead crabs for the last two days now?” The room burst into commotion again with everyone talking at once.

“The dead crabs are no joke.”

“Dead fish have been collecting around my dock!”

“At most of the docks in my creek.”

“It’s a plague!”

Druscilla looked at Pete. “Can you please call this crowd to order? I’m about at the end of my voice.”

“Yes ma’am.”

Pete shifted in his seat and took a small comb from his back pocket and ran it through his hair. Then he stood up. Just

by standing, Pete commanded attention, and not only because he was tall. His pale skin and straw-colored hair were almost startling in the dim light of the evening. He cleared his throat. "Brothers and Sisters!" then louder, "Friends and Neighbors!"

People who were standing sat down and those sitting shushed the folks next to them.

"Someone is poisoning our marsh," he said. "I think I know who it is."

This launched the room into an animated chorus of exclamations, questions and speculations.

"I said," Pete paused, "I think I know who it is. But I don't know their names." He raised his hands at the grumbling. "But... But. Some of us have a plan. Miss Juni here is going to explain."

The marsh, a vast maze of creeks winding through fetid pluff mud and brilliant green spartina, was where the Loblolly and the Tullahoma Rivers began to mingle before meeting up with the Combahee. At that point the force of the three rivers combined to carve a channel that widened into Loblolly Bay and emptied into the sea. Everyone who lived on the marsh had a boat; it was part of the life.

Around midnight, Pete turned down the lights in the guard house at the port. He could hear the dredging boat in the distance. He walked up the shore towards the sound and then around the back of the paper mill to where the Combahee came out into the harbor. Across from the mouth of Beulah Creek, two boats waited for him. Holding a rope to a scarred wooden dinghy stood a lanky fisherman named Abner Troutman who was fully able to speak except for the wad of chewing tobacco installed permanently in his cheek, and so, spent much of his time with others silently observing. Standing around a somewhat larger speed boat with an inboard motor were Dillon and Fiona Roma, a reporter from the *Three Rivers Tribune*, and Marvin Golightly from *Channel 5 News* with a videographer named

Wexler. The boats were dragged up on the shore and from where the conspirators stood, the dredging boat was in easy view. Everyone watched the minutes pass.

Deep in the marsh, one by one, Prince George residents pushed their utility skiffs and jon boats off from the docks nested in the reeds. They motored out of the luminous watery recesses into the main waterway where they assembled with flashlights and whispers. Eventually they cut the motors and drifted towards the port, steering lightly with paddles and oars. There was a soft orange glow coming off the horizon in the south where the paper mill churned pulp night and day in sulfurous brews. A brand new crescent moon hung in the dark hollow of sky over the point. The air was warm and filled with the night noises of frogs singing, fish splashing and bugs whirring. And under it all the droning of the dredge boat grew louder as they drew near the site of the crime.

At 12:25am Pete and Dillon and their crew saw a large boat motoring towards them from up the Combahee. Ghostly sails floated in tatters between the mast and the boom, and a flag flew high above the creaking frame: a black and white pirate flag. Leaning on the rail of the bow were Pirate Louisa Belle and Pirate Portia whom Bob had convinced to wear their costumes. Portia carried a megaphone while Buccaneer Bob, himself in the billowing white shirt, the amber velveteen breeches, and Teva sandals, scurried back and forth on the deck. Minding the tiller, recruited at the last minute, was Titus, who had not been hard to convince to take part in the urgent adventure, but who had not been talked in to wearing anything different from his t-shirt and cut-offs.

On the dredger big lights were mounted but they pointed down into the water where a snouted mechanism wandered the depths below, sucking the silt off the bottom and into the hopper of the ship, disturbing decades of dormant toxins. The men at the controls must have been very intent on their secret labors, because they did not notice the flotilla of dark and motley boats closing in on them from every side, until they heard a woman's voice ringing from a megaphone, "You've fallen into a

trap! Surrender!” At that moment all the boats turned on their night fishing lights like the points in a broad net cast over the harbor, ensnaring the illegal dredger in visibility.

The commotion that permeated Three Rivers the next morning was not easily sorted out, but the newspaper and the Channel 5's morning show tried to make sense of it. Mr. Wagner who had an excavating, septic and dredging company down in Palmetto City, had been caught dredging the Three Rivers port under the cover of night. He did have a permit but, upon examination, it proved to be fraudulent. Who went to the trouble to concoct a fake permit and hire someone for such suspicious activity? All Mr. Wagner knew was that a law firm from Charlestown had contacted him on behalf of the city. But for the time being it seemed no one from the city government knew anything about it. The law firm in question could not be located. If it had ever existed, it had taken all traces with it into a shredder in some obscure office. Why at night? The hapless Mr. Wagner claimed that he had been asked to do it at night and he didn't ask questions. He was held for questioning and charged with illegal dredging, illegal dumping, and endangering the aquatic wildlife of the marsh.

Fiona Roma of the *Three Rivers Tribune* put the ink to what everyone suspected when she wrote, in so many words, that the silt resting at the bottom of the harbor was most likely too polluted to disturb. Rather than wait for the report that would make this fact official and which would therefore be a great setback to any form of dredging, someone decided to go ahead and do the dastardly deed in the dark. Someone hoped that if they moved fast, then by the time samples were taken for the report, the most polluted sediment would have been sucked up into the hopper of a boat and dumped some place no one cared about. The tests from the dredged river bottom would show that maybe, with caution, the port could be dug deep and wide enough to receive the big ships everyone hoped for.

Although now people began to express more complicated feelings about this prospect. People began to feel the reality of the threat to their marshes.

At least some people were very happy that the devious plan had been interrupted. When those people came in out of the watery night of surprises, lights and cameras; when they gathered again, back in the church basement where the details of their intervention had been developed just hours previously; when those people reconvened for coffee and cookies and stories, the mood was one of elation.

Juni and Portia were in a post-adrenaline daze. Not only was it three in the morning, but they were exhausted from pinching themselves to see if the whole episode was real or dream. From Juni's point of view it was a dream come true, to be sharing her sense of urgency with such a lively group of people, taking action that was decisive and effective and fun. As for Portia, she was always happy to be where the action was, but she was also discovering her own passion for environmental justice.

No one could miss the sense of camaraderie and vitality that came with taking action instead of sitting around feeling powerless. And no one could imagine the events of the coming weeks.

It's not that people in the Three Rivers coastal region couldn't imagine a hurricane. The end of August always brought the possibility of raging storm systems, and the coast was haunted by stories of families perishing and homes splintered into matchsticks. But these tales described events decades and sometimes more than a century old. With technological improvements in weather prediction, storm tracking and communications, residents expected to have plenty of warning.

This year the rain started in earnest on August 18th, and it came down for three days, as a low pressure system moved down the coast at a leisurely pace. At the same time tropical

storm Estelle gathered in the southeast over the Atlantic and picked up speed heading toward hurricane status. Some people say the worst part is the waiting, because even though the technology for tracking a storm system is very good, predicting its path and pace is tricky. Exactly where it makes landfall is a matter for white-knuckled suspense.

Traditional low country architecture is generally designed to raise the first inhabited floors of homes well off the ground. Strong and tall foundations allowed flood waters to flow through spacious openings in the lower tier of the structure with a minimum of resistance, while the upper stories stayed relatively dry above the flow of mayhem. New homes were required to be built “on stilts” as people called these uplifting foundations. But there were plenty of houses and buildings sitting on or close to the ground, and most of these houses belonged to people and businesses who could least afford to rebuild. If these habitations were in the bottomlands, they were always in danger of being flooded in the season of storms.

“Okay.” Lou had called a meeting at the kitchen table. “Let’s make the checklist. The last list we had got so wet, it fell apart.”

“We should have that on computer,” said Titus. “But I’m sure they have tons on the internet we could cop.”

“I don’t need the internet for this. I swear I’ve done this a hundred times.” Lou sat down heavily.

“What’s the difference between a Category 2 hurricane and a Category 3? I always forget.” Juni scribbled in her notebook.

“Windspeed mostly,” answered Titus.

“And what’s Estelle now?”

“Category 4 at this point, but it’s getting ready to terrorize a few Caribbean islands. It’s impossible to say if it’s going to pick up speed or slow down. The path can lurch this way and that.”

"It feels like someone big and dangerous is coming to visit us," said Juni.

"Estelle, the houseguest from hell," said Titus. "We aren't going to get a lot of lead time on where it makes landfall until it's almost in our face. Or someone else's face."

"Do they call the hurricane "she?"

"Let's try to stay on task, my little droogies," said Lou, "Rats, where did I put my glasses? Oh Juni, they're over by the sink. Could you please? Number one, we need to board up these windows, and your dad doesn't have time to help us because he's responsible for the zendo."

"That's what I'm talking about!" said Juni. "He cares more about the sangha than us."

"Juni, adults have obligations. The storm is still a few days away. If we need him, he'll help us."

"I can take care of it, Mom," said Titus. "We have the plywood panels."

Lou cringed. "That's the thing. I let Ezra take about half of them for the zendo."

"You what?" Titus' fingers froze above the keyboard.

"He asked if we could donate them a couple of months ago and I said okay. I thought we could get some more in time for the season, but I forgot..." The sentence lingered unfinished.

Titus got up and went to stand in the screen door to the porch. He gazed out at the rain, his back to them. "Don't you think that's at least a little dysfunctional?"

Lou didn't look at Juni. "I know it sounds batty now... It seemed okay at the time, he was so excited about becoming the caretaker there. And he did make those panels, and you know he really has nothing. He's one of god's sparrows, never did understand money."

"Yeah, but you do understand money. I will never understand him or you or your relationship. He asked for these things when we need them, you gave them to him when we need them."

They listened to the solid drum of rain and wind that had been washing over the house for days. Juni almost made a habit of being disappointed in her dad, but she was as quick to defend him as her mother was. Now she felt a little bewildered that her mother gave in to her ex-husband on a matter of practical importance. It was possible her mom might not be entirely on top of things.

Titus turned to face them and gripped the back of the chair he'd just vacated. "You're supposed to be separated but you can't let go."

This was worse than the hurricane. "We can make new ones," said Juni "Right, Titus? We'll get plywood."

"Somewhere." Titus sat down and tapped the pen on the table. "Does Low Country Hardware still exist?"

"Yes," said Lou, "but they closed their lumber yard two years ago. It's all Home Depot or Lowe's. Water. Juni should start filling those jugs from the back porch and that's something else we can buy—bottled water. It's easier to move if we have to evacuate.

"And flashlights and extra batteries," noted Juni. Her mother was writing and Titus was typing. Their activity got them past what had just happened, and set them into normal territory again.

"Maybe we should find some of those long life battery things that recharge your phone if you don't have power." Titus added to the list.

"We used to keep a sort of box of things for this process," said Lou, "but I guess we didn't put it back together after the last time. I almost wish we were disaster preppers. At least we could be organized!"

"But we are organized, Mom!" Juni protested. She didn't want to hear her mother talk this way on the eve of a hurricane.

"Ok, mostly we are organized, but I think we could be more so. Did you talk to Portia?"

"I know Josh Bisbee is helping them board up, and then they're going to pack up Gramps and get out early and go stay with cousin Pris over past Florence."

"I'll check the first aid kit. Oh, and Titus, take my card and get some cash. You never know."

He took the card she held out. "We better get some gasoline. That's going to be scarce if it isn't already."

"Maybe do that first," said Lou "No, get the wood first. Oh, I don't know! I've got two patients on pins and needles. I just wish those babies would evacuate already!"

"What about my babies?" Juni had small carrying cages for her canaries and a big plastic storage bin for the turtles. "I gotta get their traveling containers ready just in case."

"We definitely need to get gasoline first," Titus decided. "Let's go, Junebug."

"I wish I was a Junebug. I'd already have my license. Can I get my creatures' stuff ready first?"

"No, we need to get going while there's still something going to get. Bring your learner's permit and you can be our chauffeur." Juni was always happy to practice driving, but maybe Titus didn't want to drive. Maybe he wasn't as comfortable managing the car because his extremities weren't as strong or coordinated. He looked strong now as he pulled out a rain jacket. "Ugh, it's too hot for this plastic. I'd rather get wet."

Despite the routines of storm warnings and preparations, there was usually a window of general panic in the days leading up to the landfall of tropical storms when everyone scrambled for supplies. Juni and Titus found gasoline at the third station on their route and filled six five-gallon jerrycans. Wood proved to be more work. They heard there was some at the Ace Hardware and Construction warehouse in Yauhannah; six pieces of plywood remained. As it was being loaded on top of the old station wagon, Drusilla Healy and her grandson Regis arrived on the same chase, so they split their supply and went home with three.

By the time they got home, they were soaking wet and Lou was vacuuming the living room. "Mom!" yelled Titus over the racket, yanking the plug of the machine from the outlet. "Mom, what are you doing? The houseguest from hell doesn't care if it's clean."

"I know that, but cleaning always makes me feel in control." She registered their drenched state. "And you kids need to put on dry clothes and turn off those fans. You can catch a chill even in this heat." She sat down at the kitchen table, still holding the vacuum cleaner hose. "You don't think I'm losing it, do you?"

"Oh, go ahead and vacuum all you want," Titus relented. "I can see that it might be centering. We'll all be swabbing the decks before we know it."

"Joe Dan came over to borrow some water jugs. His sprung leaks from the last time and the stores are completely out. So we have only three left and I filled those. I also bagged some bedding to take in case we don't make it to Kate and Steven's and have to go somewhere else. Did you get water?"

"Good things come in threes," said Juni cheerfully. "We could only get three pieces of plywood."

"In this case, threes tease," said Titus. "You're not gonna like it, but I figured it out in my head on the way home, and we'll have enough if we take apart one of the treehouses. I figure the Bell Tower will be easiest and yield the most wood."

Juni loved the Bell Tower. It wasn't her favorite, but it had always been there. Lou used to ring the bell to get her in for supper when she played outside late on a summer evening. The thought of it coming down tore at her heart. "Is it really that drastic?"

"Juni, a furious cyclopean doughnut is spinning toward us shredding everything in its path. In other words, we don't know. But if the windows of the house get blown out, we're gonna be picking glass splinters out of the floorboards for years. Then we'll wish we repurposed a treehouse or even two... Let's call it sacrifice training."

Juni and Titus and Lou worked in the rain for three days, first in the tool shed cutting wood and then up on ladders to dismantle the Bell Tower. Titus handled the drill adequately with

his right hand, but he got tired, so they traded jobs frequently. Juni was agile and moved around in the tree like a monkey, while Titus worked from a ladder. When they weren't putting boards on the windows, they did things like run around the yard taking in lawn furniture and hammocks and anything else strong winds might transform into a projectile. Joe Dan and his son Bud came over to help. Bud was seventeen, quiet, and almost as strong as his dad.

Joe Dan teased Juni about using power tools. "Nothing like the thought of having your power go out to make you appreciate electricity, eh, Juni?"

"When it's necessary Joe Dan, it's the greatest. And it's good to remember where the power comes from." Juni was enjoying all the activity so much she wasn't about to let anybody annoy her. Friends and neighbors came and went, borrowing this and loaning that.

Joe Dan's wife Lacy brought potato salad over in a large Tupperware. "Don't worry. It's that German kind, so there's no mayonnaise to go bad, just some salad oil and vinegar and a little bacon drippings for flavor."

Lou couldn't remember seeing Lacy outside of her house and porch next door. "Take some cornbread," she said, pulling out the aluminum foil.

"I couldn't—you already loaned us those jugs."

"Oh, don't be silly." Lou was touched that Lacy made the effort to come over herself when Joe Dan or Bud could've brought the salad. "I made an extra skillet of it in case somebody dropped by, didn't I, Juni? You have to take it."

"But is there anything else I can do for y'all?"

"I don't think so. Are y'all finished with the boarding?"

"Joe Dan did that first we heard about the hurricane." Lacy raked her long greying hair with her fingers. "He's the planner in the family."

"What's the latest you've heard?"

"I'm too nervous to look." She did, in fact, seem nearly petrified.

"Please stay for a sandwich and some coffee."

"I need to get back."

"Lacy, this one looks bad. Are y'all planning to evacuate this time?" Lou knew that Joe Dan didn't like to leave his house unguarded, afraid it would be sacked by looters.

"I hope not."

"You could come with us. My sister has room. Just because Joe Dan is stubborn, it doesn't mean you couldn't come with us, you and Bud."

"No, no, we'll be all right. We always make it."

"And you will this time too." Lou gave her a firm hug and she and Juni watched her scurry home in her bedroom slippers in the rain.

At its strongest, out on the Atlantic, Estelle raged to a Category 5, winds clocking at 160 mph, but by the time she gave Puerto Rico a good thrashing on August 23rd, she had been downgraded to a 3. One of the concerns now was that the hurricane's landfall would coincide with the full moon on the 26th when the tide was at its highest, causing massive flooding. The tides were already high, the ground was soaked from days of rain, and the rivers were on the verge of overflow.

By this time the evacuation orders from the Emergency Alert System had changed from voluntary to mandatory. The governor's office was telling the public to expect the worst, and most people in Juni's neighborhood were ready. Patients at the clinic were relocated to another facility.

Friday morning when Juni came downstairs, she found Lou in the kitchen, packing up food. "Joe Dan left this morning."

"What?" Juni looked out the kitchen window. The driveway next door was empty. "Lacy and everybody?"

"We'll be out of here ourselves soon. Everything's coming along great."

The three of them had been almost high from working so hard on something important, but Joe Dan had loved to say he had a perfect record in sticking out storms.

A couple of hours later they were loading their supplies into the car. Juni had paused on the porch before stepping into the rain with a plastic box of photo albums when she saw Titus stop and lean heavily on the hood of the car in the pouring rain.

“Titus!” She dropped the box and ran to the car. By the time she was beside him, he had folded over the hood and she was quick to brace him under the arms so he didn’t slide off into the mud.

“I’m okay,” he murmured. “Tired.”

“Mom!”

Lou was there. The two of them half-carried Titus, his feet dragging, through the widening puddles and up the stairs to the porch, now emptied of all its furniture and plants and even the turtles’ tank. They navigated the chairs and tables that were piled along the inside wall of the family room and laid him on the couch.

They pulled off his rain jacket and covered him with a light blanket.

“Titus,” Lou said gently. “You need to sleep?”

He opened his eyes, nodded, and closed his eyes again.

Lou checked his pulse, brushed back his wet hair with her hand, laid her cheek against his forehead and let it rest there. He slept.

“I never should have let him drive himself so hard. I’m going to call Ezra to come in the van.” She went out on the front porch and closed the front door behind her.

Juni sat in Titus’ chair, where he had sat while she recuperated on the sofa from her concussion. They weren’t loading the car anymore. They would transfer the things they’d packed from the car to the van. Everything felt so urgent now but they were just waiting for Ezra.

Titus was as still as the sofa but his breath came evenly. He’d been driving and carrying and sawing and packing but

while his nerves lost contact with his muscles, those muscles grew weaker and weaker. The disease was real. How could her mother, a medical professional, not understand the implications of this? Why didn't Ezra realize Titus couldn't be expected to work like he used to even as recently as a year earlier? She was furious at both of them.

Even with the front door closed, the sound of her mother sobbing on the phone reached the family room. Her mother saw now that Titus was sick. She'd been blindsided. Juni didn't need to lay more hard feelings in her mother's lap.

By the time Ezra arrived, the power had gone out in the neighborhood. The Loblolly and the Tullahoma rivers were breaching their banks because of the unprecedented rainfall. The storm had dumped twenty-eight inches on the region in the last six days. The Combahee River was more or less containing itself, due to the wetlands extending from its edges and absorbing several inches of an overflow. But another alarming development upriver was fomenting as the rain continued over a vast area, and that water was still on its way toward their town. Flood waters were only expected to rise.

The family huddled around the hand crank radio tuned to the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration Weather station. They learned that Estelle was moving faster than anyone had anticipated and was headed toward the barrier islands south of Palmetto City. It was expected to land in twenty-four to thirty-six hours, and they were already feeling the gale-force winds and driving rain radiating from the wide spin of the storm system.

They started moving their supplies from the station wagon to the van, slogging between the vehicles. The turtles were secured in the back of the van, and Juni began the process of getting Papageno, Ludacris, and Bowie into their smaller carrying cages. Suddenly she heard a terrifying creaking from the yard and looked out the front door to see one of their large old

trees swaying violently in the wind. She ran to the screened porch. "What's happening?" she shouted to her parents who were busy between car and van.

"Oh my god," yelled Lou, "it's not holding the roots! Oh my god, Juni! Ezra!...Look out!" Ezra grabbed her arm and pulled her into the open space under the house.

Paralyzed, they watched the wavering tree, its branches flailing in the horizontal winds. It started to lean perilously over the driveway and then hung at an impossible angle swinging first to the left and then to the right. Juni held her breath in awe as she watched it go down like a hammer hitting a nail, only the nail in this case was the van, their ticket out of there. An abrupt gust of wind and debris erupted from the point of contact. The crash thundered and shook the house around them.

Juni stared, stunned beyond her comprehension. Soaking wet, Ezra and Lou stood under the porch for a long time absorbing the shock before they stumbled back up the porch stairs where the three of them threw their arms around each other and held on tight for a good long time. They staggered into the front hall and dried themselves, barely conscious of what they were doing. The living room was dark now that the windows were boarded and the electricity was kaput. Titus was awake, upright in the middle of the couch. "What the hell?"

"Oh Titus!" Juni ran to him and hugged him. Lou and Ezra succumbed to the closest chairs.

"Was that an earthquake?" He blinked his long lashes groggily.

Ezra began to laugh. "It was! The Earth quaked!" he practically shouted. "What do you want from us now, Earth? What do you want?" Juni and Lou laughed somewhat hysterically until the tears rolled down to their chins, and they didn't know what kind of tears they were—fear, relief, and dread were there in equal measure. Lou was the first to recover herself. She wiped her face with her hands and came over to the couch to hug her children.

"Will somebody please tell me what's going on?" Titus let his head drop back to the pillows stacked behind the couch.

“We’re alive! That’s what,” said Ezra. “We’re alive,” he repeated more tentatively.

“What are we going to do?” asked Juni.

“Oh, I guess I don’t really need to know what you’re all quivering about.” Titus closed his eyes.

Lou stroked his hair. “We just lost a tree, baby, the oldest living member of the family.”

“But shouldn’t we be going?”

“We should,” Lou said, “but the tree...”

“The tree demolished the van!” Juni finished the sentence.

“The van is here?” Titus’s eyes were opened wide now. “What about the station wagon?”

“Parked behind the van, between the house and the fence.” said Ezra. He stood up and pulled out his phone. “I’m sure 911 is just waiting to hear from us.”

“The wind blew a tree down?” Titus was still trying to take in the information.

“We’ve had so much rain that the ground is totally waterlogged” said Lou. “So it can no longer anchor the tree. I’ve heard of that, but I’ve never, you know, witnessed it.”

“GrouchoFrodo! They’re in the van!” Juni jumped up and ran for the door.

“I’m sure they’re okay baby,” Ezra called after her. “They were all the way at the back and the tree fell on the font.”

“But that thing is crushed!”

“Please don’t go outside, Juni.”

Juni winced as she looked through the glass of the front door. It did seem that while the roof of the van caved toward the front, the back still had ample headroom inside.

“And get away from those glass panes,” urged Lou. “We haven’t boarded them yet, If they explode you’ll be a pincushion.” Juni walked back to the family room and plopped back down on the sofa next to Titus.

“I think I have an idea.” Ezra slipped his phone into his pocket. “I don’t mean a good idea,” he added seeing the hope so quick to brighten in their faces. “About why I can’t get through.

The cell towers might be damaged, so there might be a service outage.” Their faces fell and they all slumped a little deeper in their seats. “But I’ll keep trying.”

“If I could walk to the highway,” said Juni, thinking out loud, “maybe I could flag somebody down.” The highway was only eight blocks away, but the nearest ramp onto it was at least fourteen blocks.

“No way,” said Lou. “I’m afraid you’ll be half pasted to a tree soon after you step out that door. The wind is now our captor. Besides, you know there can be tornados in a hurricane.

“Is Joe Dan still here?” asked Titus.

“He left earlier this morning,” said Lou.

“I guess we’re going to have to wait it out,” said Ezra cheerfully. “Nothing like a hurricane to help you meet your cadaver.”

“I’ve been shaking hands with my cadaver for a while now.” Titus seemed very much awake now.

“What are you talking about, Dad?” asked Juni.

“Buddhist wisdom,” he replied. “It’s best to go walking with your cadaver when you get the chance. Make friends with death.”

“Dad,” said Titus, “do you know what Suzuki Roshi said on his deathbed, after a lifetime of preparing for that moment?”

“I don’t seem to recall that.”

“He said, ‘I don’t want to die.’ No Buddhist like an honest Buddhist.”

Ezra smiled. “It’s the human part of us. Jesus Christ didn’t want to die either, even though his death would mean salvation for countless others—according to the scriptures anyway. He was at least half god.”

“Does the cadaver thing just mean we’re supposed to accept the fact that we die?” asked Juni.

"It's something we share with every other living being. No way around it." Ezra appeared to be content with this thought.

"I guess it makes sense to get philosophical when you're in a jam, but could we please put our minds to the predicament at hand?" Lou pulled a blanket from a stack by the door and put it over Titus's lap.

"Thanks Mom, but it's sweltering in here with no air conditioning." Titus pushed the blanket on to the floor.

"No fans either." Juni got up to retrieve the blanket and toss it onto a chair.

"This has never happened to us." Lou was pacing the floor. "We've always evacuated in time. Still, we know what to do, bar the front door, close interior doors, so forth." She trailed off.

"We should make a big sign," said Juni. "You know after the hurricane you see where people put up help signs."

"We could tell stories," suggested Ezra. "There's a story about a woman being chased by a tiger until she falls down a cliff. She's clinging to a little tree and hanging on for dear life with the tiger above her and the rocks below when she notices a strawberry growing out of the rocks, so she eats the strawberry."

"Not much of a last meal." Titus made to lie down again and Juni helped him lift his feet up on the couch.

"But you get the point. Living your best life no matter what happens."

"Dad!" blurted Juni, "if you'd been helping us earlier, we'd be out of here by now."

"Don't go there Juni," Titus intervened, "You could just as well say that if I hadn't collapsed we'd be out already. Regret is always measured by fantasy scenarios in your head. We don't know what else might have been."

Ezra watched Juni steadily, "I'm sorry I always seem to let you down, baby."

"Stop it," said Titus. "Please, no family dramas."

"We need to be ready to get to the strongest place in the house." Lou had stopped pacing and was trying to get them back

to practical matters. "That would be the big closet under the stairs. Come help me empty it." Everyone but Titus walked out to the hall to get busy. They laid all kinds of cushions and pillows from the porch furniture on the floor of the emptied closet, placed a bucket and a couple of pitchers of water, and a leftover flashlight. Juni went ahead and put the canaries in a corner there. They would bring the radio when they really settled in. Then they went to sit down again in the living room.

The wind kept up a steady mewling like a battle of a thousand cats. The hand crank radio let them know that the hurricane was at least a day away but had definitely swerved northward pointing itself at Palmetto City, about sixty miles south of them. Ezra produced a deck of cards and was shuffling them for a game of hearts.

"Are anyone's ears ringing?" asked Juni.

"Changes in barometric pressure," said Lou.

"It makes me feel crazy." Now Juni was the one pacing. Ignoring her mother's protests, she gazed out the glass in the front door at the tree limbs dancing wildly in the wind. The rain slammed the sides of the house in heavy waves. She was about to turn back to the living room when something caught her eye. A ways down Meeting Street a blurry white shape was moving.

"Hey!" she yelled, "Something's coming! It's a truck!" She opened the door and ran out on the porch waving her arms and screaming "HELP!" at the top of her voice, as the truck crawled towards the house.

Juni felt a desperation she had never felt before. She tore at the screened door. As soon as it was opened, she started down the stairs holding tight to the railing. The wind almost pushed her over. Ezra came behind her. "HELP!" yelled Lou from the porch. At the bottom of the stairs Juni slipped and fell. She looked up to see a small woman in shorts and a t-shirt jump nimbly out of the truck. Ezra helped Juni stand, and the visitor came through the watery yard toward the house, zigzagging in

the force of the wind. To Juni this looked fairly lunatic, but then she realized it was the same as tacking in a sailboat. The woman held out her hand smiling, and through the rain pelting her face, radiated warm capability.

The three of them pulled themselves up the stairs. Lou hugged Juni and guided her into the hall. Someone closed the door against the rain and racket, and they all wiped the wet from their eyes. "You're going to want to put a board over that door." The stranger indicated the glass panes in the front door.

"Who are you?" Juni held out a towel and stared in wonder at the long braids and lean body painted with wet clothing.

"Come in, come in. Let me help you with those boots." Lou was obviously flustered.

"No, please ma'am, don't try to take off my boots. We don't have much time. In fact, everybody get your shoes on. Is anyone injured?"

"Not really injured," answered Lou.

"Our son is suffering from exhaustion," said Ezra.

"Do we need a stretcher?"

"I can walk," Titus called from the couch.

"That's good, but you have to let us help you. If you are weakened for any reason, that wind could knock you flat." Everyone was grateful that this efficient sprite was taking charge. "And make sure your he's hydrated," she said, "Any pets in the house?"

"My canaries are in a box in the closet, and GrouchoFrodo are in the back of the van," Juni pointed outside. The visitor turned her head to look out the door at the van. Long strands of dark hair escaped her braids, as though she slept in them and then went for a swim. "They're turtles," Juni added.

"I'll get the canaries," said the stranger authoritatively. "Who can get the turtles? Does everybody have identification and money, prescriptions, those things?" They went inside to collect the small emergency bags they had readied earlier. Titus was sitting on the couch.

“My son will need help,” said Lou as Ezra helped Titus to his feet.

“I’m okay, I can walk,” said Titus.

“But we’ll help you,” said Lou.

They moved quickly to get the animals into the compartment in the back of the truck along with the water and a few small bags of dry clothes. Then they walked Titus to the truck and all climbed into the cab which had a back seat. It was the most powerful truck Juni had ever been in, and she was elated.

“Where will you take us?” asked Lou.

“Were you going to stay with family?”

“We were headed to my sister’s in Florence.

“I can’t take you that far. I’m gonna carry you up to the Kimbro’s Furniture Warehouse in Calquiddie County. Maybe your family could pick you up there. It’s the closest shelter still receiving, and we can get there on surface roads. The freeways are like parking lots. I always wonder why people wait so long.” There was an awkward silence. “But most people have their reasons,” she added. “Then I need to get over to Prince George; they’re at least two feet under water with no end in sight.”

“But who are you?” insisted Juni.

“Women’s Climate Response Team. We usually work in pairs, but my partner is helping another team winch a piece of roof off of an old couple other side of the highway.” The truck plunged through the flooded streets.

“I wonder who that could be.” Lou knew so many of the residents of Three Rivers. “Do you think they’ll be okay?”

“If we’re lucky. If they’re lucky.”

“What’s the Women’s Climate ...what was it?” asked Juni.

“Team. We’re just a scrappy bunch of citizens trying to do something about climate collapse because the government is useless.”

“It’s all women?”

“We got sick of working with dudes who underestimate us, so we just formed our own group.”

"But what's your name?" asked Juni.

"Me? Dolores Grimm.."

"Grimm?" Juni was dumbfounded to hear the name that had visited her with her concussion. That was three months ago.

"Yes! I know it ain't sunbeamy, but that's my name."

"Are you a police officer?" Juni was ready to ask about the numbers on what she had taken to be a badge in her vision.

"Oh no! I'm a personal trainer, but I spend a lot of my time working with the team."

"Do you each have a number?"

"We're much more informal than that."

This silenced Juni. The family was too exhausted and dazed to talk, so they rode in silence buffeted by the storm.

At Kimbro's, Dolores Grimm helped them unload and find a chair for Titus just inside. They stood gathered around him for a brief goodbye. "I have to get back out there now." She was clearly eager to be on the move again.

"We can't thank you enough." Lou took Dolores's hand in hers.

"Really," said Ezra, "you may have saved our lives."

"Definitely saved my ass." Titus, much revived, treated them to a smile of self-composed vigor.

"Can I come with you?" Juni asked in a rush, rising up on her toes a little.

Grimm scrutinized her. "What's your name?"

"Louisa Belle Poole."

"Louisa Belle Poole, we'd love to have you, but this isn't the best time to get started. We have trainings."

"Can I come to those?"

"Sure, everyone has something to offer." She made to put her hand on the door handle.

"But what's R1216?" Juni blurted.

"R12:16." Dolores repeated, "Why, did you see our flyer?"

“No.”

“Well, I guess you didn’t, otherwise you’d know. We always add this verse at the bottom.” She pulled out a paper that had been in her back pocket, and handed it to Juni who unfolded it. The page was wet and warm and curved to the shape of Grimm’s body. “And the earth helped the woman; and the earth opened her mouth, and swallowed up the flood which the dragon cast out of his mouth. Revelations 12:16.”

“Hold onto that paper Louisa Belle. It has our contact information.”

Juni resolved to memorize it.

They were in a bright hallway, white walls and a white, speckled floor, except the floor was swathed with mud. The only person in the hallway was a boy a little younger than Juni. He was flinging an enthusiastic mop over the mud. He didn’t speak to them but clearly played to his audience. Down the entrance hall beyond a huge number of shoes against the wall, there was color, movement, noise. Juni clutched her box of canaries.

A woman walked toward them from the action. “Good afternoon! You just arrive? Any injuries?”

Lou surveyed her family. “We’re all sound and safe.” She undid her hair and tried to get her fingers through it before reclasping.

“I’m Clementeen.” The woman planted herself among them, scrutinized them as she shook the hands of each of them, shook Titus’s hand where he sat. Juni had seen her around town, maybe in the grocery store, she wasn’t sure, but she had a memorable face. The lids above and below her eyes were puffy so that her eyes didn’t open very wide. Of course large eyes were beautiful but this woman’s eyes were beautiful, they were so soft. “So you’re all doing okay. You don’t need any water or first aid? Your loved ones and pets are taken care of?”

“As far as we know,” said Lou. Juni wondered if Alice Coltrane was in the house at Murphy Preserve or they’d evacuated in time. They couldn’t get through to her.

“Alrighty.” Clementeen sat down at the table along one wall and pulled an index card from a small file box. “We’ll need to get a little information. E-e-everybody goes into the registration.” She drew out the word as though to include more people. “Charles, keep that mop head down. The mop head needs to have more contact with the floor.”

“Yes ma’am.” While their attention was on him, Charles took the opportunity to show he knew how to use the heavy, industrial bucket. He dunked the mop and hurried to mash it in the ringer mounted on the side. He didn’t seem to mind that water sloshed on his shoes.

“Must be steady work,” Lou said to him, “all these people coming in out of the rain.”

Charles picked up speed.

“E-e-everybody lends a hand here,” said Clementeen.

“We’re ready to do that,” said Lou. “I’m a nurse practitioner and midwife. Ezra was a pastoral counselor and still counsels people.” They pulled out the chairs across the table from Clementeen.

“Wonderful, wonderful.” Each of her nails was adorned with a different rendition of a heart, different shapes and colors, glittered backgrounds. She recorded their names, pronouns, ages, addresses, marked down the turtles and canaries, learned they had no vehicle in the parking lot. “Any health concerns or special needs of note?”

Juni waited for her parents to answer, but Titus spoke. “I’m sick but it’s not contagious. I can do my part, but I could get tired. The past few days took a toll and this morning depleted me. It’s the first time that’s happened. I assume I just need rest.”

Clementeen kept her fuzzy eyes on him as he talked and after he’d finished talking. He met her gaze. She didn’t ask any questions. Then she wrote on his card.

“Okay, the designated emergency shelters all the way to the coast are either full or not functioning due to floods or power outages. The community here in Congdon is working this thing out. Mr. Kimbro of course, but also Low Country Martial Arts across the alley used to be a boxing gym. They’re letting us use their bathrooms and showers. Calquiddie County schools’ PTA thrift stores are sending bedding and clothes in a truck donated by Get A Move On. Beloved Community Church— my church— and some of the dryer neighborhoods have pledged to provide food. Pietra’s Pizza is sending pizza this evening. You like pizza, Juni?”

Oh my god, Juni was hungry! “Yes, ma’am.”

“We brought food from our fridge,” Ezra said. “We’re happy to share.”

“And that is how all will be provided.” Clementeen’s smile seemed contented and sleepy. “There are sixty-seven people here now and more will come until we don’t have room for them.

“There are some offices along that side of the building.” She patted the air to the right. “We have a first aid room, Miss Louisa. We’ve got counselors for traumatized people. We have a no-talking room if you just need some quiet. That’s the closest we can come to solitude. We have a team to facilitate disagreements among guests, so please come to us if you have problem with a neighbor. We’ve tried to think of everything but this is a group project, and if something comes to your attention, please bring it to the community’s attention by pinning a note to this bulletin board.”

She reached under the table and handed them each a plastic grocery bag. “You can put your street shoes in the bag. We’re doing our best to protect Mr. Kimbro’s merchandise. The PTA Thrift sent loads of shoes and slippers so please find some that fit and use those while you’re indoors... And see this clipboard? This clipboard will be on the table. If you leave the building, please *please* sign out on this sheet, so god forbid if there’s an emergency we can account for you. In these columns

include what time you leave and where you're going. Then sign back in when you return."

"You mean like to the showers?" Juni wasn't sure where else in this transformed world anybody would be going.

Juni had never seen anything like Kimbro's showroom. It was like the floor of an apartment building with all the interior walls magically dissolved. She could make out the living rooms, bedrooms, dining rooms because the dressers and bookcases let you know where the walls would be if there had been any. Squeezed in wherever they could be fit were mattresses encased in thick plastic. People in slippers were everywhere.

Earlier arrivals had staked out the spots along the real walls, so she and her family set up out in the middle of things. Mr. Kimbro was letting people in as long as more could fit, but he asked that they not rearrange the heavier furniture. Juni only had to move some dining room chairs to wedge her single mattress between the table and a sideboard. Titus was sound asleep between the other side of the table and the back of a hutch.

Juni installed GrouchoFrodo under the table and cut on their lamp. The showroom floor had a million outlets! She pulled the three small birdcages out of the box, tucked them under the table, and covered them with the cloth she'd had over the box. She lay down on the mattress tentatively, as though she were in the woods feeling the lay of the land beneath her sleeping bag, checking for dips and bumps before she pitched the tent. The conviction that she should be in the woods was so strong, it was strange to look up high into the rafters instead of into trees. Charles of the mop told her that they'd decided the day before to call the separate spaces campsites. It was crazy but she wished she were in the woods, out there with evil Estelle. Wind in tree branches was the kind of scary she preferred. The building rattled when the wind blasted against it and the ceiling was so far up, it seemed all that empty space muffled the sounds the people

made down at the floor level. Everything below felt muted and sleepy. They were all biding their time, this wasn't where any of them chose to be. She wished she could call Portia.

She thought through the day. A man had come in while Juni was still choosing shelter shoes. She noticed his voice first: it didn't rise and fall, but was flat like hers after the concussion. An oak had fallen on his house on Percival Street and crushed the living room where his wife was boxing up porcelain. That's what he said. The guy's wife was in the hospital and he didn't want to leave the area. For miles inland all the hotels were either booked or closed, and he had nowhere else close enough to stay. Juni had peeked at him while she hurried to find shoes. He wore plaid slacks, a pink polo shirt. He was wet. He had nothing with him.

They were rich in comparison. Lou vacuumed. A tree totaled the van. GrouchoFrodo and the canaries were safe. Titus was still asleep. Titus was still alive.

She rolled toward the birdcages, pulled the cloth off, and whispered to the canaries. "Ludicris, don't dis bliss. Papageno, doin bueno? Bowie Bowie, high and low-y in the flow-y." Maybe the dark and the sound of her voice reassured them, they flitted to between the perches in the familiar way.

She thought again to call Portia, it was automatic. Portia and Rosa and Gramps were surely getting rain and wind. Were they getting news of Three Rivers?

She roused herself, took a new notebook and pen out of her backpack and put them into the side pocket of her cargo shorts. She stood in what would have been a hallway in the apartment building. Ezra's mattress was there perpendicular to Juni's sideboard, Lou's was closer to Titus, but neither parent was visible. Maybe she shouldn't leave Titus. She scanned the roomful of rooms. She felt like she was using x-ray vision to spy on the groups of people, some loose, others tight. She recognized her father pushing a grocery cart full of sheets and blankets. He stopped at a living room suite where small children were draped on all the sections of a sectional sofa, sleeping. Ezra

was so solicitous, the way he pulled linens out of the cart so the mom could choose. Juni ran to join him.

“Juni!” called a familiar voice. She turned to see friends from school, the Jackson twins, Samantha and Tamara. They motioned to Juni to come over and she picked her way through the tentless tent city, arriving breathless.

“Hi Sam, Hi Tammy. How long have y’all been here?”

The red-headed doubles stood together in stained green hoodies. As she usually did, Tam stood a little behind Sam. Tammy was as quiet as Sam was chatty. “How long we been here, Tam? I think it was just this morning but seems like a dog’s age. Did you see where the clothes are? We’re grubbier than ever.” She turned around to show Juni the extent of the damage.

“I only just got here today, but I know they keep coming in...”

“Our house is drowned, is yours?” asked Sam, eagerly, her pudgy hand taking hold of her sisters’.

“It wasn’t when we left, but a tree smashed my dad’s van.”

“Juni, guess who’s here.” Sam bounced slightly as the words rushed out of her.

“Who?”

“The grammar goblin.” She giggled.

“Ms. Milbrey?”

“She’s staying over at the back wall. We didn’t talk to her yet.”

“No way,” groaned Juni, looking to the back wall and remembering her encounter with Ms. Milbrey on the Fourth of July. “I don’t think Ms. Milbrey is too fond of me.”

“But everybody is being nice here,” said Tammy, bashfully.

“Juni!” She heard her dad’s voice calling her.

“I gotta go help Dad. If I find two matching outfits I’ll save ‘em for you.”

Several campsites over, her dad introduced her to Wanda who’d solved the hurricane hair problem by stuffing hers into a

knit cap. Now she pulled on blond and pink bangs, tugging them to one side across her forehead.

“Hey.” Juni shook Wanda’s hand. “Can I do that, Dad?”

“I’m sure you can. PTA Thrift just delivered a big load of stuff.” He turned to Wanda. “If the kids need dry clothes, you can find some over there.”

Wanda looked where he pointed. “I can’t go over there and leave the kids sleeping. How many of these can I take?”

“Take what you need. If we run out, I’ll come around and see what you can do without.”

Wanda headed toward the kids. She hadn’t mentioned another parent. Juni watched to see how she was going to cover four far-flung bodies with two sheets. Wanda just plucked up the children and reoriented them so each pair’s feet were together and their heads stuck out of either end of a sheet. Not one child woke.

Ezra whispered to Juni. “You could offer to watch the kids while she finds dry clothes for them.”

“How about I go fill a cart with kid clothes. Where’d you get them exactly?”

She followed his directions to the back of the building and pushed against one of the big double doors. The knob turned but the door didn’t budge. Maybe it was the wrong one. She pushed again and air whistled around the door. She leaned into it and found herself on a loading dock, the wind driving the rain into the opening where a truck had backed in. People were unloading boxes and plastic bags from the truck. The tops of the bags fluttered.

Clementeen was there, directing.

And there was Dillon.

Juni hadn’t talked to him since the flotilla. He was dragging a huge cardboard box down the ramp and off to the side to make room for more.

When he saw Juni, he threw his arms around her. “Fellow swashbuckler, well met!”

“Ha ha!” Juni shouted into the wind. “Who be ye saving now, rascal?”

He let her go. His uneven hair was plastered in clumps onto his forehead, and a drop of water fell from a point that hung over one eye. “Just my troublesome family. You here with yours?”

“Couldn’t shake them.”

Dillon called to Clementeen. “Should we start hauling the stuff here into the warehouse?”

She nodded and people began to drag the piled boxes and bags through the double doors while others held the doors open against the wind. Juni went to work.

By six-thirty, seventy-seven people from many walks of life—with a large contingent from Prince George—were padding through the display rooms in their adopted footwear. They now had bedding between them and the plastic mattress covers. They had dry clothes and towels for showers at Low Country Martial Arts. They had toys, board games, puzzles, and books. All the flashlights folks had brought with them were collected and distributed so that everyone would be ready if the power went out. Three refrigerators and four microwaves had been donated.

Juni and Dillon stood Juni and Titus’ mattresses up and assembled 11 dining room chairs so that their two families could eat together, and Juni hid the canaries and turtles inside an entertainment cabinet to protect them from the youngest kids. In addition to two pizzas, they combined leftovers from home: the Pooles’ salad ingredients and leftover pork chops, the Wilders’ sweet and sour chicken helper with broccoli. The food wasn’t warmed up but Dillon in particular was putting it away.

Her parents had given the don’t-pity-us-but-don’t-think-we’re-idiots-either explanation of how they’d come to wait out the hurricane in a furniture store with no kitchen or wifi, and now all the Wilders were crying out to tell their story. It reminded Juni that the stretch of years between her and her siblings had some advantages.

Dillon raised his voice and pointed at his mother. "Circle stack! Starting with Mom."

Darlene laughed and glanced at the Pooles. "We do have ways of restoring order. Dillon got this stack thing from groups he's involved in— it's just taking turns." She put her arm around Molly, the mid-sized sister beside her. "Basically, it was already flooding around our house and we couldn't stop doing things to keep the water out. We bailed here, we sealed there." She shrugged, and it was Molly's turn to speak.

"We carried furniture upstairs and now we can't even get in our room." She glowered at her parents, half kidding, half pouting. "I think you had to bring us here because you made it so we can't sleep at home."

Carter, the boy next to her, was shorter and stockier. "The water was coming up the steps! We watched it! First it was on the bottom step, then it was on the next step, then the top step..."

"Where were these steps?" Titus asked.

"In the yard. The water was coming up to the porch."

"Salad before cookie," Darlene directed him.

"We did get some of our things out," said Dillon's father Mike. "We packed stuff into the cars and took them over the Combahee to higher ground, one of them a couple of days ago and the other yesterday. Then I got up this morning and there was an inch of water downstairs."

It was weird how Juni was sure she saw Dillon in his parents' faces but couldn't say where exactly. Maybe the squarish jaw was the same in his dad and the wide forehead in his mom, but she'd have to spend more time with them to catch other details.

Alma the littlest sister chirped up like a tree frog. "Hurricane Estella's gonna crash on Tree Rivers at sixa tock!"

"What?" Mike warded off the pizza dangling from her hand. "Who told you that?"

"Baxter."

"Did not." Baxter was the brother just younger than Dillon. He was already rangy but not as tall as Dillon. "That guy

in the office with the computer said *Estelle* was going to make landfall tomorrow night in Palmetto City and the moon was going to be full too.”

“Alma,” Dillon said, “we were talking about how we got out of the house and came here. Do you remember?”

“The streets were gone and a man came in a boat to ride us to the bridge.”

After showing their guests to the edge of the campsite and thanking them for taking the paper plates and napkins to the trash, Juni’s little family sat back down at the table. They’d hardly seen each other and the day had been so long.

Juni was used to seeing Lou exhausted— sometimes babies entered this world one after another through the night— but her whole family was exhausted. Juni wondered if her own skin looked pasty and her eye sockets hollow. Maybe it was the big fluorescent lights. These would be turned off at eight pm; then people could leave small lights on in their camps until ten; after ten they had to turn out the small lights if they disturbed folks nearby. It was strange to feel you were lingering together in the privacy of your dining room when you could see people in their homes near and far and knew they could see you. When she looked at Lou, Juni snuck a discrete look past her and between furniture to a guy reading in a recliner. He must’ve been ecstatic to get dibs on a recliner.

“Well,” Lou smiled, “I guess you know we got a text from Alice Coltrane.”

“No!” said Juni. “How would we know?”

“I should have thought you might not check your phone. They evacuated. Murphy’s a barrier island so they couldn’t stay there. They had to package up computers and external hard drives and some expensive equipment, but they’re up in Bartram. Texting works better than trying to call.”

“They’re asking us not to call,” said Ezra.

Juni could text Portia! She ducked down and found her phone in her pack. She'd been so busy, she hadn't missed it.

"Where have y'all been, anyway?" Titus asked.

Ezra waited for Juni to answer but she wanted to hear from her parents.

"I've been moving things around, for the most part. Juni too. Meeting people as we make sure everybody has what they need, everybody knows who to ask for what. It's going smoothly but there's always the post-honeymoon phase. Someone had a noise issue, someone accused someone else of letting their kids run wild. A couple of people were ornery with each other about boundaries but we worked it out with a rug, and I saw the complainants playing cards together later."

"What about you, Mom?" Juni asked.

"No serious physical injuries yet. There's one woman seventeen weeks pregnant who's worried she's going to go into labor prematurely but there's no indication of that. Otherwise bumps and bruises. So far." She pulled air through her teeth in her worry whistle.

"Why do you say 'so far' like that?"

"The storm hasn't made landfall yet. I'm trying to be ready for when conditions are worse and people have a harder time getting out of their situations."

"The landfall thing doesn't mean a lot," Titus said. "It's just a way of tracking a hurricane. A storm can destroy plenty before and after its eye comes beaming over the dunes."

"You have that in a poem?" Juni asked.

"Maybe. And did I see you scribbling, journalista? Have you started documenting this Beloved Community? This place has as many stories as people. We're— The world is going to need to know the best ways to respond to these disasters, and stories carry more value than lists of instructions. Documentary or fantasy, doesn't matter as long as they're true."

"Why do you call it a beloved community?" Clearly everyone at the table knew but Juni. "I thought that was the name of Clementeen's church."

Her weary parents looked to Titus. "I'm the only one who's had a nap? Okay, the Beloved Community. A name for Martin Luther King, Jr.'s vision of the world without the triple evils."

"Poverty, racism and militarism," said Ezra.

"Right. We're making one here, as best we can, though it's not the most diverse economically—meaning I don't see too many rich folks. Or maybe everyone looks the same given the circumstances. Except Mr. Kimbro."

"I've met..." Lou and Ezra spoke at the same time.

"I've met him," Lou said. "He's keeping the faith in his office over there. He does a lot of his business on line. He's a smart businessman but whatever stereotype you might have of a rich man, he doesn't fit it."

The fluorescent lights went out. Scattered over the showroom, warm lamps shone, a few more came on. It was dark up toward the ceiling. Juni's eyes closed by themselves. She opened them. "Are you careworn, Mom?"

"What, baby?"

"Are you feeling careworn?"

Lou took Juni's hand and rubbed the palm with her thumb. "I am. People are losing homes. I don't know how our home will come out of this. I'm hearing the stories. I'm feeling the cares. But I'm so grateful to be here. We might could do some good here."

After brushing her teeth in Kimbro's small bathroom, Juni texted Portia: "We're in Congdon, in a Beloved Community in a furniture store except Alice is in Bartram. How are all you? What do you hear re 3Rs? Let me know you got this. In love and trouble—"

Then she took care of the canaries and turtles and snapped off their light. She was so ready to sleep. Her body felt like it was vibrating, and she was hazily aware of rhythms in the hammering rain and the air conditioning hum, but she tossed

and turned to the other sounds— the ticking in the corners, the creaking at the joints.

She was back home on the porch. Rain is falling but the rain is like sand. It's heavy. The porch roof begins to cave in. She has to get the aquarium out of there, not just the turtles. She has to save the whole porch. If the porch collapses, it will pull the house down. One of the posts has cracked. It begins to buckle. She takes 'Titus' guitar and wedges it under the falling crossbeam but then the ceiling above her splits and water gushes in. As she reaches to hold up a broken ceiling board, the cascade of water sweeps Frodo and Groucho away. She watches in horror but can't leave the ceiling she's holding up. She knows they drown.

She woke gasping. The dark was unfamiliar. It wasn't the dark she knew in her bed at home. Then she remembered and flicked on the turtles' light. Groucho was hunkered down on the bottom and Frodo stood up against the side, the tip of his nose out of water. All clear. She turned the light off again. Dillon was asleep in this room, there was no wall separating them. Little Alma and Dillon's whole family were asleep in this room. Wanda's children on the sectional sofa, 'Titus' on the other side of the table, her parents who hadn't lived in the same house since she was too small to remember had shut down for the night not ten feet from each other. Each complicated person lying there had shut down, the most natural thing in the world, there but not there, while Hurricane Estelle punished land, sea and sky. Juni shut down too.

The next morning before breakfast, Juni wrote "Estelle and the Beloved Community" on the first page of her new notebook and then filled pages with goings on at the shelter. She visited several campsites and got stories that most people were eager to tell. Then Alma wanted to help Juni take her turn with the mop in the front hall. Dillon came to help Alma help Juni. There was a lot of helping going on when the front door opened and Pete Pettigrew blew in. Nearly a dozen soggy people hurried

through the door with him. They dropped wet plastic bags and suitcases, shook the rain off themselves, and some headed back out.

"You two?" Pete hailed. "Are you always where the action is?"

"We could say the same of you," said Dillon. "Hey Mrs. Kaminski. Ms. Lafette. Mr. Jeeter. Is it the whole neighborhood?"

"Now we're gonna need to mop more!" Alma squealed, serious about the mop.

"The storm surge is on," said a man with each arm around a kid. He started to say more but squeezed the kids closer instead.

Juni stared at them.

"Ya'll doing intake?" Pete asked.

"What's happening out there?"

Pete pulled at his gimme cap which he'd set so tight against the wind that it left deep red tracks across his forehead. "The water has risen suddenly and it's not from the rain. It's storm surge coming from the ocean."

Juni got behind the table. She could at least get things started. Alma stuck close to Juni when Dillon went out to help bring in possessions.

"Gloria and I are ferrying this leg of the journey," said Pete. "Prince George is under enough water, folks with boats are getting people out and bringing them to drier land but then we're running into a lot of blocked or flooded roads."

The woman Dillon had greeted as Ms. Lafette hugged a few people and prepared to leave. "Lot of refugees heading this way."

"I ain't no refugee," said a girl about twelve.

Gloria turned mid-hug. "We're all seeking refuge from a storm right now. A refugee is just a person seeking a place of safety."

"Psalm 46," said Pete. "God is our refuge therefore we will not fear, even though the earth gives way and the waters

roar and surge.” He and Gloria went back out the door into the rain.

Charles showed up in the hallway, saw the crowd and disappeared again. He would be fetching Clementeen.

Juni tapped some index cards on the table top, trying to recall the process. “Does anybody here need medical attention or water right away?” No, nobody needed any of that.

She started a card. “Today’s date... does anybody know the date?”

“August 26th,” said Mr. Jeeter.

Juni didn’t look up and she didn’t say anything, although she had a new secret: today was her sixteenth birthday.

One more truck emptied the PTA storage facility just before it began to flood. More bedding and clothing arrived from a call put out to inland counties close by. Neighbors took what they could to a designated truck stop, and people volunteered to drive it to Kimbro’s.

Juni was carting shoes to the front hall when she saw Clementeen escort a new party of refuge seekers into the showroom. Juni hurried to see if Grimm had brought them, but it was Pete and Gloria again.

Gloria had sat down at the table with the food coordinator, Ms. Maybank. Ms. Maybank scolded Pete. “I can see you getting tired every time you walk through that door. When was the last time you ate?”

“We’ve got energy bars.”

“Juni, please go make them up some plates.”

“I’ll come with.” Pete moved toward her.

“Hold up, there big man.” Ms. Maybank held out a plastic bag.

Juni slipped her front hall shoes into her bag and pulled on the ratty Vanns she’d found. “What’s it like out there, Pete?”

Pete sat down on a chair and stared into the piles. “Harrowing.”

Juni had asked about accompanying Pete, but was told that she couldn't do much without a boat or a driver's license. They were right she could do more in the shelter.

A young man came into the hall from the showroom. He was barefoot. "I need me some shoes."

"Brodie." Pete said. "How's your grandmother doing?"

Brodie hefted a boot. He looked nothing like Titus except he was about Titus' age. His face was rounder, his skin a shade darker. "Mom's getting her into a hot shower. She's not saying much."

Juni went to pull a chair over then found a roll of athletic tubesocks. "You want to try those on? There are socks right here."

"Juni's a journalist," Pete said. "You could tell her the story. She's been writing them down for people so they aren't forgotten and so we can put them out there, tell all those people who don't know how it is."

Brodie sat down. He didn't look like he wanted to talk, but Juni pulled out her notebook and pen. When he started, she slid down the wall to sit on the bags of socks.

"The water was too heavy, we couldn't get out the house. We couldn't open the doors. The water in the house come up to here." He sliced above his knee with the outside of his hand. "But we couldn't get out the windows either. We boarded them up from outside. They had some long, long bolts going in at the tops." He grit his teeth. "We did too good a job."

"So we were upstairs. I went out on the porch roof so the boat people could see us and they come but the doors were still stuck. We were going to have to climb off the porch roof. They threw us a thing they had, like a swing you tie to a tree branch. You see that thing, Pete?"

Pete shook his head.

"It had a piece of wood you could sit on, wrap your legs around the rope and sit on the wood. We tied the other end of the rope around a bed inside the house, as a backup. This guy Grover come up from the boat, climbed the rope to help us. The little kids went first. They know how to do that stuff. Me and

Dad and Grover lowered them down. They were scared with the weather... but it was easy, the kids liked it. But it was hard just to get Granma out the window. Moms got the swing like it should be and told her hang onto the rope, that's all she had to do, just hang on with her arms and her legs so she wouldn't come offa that piece of wood. We got her sitting on the edge of the roof. I lay down and Dad held me by the feet. I put my arms around Granma and we started pulling her off the edge but she didn't want to go. It was hard for her to let that happen. I had her under the arms though and we just did it, she was off the roof, but then, shit, she let go the rope to grab onto me and she fell."

"Oh my god," said Juni.

"She turned so hard to grab onto me, she twisted out of the hold I had on her, the way I was holding her." He dropped his face into his hands and sobbed.

Pete got up and gripped Brodie's shoulder. "But she's going to be okay."

Brodie shook his head. "We don't know yet. She ain't talking. It don't seem like she hurt herself but maybe she hit the steps or the porch and we just don't see it."

"But the water broke her fall."

"The water." Brodie's voice was dejected.

"There's a nurse practitioner here," said Juni. "Did she check on her?"

"The *water*." He sat up, indignant, as though someone had suggested a glass of water would cure his terminal cancer, but he wasn't looking at Pete. He was looking at the rain battering the front doors, streaming down the glass, soaking the towels rolled up on the threshold. "The water was everywhere. The water is going to melt our house and float away everything we have inside. Look at it. The water isn't going to stop."

The light in the ceiling above him sputtered and went out.

Clementeen had warned people how they would handle it if they lost power, but now she called a meeting. They gathered in and around a living room suite near the offices. The older and less able people had been encouraged to settle in this area of the showroom, so they didn't have far to come. There were now 142 refugees but not all of them were at the meeting. Some parents were with napping children, some exhausted arrivals had fallen asleep. Brodie sat with his grandmother who lay on a couch a few rooms away.

An electric lantern on top of a hutch lit the space well enough. Clementeen stood at the doorway, waited for quiet, then when quiet came, bided her time in the characteristic way she had of rooting herself before communicating.

"We don't know yet what all this storm might take away from us," Clementeen said, "but we do know what we can be grateful for." She opened her hands and nodded around at them. Her eyes were brimming. "Right?"

The group rustled. Sniffs and a few sobs rose from the shadows.

"Let's take a moment to be thankful for what we have here, who we have here, for how all of us contribute to this community we're making." She put her head down for a full minute of silence.

Juni was on the floor beside an armchair, trying to find a comfortable way to lean against the end table behind her. Alma wanted to sit in her lap, which complicated matters. Juni was grateful for Alma.

Clementeen spoke again. "So much to appreciate in our lives. We can be grateful for Mr. Kimbro, who's with us now!"

Everybody stood up and cheered. Juni craned her neck for a view of the benefactor she hadn't seen yet. He stepped out from behind a floor lamp, grinning from one large ear to the other. He shook his head and shook his head, and something glinted from behind him— his hair pick. She couldn't hear him over the whoops but his lips were clear: "Please. Please, please."

When the crowd settled back down, a baby wailed from the other side of the showroom. The crowd laughed then cooed. “Aw.”

Mr. Kimbro laughed. “Now see what y’all did. You shoulda never cheered like that.”

Clementeen looked delighted, like all of this was good for all of them, their spirits.

Mr. Kimbro looked to her and she waved him to go ahead and speak to the folks.

“I know you’re taking good care of things here and I’m just happy you’re taking such good care. You’re all safe here. I’m just sorry the power went out, but the generator will keep the air conditioning going as long as we have fuel, but the refrigerators are keeping the food cold and the ice packs ready for injuries.” He nodded at Clementeen, starting to make his exit. “Miss Clementeen and Ms. Maybank are taking care of everything. They tell me what I need to know and ask me questions on your behalf. So let’s be grateful for them.”

For the sake of the babies and sleepers, the group restrained themselves to muted clapping as he made his get away.

Ms. Maybank asked that people open the refrigerators as little as possible. Mr. Bourne suggested there be a refrigerator gatekeeper who could make sure this was done rarely and efficiently, like for several items at once. Ms. Maybank said maybe there could be a team working on food management. She reported that the big Grocery Genie in Four Holes was sending a generous donation that included fried chicken, biscuits, and prepared salads. Juni was pleased to think this could be her birthday supper, even if it was her secret.

Lou was busy prepping volunteers to follow up on the injured people she’d seen. If her mother remembered the birth of her most precious living accident, she made no sign to Juni.

Dillon proposed marking the floor with labels so people could find their way around more easily with just a flashlight. Juni joined his group after the meeting adjourned. Charles was there, too. They decided to pretend the walkways were streets,

and Charles immediately wanted to name a walkway Wateree, which was the street he lived on. They named the walkways after streets that were under water.

Kids who couldn't read drew pictures and taped them to the floor near their new homes for easy recognition in a flashlight beam. Brodie's little cousin drew a house at the top of a mountain, but drew the mountain first and so high, he didn't leave enough room for the house. He cried when there was no second floor or roof, but Dillon extended the base into the mountain and topped off the house, and the kid was ready for the tape.

In the late afternoon, Juni and Titus were sitting on his mattress with their backs against the hutch that faced into Mr. and Ms. Dozier's living room campsite. By the light of a headlamp, Juni was reading him some of the accounts she'd written in her new notebook.

He interrupted her. "What time is it?"

"Around five, I think."

"The Wilders are reciprocating with a dinner invitation," said Titus. "At 6:00. Early but they do have little kids."

"Of course." Juni played with her phone. Dates like birthdays had never been on Titus' radar, even his girlfriends'. "I got a text from Portia..."

"Yeah?"

"They're all fine, feeling safe. She wished me a Happy Sweet Sixteen."

"Oh." Titus made a sad face. "Poo' Junikins. You should be knocking them out at the DMV today."

"If I had a driver's license, would you quit calling me baby names?"

"Baby names for you are Opposite Day all the time, like Little John at six and a half feet and 300-pound guys called Slim. You're way ahead of the insignificant measurement of years."

"How?"

“Most people your age don’t have the scope of curiosity and energy and sensitivity and caring that you have. They live in a constricted world because their worldview is constricted. They’re too anxious about how they come off, how impressive they are, to worry about all those animals and plants that don’t even notice them. They’re obsessed about wowing a vast mob of groups, all with different standards, all the standards conflicting and confusing. What’s cool in one group is dorky in another. You’re aware of all that, but you do what you think is more important.”

“Okay, wow. Thanks, Titus.” She wanted him to stop.

“I’m not finished.” His tone was serious.

“Really...”

“We don’t live just in our towns anymore. Everybody’s playing to the audience of the whole world, a world of celebrities and extreme money that isn’t taking care of the people or the nonpeople. How can that work? It frays any happiness a person can make; it makes us into stick people. You’re playing to a more significant world.”

“Please stop it please!” Juni was close to tears. “I mean it!”

Titus’ frown wasn’t just puzzled; he was dismayed. “Why should I stop?”

“You sound like you’re saying goodbye.”

“I’m not, so that’s your problem. But remember this when I’m not around to say it. You’re going to be okay, Juni, because you know what’s important and you know how to work. Plus you can laugh at some very dark matters. Things are going to get so bad, it’s hard to imagine how bad in reality. It helps me, sometimes, when I try hard, to know I’ll miss it.”

Juni took his hand and he clapped his other hand on hers and they took turns pulling out the hand on bottom and slapping the hand on top.

Titus squeezed her fist to finish the endless circle. “Read that thing again that Brodie said about his grandmother, that she was strong enough.”

She flipped through the notebook. “The way she was holding onto me so hard, my shoulder, my neck, she had plenty of strength to hold onto that rope.”

Titus mused. “Like if she’d done the thing that didn’t feel natural or safe to her, she’d have been okay. But that’s what we’re all going to have to do. We’re going to have to live so differently, we’ll probably find it frightening, which means we might believe it’s the right way to live but it will feel wrong. You have the strength to hold onto what’s going to get us through this.”

“Lemme... I’m not sure I followed that.” Juni made a couple of notes in her notebook to study later. She arched her back in what Ezra called a cleansing stretch. “I kind of like living like this except I want to go outside.”

“This is special, these sudden communities and solutions after a disaster. But who knows. Maybe it’ll be one disaster after another and people scrambling like this over and over. What time is it?”

“I turned my phone off because I lost my charger and have to borrow one which is a hassle.” She stood up and called into the speckled darkness. “Anybody know what time it is?”

“Five of six,” came the answer.

“Okay, Toonzy, I’m craving me some fried chicken.”

They strolled down Saville Street to Canaan Way. Juni shone her light on Carter’s picture of a rhinoceros marking the Wilders’ campsite so Titus could see it. There were no lights at the site. “Is this happening somewhere else you think?”

Flashlights ignited and blinded her. “HAPPY BIRTHDAY!”

Juni clapped her hands over her face. “No way! Get *out*!”

Lou did the family seize-and-squeeze and kept squeezing while she whispered a long message into her ear until Juni was desperate for a breath. Something about proud and love and save the world. Then the party twirled Juni from one hug to

another all the way around the table. "I'm a cyclone!" she crowed.

"Look look look!" shrieked Alma.

Carter grabbed her by the neck and pulled her over the table. "Look at the cake!"

They shone their lights on a sheet cake with white icing. Under the arc of the words "Happy 16th, Juni," a brown baby bear sat on lines of blue curlicue waves. There were bits of blue curlicues on either side.

"What's that on the cake?" Carter put his face in the lights and looked up at her. The party was waiting for something.

"Wha— Oh, perfect! It's a water bear!"

They let her blow out a flashlight so she could make a wish and she made the same wish she'd made the year before, that the earth would be restored. They played Pictionary. Clementeen stopped by for a round of would you rather. Her question was "Would you rather write a book that makes Oprah's book club or star in a movie with Denzel Washington?" There were homemade cards. Dillon had scored a multi-tool from the donations. He handed it to her with the wrench arm out.

Lou had thought to bring a delicate chain with a small oval locket that her mother had given her on her 16th birthday. Inside the locket was a tiny picture of a loggerhead turtle. "You can change that picture any time you like," said Lou, "I was just thinking of our night of the sea turtles."

When Alma had fallen asleep in Juni's lap and Carter and Molly were quiet on their mattresses, Mike turned the conversation to the hurricane. He'd read the latest notes Mr. Kimbro had written in the folder kept on top of one of the refrigerators. Mr. Kimbro tuned in regularly to the weather on his office computer.

"Estelle's probably made landfall by now, down at Palmetto City."

"How far away is that?" Baxter asked.

“Eighty miles. And the hurricane’s 200 miles across so do the math.”

Baxter’s eyes widened in the light of the electric lantern. “So it’s here?”

They listened to the hurricane they were no longer waiting for. Juni tried not to hear the clanks the building made, like maybe a ghost in chains. “Sometimes the wind sounds like a wave breaking on the beach.”

“Don’t you bring in a train, Estelle!” said Darlene. “That’s what they say a tornado sounds like.”

“I heard there can be lots of tornados inside a hurricane,” said Baxter.

“Oh let’s don’t talk that kind of talk. I have to sleep tonight.” And with that they called it another day and stumbled to their beds.

Juni cut off her headlamp and stood at the end of the dining table. The twinkle of flashlights in the dark reminded her of fireflies. Outside Hurricane Estelle was whirling in circles two hundred miles wide. She was like Ezra’s Great Wheel of life and death and life again. Rain exploded on the roof. Once in awhile the wind shook the whole building, shook it so a thousand tiny cracks threatened the seams, and even in the middle of the showroom, she felt a draft.

“Titus,” she whispered.

“Yeah?”

“I’m going out to the loading dock. If I’m not back in twenty minutes, send a search team.”

“The loading dock?”

“I just want to be out there with a hurricane!”

“I get that—for you anyway. Don’t do anything stupid.”

It was hard to open the door but this time she knew to lean into it. It gave suddenly and released her onto the concrete platform. She put her headlamp in her pocket and scanned the space, what she could see of the sky, but it was like she was

inside a big garage. Even without a door at the other end, the walls kept her from being really outside. She wanted to see Hurricane Estelle unframed, no wall or building in view. She needed to get out to where the trucks pulled in.

The wind seemed to be coming across the opening rather than into it. She ran to the steps, then held tight to the railing going down. From the bottom of the steps, she caught hold of a reinforcement bar that ran the length of the wall like a railing. She worked her way along the wall to the opening, all the way to the mouth of the cave. A sudden gust lifted her and she nearly lost her footing. There was the old familiar catch inside her, about not wanting to be stupid when she didn't know enough. So? Maybe she had to do some stupid things. How else would she learn for herself what this world is made of?

Now she was right on the edge, close enough to being out that the rain sprayed in her eyes and the wind tore at her hair and she could see the full sky. It wasn't pitch dark, somewhere in the storm there was a full moon. The sky pulsed with light and dark clouds curdling in the tempest.

Across the driveway and across an expanse of grass, the trees were strange. A blast of wind flung rain into her face so hard, it hurt. She put her face down and when she lifted it again, she saw the trees all leaning in one direction. Their crowns bobbed furiously against the downward pressure, a mass of horses darkly stampeding in place. She could barely make out the leaves on the trees and was astonished to see them holding fast to branches. Where were the squirrels, the field mice, the cicadas, the birds? These and other things she wanted to know.

But she couldn't take her eyes off the trees. She could watch forever, like when she lay on the beach as an eclipse of the moon proceeded, and she stayed there for hours to watch the entire passage of the earth's shadow across the lunar face. That is us, she thought at the time, that is Gaia casting a ruddy shadow on the nearest celestial orb. It felt important.

It was important now to watch the trees who still tried to live like all the other living things. They held onto the ground and bore the wind. They'd bear it until their roots gave out. It

was their way of being alive. Humans had their own ways of being alive, which maybe they couldn't help. Maybe they couldn't help wanting to invent stupid things nobody really needed, or mine every last nugget of gold, or burn the last drop of petroleum, or rip up the bottom of the ocean.

But they could start wanting something else more. They could want the people to thrive. If they wanted the people to thrive for real, they would want the earth to thrive.

"Juni!" Titus hollered through the whistling squall.

"I'm coming!" She turned and started back toward her brother. "I'm here!"

~ Gaia Notebook ~

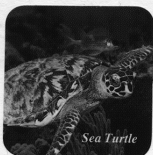
by Louisa Belle Poole
aka Juni

or
a few of my favorite things

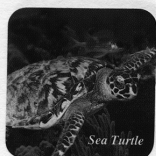
"Human history is a Gaian dream."
T McKenna

"As knowlegde increases, wonder
deepens."

"In the Gaia theory air, water, and soil are
major components of one central organism,
Planet Earth. What we typically think of
as life has evolved merely to regulate
the chemistry of the biosphere."
David Easton



Sea Turtles



Seven different species

- ★ Leatherbacks: Vulnerable
- ★ Greens: Endangered
- ★ Loggerheads: Vulnerable
- ★ Hawksbills: Critically Endangered
- ★ Olive Ridleys: Vulnerable
- ★ Kemp's Ridleys: Critically Endangered
- ★ Flatbacks: Data Deficient

Threats:

entanglement in fishing nets + lines

poaching + illegal trade - eggs, meat, shell

plastic garbage - ^{ingestion (they eat it!)}
entanglement

ocean pollution - chemicals hurt their
immune systems ^{oil spills}

GLOBAL WARMING

hotter sand - failed nests, or imbalance
of females to males

rising water - loss of habitat

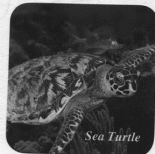
severe storms can damage nests

coastal development - ruin of habitat

artificial light pollution - harder for them

to find suitable nesting area

Sea Turtles are ANCIENT



They've been here about 110 million years
since the time of dinosaurs

They eat • jellyfish

- seaweed
- sponges
- snails
- crabs and shrimp



migrate long distances

found in all warm and temperate zones

Like salmon they return to their
birthplace to lay eggs

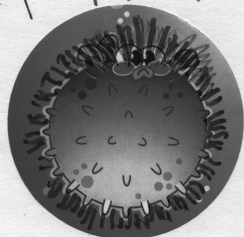
Reproduction

sand over 85° mostly females

sand under 85° mostly males

sand is getting warmer!

An idea proposed by James Lovelock



and
co-developed by
Lynn Margulis

Gaia is named after a ^{Greek} goddess
but is a real living organism

Life on earth = biosphere

Biosphere functions as one living
SUPER organism that changes its
environment to create conditions
that sustain life.

"the geophysiology of Earth"

: Life and earth's atmosphere
evolved together, ⁺ with inorganic
surroundings to form a synergistic
self-regulating complex system

single cell
organisms

Gaia, Inc. is also a company! disambiguation!

The pronghorn antelope

survived the extinction from
ice age 11,000 years ago

← **THE Big Extinctions** →

444 million years ago 86% species lost,
the ~~End~~ Ordovician

375 million years ago 75% species gone
Late Devonian

251 million years ago 96% species lost
End Permian *

200 million years ago 80% species lost
end Triassic

66 million years ago 76% of species
went extinct

Now ?? % is going extinct!

It's the Sixth Mass Extinction
now (thanks to us.)

Pink fairy armadillo

deserts and scrub of central Argentina!

average body length is 13 cm

(about 6 inches?)

can fit in a man's hand

have a pink shell!!!

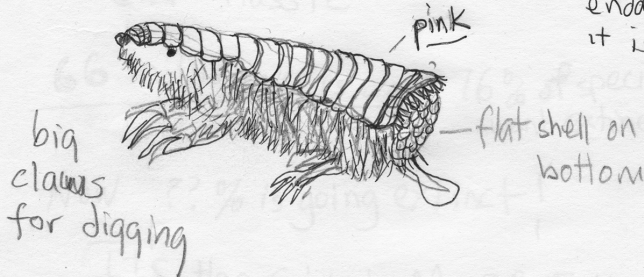
with white fur sticking out.

Chlamyphorus truncatus the smallest of armadillos

can't survive captivity

only seen rarely - they don't know much

eat ants they are insectivore. don't even know how endangered it is.



Jumping Spider "salticid spiders"

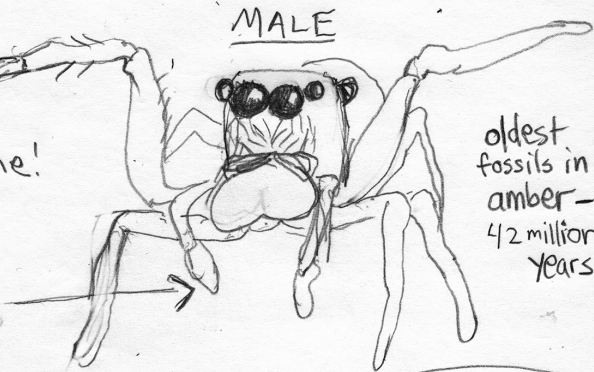
Phidippus otiosus
" audax

Salticidae family
100s of kinds in
this family

hangs out in mixed deciduous/pine
forests

female
spiders are
often
identified
by the epigyne!

male
pedipalp



oldest
fossils in
amber -
42 million
years

carnivor

(something
like this)

four pairs
of eyes -
nearly 360°
vision

diurnal (daytime) hunters
doesn't weave a web but
makes silk safety line in case it falls.
it "tethers a filament of silk" to where
it starts a jump.

very complex behavior - many different
hunting techniques.

venom doesn't hurt humans.

Bats are so cool



They are a whole world: very complex

the only mammals capable of true, sustained flying.

- ~~Guano~~ bat poo = fertilizer

- CHIROPTERA order

- over 1200 species - ^{are found} in almost all ecosystems except frozen.

- some are insectivores (like mosquitos) flies termites &

many are frugivores ^{fruit} and/or nectar

- then there are vampire bats - blood suckers but don't bother humans

* Most are nocturnal (active at night)

- poor vision, depend on Echolocation (but none are blind)

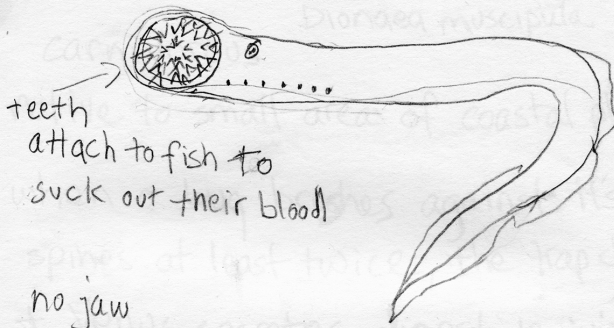
where they call and listen for echo.

The delay between call + echo tells them the distance to their prey.

- magnetoreception - like birds, they are sensitive to earth's magnetic field and use to orient themselves.

- White Nose Syndrome, a fungus is killing bats in North America.

Lamprey



no jaw
one eye
one nostril
seven breathing holes on each side

38 different species

some people eat them, even today.

Venus Flytrap

carnivorous *Dionaea muscipula*

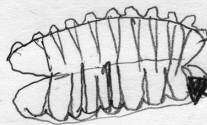
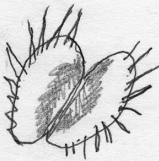
native to small area of coastal plain

when a bug brushes against its
spines at least twice, the trap closes

+ Venus secretes digestive juices

Breaks down meal (insect) 5-12 days

adapted to eat insects because it was
living in nutrient-poor sand.



fly in
here

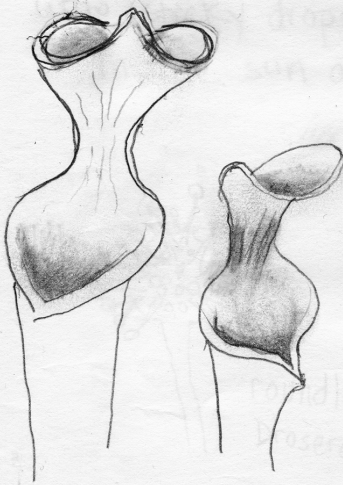
snap!
gotcha!

Pitcher Plant

Bogs wetlands

is carnivorous

a bog adapted plant



Sarracenia
(North American)

"pitfall traps"
attract and drown
their prey in
nectar.

- horizontal rhizome
- convergent evolution

carnivorous but
not only

SUNDEW

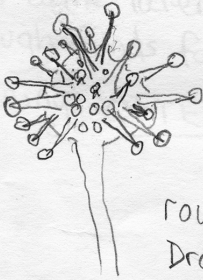
dwarf sundew = *Drosera brevifolia*

pink sundew = *Drosera capillaris*

94 different *Drosera* species

little sticky drops look like dew
in the sun and attracts bugs

(like stars) (space creatures)
then leaf folds over
and traps bug



roundleaf

Drosera rotundifolia

form prostrate or upright rosettes

glandular tentacles making
sweet secretions

bogs fens swamps marshes & moist streambanks

WEST Indian MANATEE

vegetarian
freshwater

Trichechus manatus
"Sea cow"

weigh between 440 and 1300 pounds

average ~ 990

closest living relative is the elephant
same skin

mammal

often have white scars from
motor boats running over
them - hard to see

• camouflaged in water



was endangered now just threatened
since 2017

- ↓
- boats
 - monofilament entanglements
 - * loss of habitat
 - hurricanes
 - algae blooms
 - disease

THE TARDIGRADE

also called water bear
moss piglet

Has survived
all of earth's
extinction episodes

8 legs

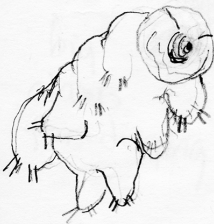
looks like it has a kind of horn in its face
punctures algae + ether things to suck
out nutrients!

can't kill it! not by boiling
freezing
starvation
radiation

it rolls into a little survival ball:

called a "Tun" dries out +
sleeps

Add water, good conditions,
and it comes back!



A SURVIVOR
even in outer space L

International Union for Conservation of Nature

IUCN the "red list"

seven levels:

LC • least concern - lowest level abundant

NT • near threatened - habitat may be

VU • Vulnerable ← rate of decline
- geographic range
- extent of occurrence
- population size

EN • endangered

CR • critically endangered

EW • Extinct in the wild
only exists in cultivation (plants)
or captivity (animals)

Ex • EXTINCT! no reasonable doubt
the last one is died.

Plus on June 25, 2012 Lonesome George

DD • Data Deficient - can't get enough data on
abundance and distribution.

Enhydra lutris



Sea Otter

- has the thickest fur on the planet
no blubber to keep it warm
big skin trade so almost extinct @ 1900
international ban on hunting now but
still classified as endangered
- uses tools! like rocks to open shells and
unstick things like abalone
- a KEYSTONE species for kelp forest
ecosystems
eats sea urchins so they don't eat all the kelp
kelp forests which sequester carbon
and are home to lots of other species.
- dive to sea floor to find food.
food = marine benthic invertebrates
benthic[↑] zone is lowest in a
body of water

Lynn Margulis "quotes"

"Life did not take over the world
by combat but by networking!"

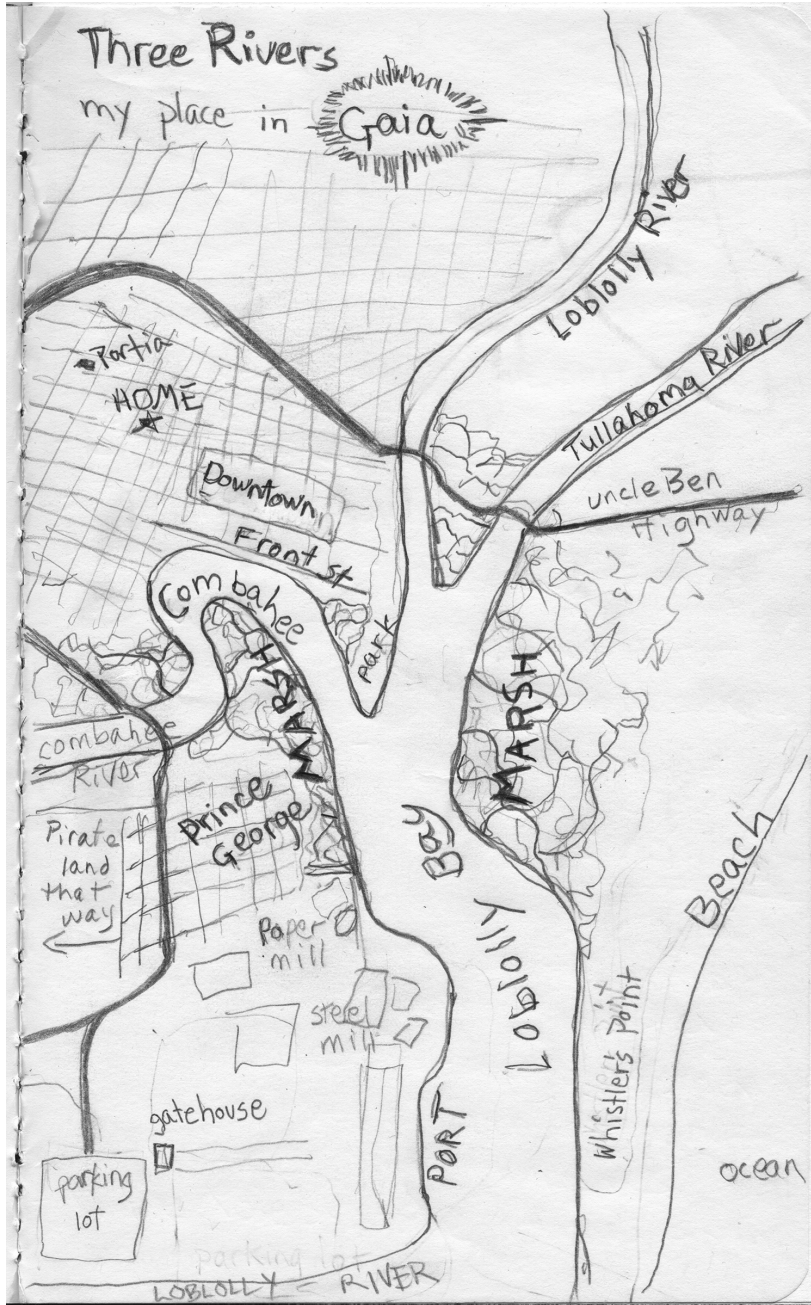
Life is a planetary phenomenon and the
Earth has been alive for at least 3000
million years. To me the human
move to take responsibility for the
living Earth is laughable The planet
takes care of us, not we of it. ... we
need to protect us from ourselves.

Evolution is no linear family
tree, but change in the single
multi-dimensional being that
has grown to cover the entire surface
of the Earth.

(So how much of the Earth is
Gaia? the life-atmosphere layer
plus geology? how deep? think geophysiology)

Three Rivers
my place in Gaia

my place in Gaia



The Declaration of Independence rewritten by Juni and friends

When in the course of human events it becomes necessary for a people to dissolve the political, economic, and cultural bands which have connected them with a limited, misguided, and destructive system and to assume among the powers of the earth, the separate and equal station to which the Laws of Nature, of Reality, of Truth, and of Nature's god entitle them, a decent respect to the opinions of all beings requires that they should declare the causes which impel them to this separation.

We hold these truths to be self-evident, that all Life and Ecozones, Bioregions, Habitats, Cultures, and Natural Resources are created equal, that they are endowed by the Universe with certain unalienable Rights, that among these are Life, Liberty, and the pursuit of Well-Being. —

That to secure these rights, cultures are created, passed along, and developed among humans, deriving their just powers from the deep understanding of human beings, an understanding unfettered by overinfluence of advertising, twisted financial incentive, propaganda of the plutocracy, or suppression by the State.

That whenever any form of culture becomes destructive of these ends, it is the right of the people to alter or to abolish it, and to establish new institutions, laying their foundation on such principles and organizing their powers in such form, as to them shall seem most likely to effect their long term and actual safety and happiness, which rests on the long term and actual safety and happiness of all lifeforms and our miraculous interconnected systems.

Prudence, indeed, will dictate that cultures long established should not be changed for light and transient causes that appeal to possibilities of excessive material gain without benefit to

society or ecosystem, or of frivolous popularities, and accordingly all experience hath shewn that humankind are more disposed to suffer, while evils are sufferable than to right themselves by abolishing the forms to which they are accustomed.

But when a long train of abuses and usurpations, pursuing invariably the same object, in this case, of concentrating wealth in few hands, fragmenting, oppressing, and depriving of livelihood the majority of the population, inciting hatred among factions, plundering the commons of land, water, and clean air, evinces a design to reduce them under absolute despotism, it is their right, it is their DUTY, to throw off such purveyors of culture, and to provide new guards for their future security.

Such has been the patient sufferance of these United States and living beings the world over; and such is now the necessity which constrains them to alter their former systems, including economy, government, culture. The history of the present United States is a history of repeated injuries and usurpations, all having in direct object the establishment of an absolute Tyranny over the freedom of other nonAmerican cultures, animals, plants, and ecosystems to restore, develop, and maintain their well-being. To prove this, let facts be submitted to a candid world

