

INHERITED WINTER COAT

MY FATHER KILLED A MAN ONCE. It was an accident.

He was driving a train between Tennessee and Alabama and saw a young man stand on the tracks and freeze in place—he wanted to commit suicide, it seemed.

My father said he screamed and screamed, but it takes a full two miles to stop a train. He saw the boy explode on impact, torso torn from limbs. He also said that he saw the boy's eyes before the train hit him—that was the part he could never forget, the part he still saw even when he closed his own eyes.

I was having a similar feeling of internal combustion, albeit a less violent one; I was hungover and riding in a car along

the Tennessee and Alabama state line and saw a train speeding alongside for a stretch and again thought about my father, who was now gone himself. He had died unexpectedly months before and I was still in mourning—sometimes the pain would dry up suddenly, and sometimes it would fall down all around me like rain. I was currently in a dry period.

I was riding down to my grandmother's house to rescue a peculiar inheritance: some guns of my father's, and some of his winter coats.

Driving the car was the man I loved. He decided to go with me—he wanted to be there for no other reason than to be a shoulder to lean on. He said he knew there would be tears.

I had forgotten about the Appalachian foothills, the rolling blankets of trees and hills that covered the landscape with green, gold, auburn, or white, depending on the season. I'd been in California too long and forgotten about dramatic stages—oppressive humid summers in the winter, flash floods or tornadoes. I had lost a sense of season anymore and had as of late been living in my own personal seasons. My life in the California coming to an end—I felt it. I sat quietly, often with an instinct to guide me to the next thing, whatever.

I forgot how the mountains here bled water. Whole jutting waterfalls just shooting out of the rocks like a shower hose. I was having my own eruption of emotion.

My lover was driving. The night before, I held him close in bed and was beside him and beside myself. Why did this feel

so good? My sex life was absurd. Typically I crawled through bathhouses and felt swept aside; the sex with him wasn't lustful or "manly" or full of unspoken rage. It was this thing that I hadn't had in a long time. It was closer to comfort. Like, I really was right there next to him—I was THERE. Is this what love felt like?

Back to our mission. My father had a bunker on my grandma's land in southern Alabama. A collection of moderate vintage winter coats and a collection of antique rifles, one with the name "Jody" engraved on it. The name of my great-great-grandfather. We were going to go to my grandma's land, pick up the coats and rifles, go down to New Orleans for two days, and come back up to lover boy's house in Tennessee. I would fly back to California from there. I figured if we were smuggling guns across that many state lines I should let a white boy drive—they're good like that.

I remembered my father—he was an OG. His coat collection was one of his prized achievements; even I as his only son could not outrank it. I asked once when I was a boy, "Die-dee"—as I pronounced his name—"can I have your coat?" He was wearing this tan-and-green houndstooth number with wooden buttons and a large collar on it; it was long, almost to his knees. His older brother had been a mod and played in soul bands in the seventies—he had stolen his style from him.

"You can't fit in Dad's coat yet, son. You can have it when I die." I couldn't have been more than eight when he said it.

He said it in a way where I knew he never intended to die. I thought about this memory as we pulled into a rest stop off the highway, and I almost cried but caught myself.

"Hey, baby—can we stop at Popeyes?"

"Yes, sir," said my handsome driver.

e to my grandma's all through my drive four hours north to get me for break, and I would sit and follow the eyes and just feel content. Lover boy iam, where we found a Popeyes, and, outh, we found ourselves close.

na's was the same as I remembered.

It was all Gulf Coastal Plain Spanish moss, two-lane highways, dirt roads, and Reconstruction-era decay. Everything—even the sparse houses that were obviously lived-in—all seemed eerily vacant. I was vacant.

My grandmother was from Gee's Bend; at some point in history a bunch of super scared white people burned a ferry so Black people couldn't travel to vote there. This is as much as I remembered of what my family had told me. My boyfriend was white as fuck, and he was probably (besides insurance salesmen) one of only a dozen or so white men who had set foot in this stretch of land in twenty years.

There were so many abandoned churches. We parked and explored one a mile before my grandma's house. It was dilapidated. I remembered my father driving me to my grandma's