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CHRISTINE, DAUGHTER OF IMMIGRANTS

for her daughters, Carol and Lois

Before she dies, your mother tells you of life in the black fields of Germany before she married and came to this house and this room where she lies seven years dying of pernicious anemia.

You see as she tells you the black fields of potatoes like ugly stones stacked in piles and ready for battle, her hands green with vines she has pulled and calloused by the spade she leans into,

the edge of her long dress stained with mud hot and stinking with rotting potatoes.

She tells you of days she fainted in the fields and her father carried her a long way—

his boots sucking in and out of the mud, the hem of her dress dragging—across rows of potatoes to a cart of straw where he left her unattended for hours in the sun with pain like the labor of childbirth drawing her knees up hard against the straw and no water for her throat so dry with breathing through her mouth and the dark red flow of her blood soaking through her dress into the straw and the grain of the wood that she scrubbed but never entirely cleaned of the stain.