Arc and the Sediment
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They say if you die in your dreams, you die in real life. Gretta wakes from a dream that she was murdered by Ronald McDonald. She remembers thinking in the dream, *This must be Armageddon.* Rain, deserts. Weird landscapes. Nuclear mushrooms. Ronald, who was deceiving a small crowd with cheap tricks, could make himself as tall as King Kong or as short as eleven feet so as to fit, hunched over, through the threshold of her apartment building. Her focus became clear; she moved, the whole of her, in one direction: forward, anywhere. In the end, he got her with a long metal rod that had a barbed hook on the tip of it.

She lies in the starchy bed for a while. She is alive—sick, cold, wondering what to do. The room stinks something awful. She gets up and throws her dirty clothes, a half-pack of cigarettes, and deodorant in her suitcase. When she finds the map, she finds also that it is stained with vomit. *Gah.* The taste in her mouth—she needs a toothbrush immediately. She considers washing off the map. *Fuck it,* she thinks. *If I get lost, it'll be fate. It'll be out of my hands.*

She showers, scrubs her teeth with a washrag, squeezes her aching temples with her palms. She considers crying, but she hasn’t got the time. Now that the fox is undeniably dead and she has survived nearly a fifth of gin, a handful of Zoloft, and Ronald’s rod, she resolves to confront Lance with a choice and get back to her children by midnight. She’ll be home, unpacked, bathed, and ready to go to work by Monday.

On second thought, she takes the map. She wipes it off with a stiff
white towel, stashes the rest of the plastic cups and the stationery into her pack.

She wants to pat the fox, give it a good-bye. She can’t bring herself to make contact with such warmlessness. She tosses the room key next to the animal and leaves the door open.

Her pack and suitcase land in the bed of the truck with a crack. She stows the laptop beneath the seat. The air is still and silky from aridity. The sun is bright and somewhat warm, but she’s cold nevertheless. The ignition clicks impotently. She rests her head on the steering wheel, her hands ten and two, and waits for some good luck.

Once, when her father took her family to church for the first and last time, she was left behind. A car wreck had convinced him to get religion. Her mother suggested they try Mormonism so as to fit into the community better, but Mormon families had too often sent Gretta (in tears) and her brother (cursing) home for not being members of the church.

“They can go straight to hell,” her dad always said. So he took them to Christ’s Church in Salt Lake. The pastor or minister or whatever he was—Gretta still doesn’t know the difference—used Biblical quotes to call upon God to smite the sinners who danced and drank and coveted and took pleasure in mischief. Gretta’s father was so angry, he ushered his family out of the pew and out of the building (“Wait! Let me get my coat!”) and sped right out of the church parking lot—without her.

After the services, people filed out the front door and around her as she sat on the steps. The parking lot emptied. She cried. She tried to go back in. The door was locked. She wet her pants. She sat on the snow-packed, yellowed porch. A janitor appeared behind the glass, unlocked the front door to leave, and locked the door behind him. He asked her if she was okay. She said she was. Her father would come back for her. And he did, almost three hours later, just before dark; her toes felt ringed by ice and her fingers were long since numb.

“We thought you were in the backseat,” her mother explained. “Your brother didn’t say a thing. And your father—well, I’m sorry,
Gretchen—we’ve all had a lot on our minds.”

She tries the ignition again. It works, with some reluctance. She is one step closer to her destination.

Maybe she’s not ready. *What’ll you say?*

“Lance, your children need you.” They do miss him. They misbehave in honor of their loss. “Lance, I need you.”

*No, no, and fuck no.*

~ Two Rapids Hotel ~

Fun for the whole family!

*Resolve: DISSOLVE, MELT; BREAK UP, SEPARATE* <the prism resolved the light into a play of color>; also: to change by disintegration, to reduce by analysis. To cause resolution of (a pathological state). To deal with successfully: clear up. To reach a firm decision... intrans. CONSULT, DELIBERATE... to progress from dissonance to consonance.

She is not convinced of the existence of consonance, except perhaps in music. That, in her mind, reveals the dream of music for what it is: hope.

*Responsibility: The quality or state of being responsible: as moral, legal, or mental accountability.*

She flips through the dictionary for something more persuasive but feels overcome with something closer to predilection.

*Futility: The quality or state of being futile: USELESSNESS. A useless act or gesture <The futilities of debate for its own sake—W.A. White>
Futile as her push south seems to be, Gretta can’t very well keep turning around. If she drives back home now, she might be back later with less money for gas. Her children, she decides, will not spend their adulthood getting confessional in Al-Anon or AA. They will not be motherless and they will not be fatherless, in spirit or otherwise. Or at least they will not be motherless. They will go to college, if she has anything to say about it. They will travel. They will accompany her to therapy and develop vast amounts of self-esteem. They will see much more of their mother in the future, if she has to stay home and spin freakish doll-head doilies to earn a living. Gretta will force her relationship with Lance to some conclusion so she can get on with, at the very least, a parenthood strategy, because there can’t be anything futile in that. Her sobriety would not require a drum, but a commitment—to her kids, to herself. To the possibility of “looking upon beauty,” as Lance’s father would say, without feeling loss and regret.

If she had to start up a new AA, she would—Agnostic Alcoholics, maybe. She could be her only member so as not to fear her impact on the unwitting. She’d continue her rewrite of the Twelve Steps, then she would follow them. Jane Doe wakes up one day and takes a run rather than thinking about taking a run. The next day, she does it again. There it is: a resolution.