Hibernate
Eslami, Elizabeth

Published by The Ohio State University Press

Eslami, Elizabeth.
Hibernate.
The Ohio State University Press, 2014.
Project MUSE. muse.jhu.edu/book/35395.

For additional information about this book
https://muse.jhu.edu/book/35395
MacArthur Park

For reasons they can’t fathom, Joanna and Rudy are separated on the plane to Los Angeles by a boy with no legs. They discover him in Joanna’s seat when they go to sling their carry-ons into the overhead bin.

The boy looks about fifteen and sits with an *US Weekly* splayed across his crotch, doesn’t notice them or refuses to, so deeply involved is he in an article about the ten worst celebrity beach bodies of the summer. His eyes move over a starlet’s thighs, her subtle cellulite highlighted by red circles and editorial asides. When the boy reads, he opens his lips, just barely, like a newborn tasting air.

“Excuse me,” Joanna says, because someone has to. “I believe this is my seat.”

The boy coughs, and one of his thumbs smudges news of someone’s failing breast implants. His ears are plugged with either speed metal or the clashing of thirteenth century Turko-Mongol sabers, about which Rudy is something of an expert. From time to time, she imagines giving a lecture near a table covered with gleaming weaponry, her seventh graders in awe, their faces like fresh baked pies.

Trying not to stare, Joanna puzzles over how the boy managed to make his way down the jet bridge to her seat. There hadn’t been a wheelchair, at least not that she saw. Her mind moves carefully, as if each thought must be tethered by safety cables to rock. If only they knew what had happened. It shouldn’t make a difference, but it does. Too young for
the Army, too young for Walter Reed. She doubts it could be congenital; the knees are not smooth and white, no evidence of arrested development. Both women have lived long enough to recognize injury when they see it.

In the 80s, one of Rudy’s students lost an eye when he bound five sparklers together. After three months of surgeries, the boy returned to school. Standing in the hall with the other teachers, Rudy watched him bouncing along with his friends as if nothing had happened, the only evidence a black patch over the empty eye socket.

Neither adorned with prostheses nor encased in pant legs, the red curves of what would be the boy’s knees remain exposed, tapping to a private beat.

Normally the women wouldn’t mind swapping seats with him, but it’s a long flight from Atlanta, as well as a special trip—Rudy’s retirement after thirty-five years teaching European history and coaching field hockey—and Joanna intends for things to go perfectly, though she’s beginning to think that means it will be impossible for her to enjoy herself.

All Joanna wants is to make good memories and cache them away in a trunk under the bed. To have the kind of trip they will feed from when they are too old for travel. The RESPECT concert, five days in the turquoise water of a hotel pool. They can talk about it when they are residents of Rose Hill, the aging, childless couple, both easing into a steady senility that will rob them of their habits of hygiene and courtesy. As long as they have each other and the memory of Los Angeles. Aretha’s sequins and the architecture of her hats.

Now Joanna sees them sitting in white metal chairs on an artificial patch of grass, recalling the boy. They won’t remember where they had been going, or why, just his absent limbs. It will become a frequent topic of conversation—remember that boy?—along with lost friends, the lobster bisque at The Chowder Pot, and the death of the novel.

Joanna places a hand on the boy’s shoulder and applies a quick pressure, enough to make him look up.

“Not sure if you heard me—I believe you’re in my seat,” she says, halfway apologetically.

Rudy rifles through Joanna’s purse for documentation. “Show him your ticket.”

“Do what?” the boy says in a monotone.

Joanna smiles. “What I mean to say is, I bought tickets four months ago for my friend and me, together. If you could just scooch over.”
The boy returns to his magazine. He makes no movement, save for a slight, impatient vibration. “Not my problem,” he says.

After a minute, Rudy shrugs and sits by the window. She yanks out a Ron Chernow presidential biography and buries herself in it, determined to read her way through the flight.

Joanna stares at her. “You’re just going to sit.”

“I’m tired of standing,” Rudy says, not looking up from her book. “So are you.”

Joanna, unwilling to concede, waits for a flight attendant, but when one arrives to smash down the bins with her skinny arms, she gestures Joanna down into the other seat. “You need to be buckled for take-off.”

The three of them sit silently for the duration of the flight. Only once is there any kind of communication, when the flight attendant comes by with the snack cart. The boy orders a Sprite and doesn’t say a word as the drink is handed to him. The sabers clang on in infinite variations of battle in his ears. Rudy and Joanna shake their heads politely and indicate they aren’t interested in food or drink, though they are forced to pass a bag of pretzels, and finally, a small napkin, over the boy’s missing legs.

At LAX the women stride past gift shops and television monitors, through layers of post-flight security, down into tunnels and up escalators, forgetting about the boy. They tip bathroom attendants with the last of their change, and witness tearful reunions at the baggage claim. While waiting, they eat prepackaged sandwiches, fretting while two children climb on the conveyor belt.

They don’t take a breath until they collapse in the backseat of a cab. It’s then that they notice the sky, a muted blend of pinks and grays tinted with green, a storm waiting far away over the desert. The driver eases out into traffic. He keeps the windows down, one hand wiping sweat off the back of his head. Rudy leans her head against Joanna’s shoulder and dozes, fine strands of Joanna’s blond hair blowing against her face.

When they finally arrive at the hotel in Westlake, it’s well past eleven, but they can instantly see it’s not what was advertised, the only accurate detail a pool with a couple of sickly palm trees leaning over it. The women climb out of the cab and navigate their way through shards of glass on the dark asphalt. Near the door, bluish lights illuminate a handwritten warning about large bills and after-hours transactions.
This hotel is in no way responsible for thefts, injuries, break-ins, or alterca-
tions with other guests. Please enjoy your stay! —The Management

Inside the lobby, someone has at least made the effort to create the
illusion of luxury—leather furniture, a plasma television, a faux marble
desk. But the twin ferns are dead, and cigarette butts and dead flies are
in piles in the corners of the floor. The television is showing an entertain-
ment program on a loop. Lindsay, Sandra, Paris, Katie, Lindsay.

Joanna and Rudy are too tired to protest.

At the desk, a taciturn clerk takes Joanna’s credit card and proffers
keys by smacking them down on the counter like playing cards. Joanna
is charged at least twenty dollars more than she was quoted, via mysteri-
ous fees and hotel surcharges, but she is so eager for sleep that she lets it
go. Rudy inquires how far it is to the nearest non-chain restaurant, and
the woman hands her another card, this one the number for a $40 per trip
private driver.

“We can’t walk to anything from here?” Rudy asks.

The woman waves long, leopard-colored fingernails. “It’s MacArthur
Park.” She makes a face like Rudy has suggested jumping off the Capit-
ol Records building, but a second later, her eyes go soft. “I guess, if you
want.”

There is no one to take their stuff or walk the women to their room,
so they haul their bags through the mildewed stucco corridor, past an
unconvincing mural of a vineyard, and up a narrow flight of stairs. The
elevator, of course, is out-of-order.

The room reeks of cigarettes, and when Rudy collapses on the bed
and pulls back the sheets, she finds more than a couple questionable hairs
coiled on their pillows.

“I’m going to take a shower,” Joanna sighs, rifling through her bags.
She plunges her hands down into layers of folded clothes, searching for
pajamas. It took her five days to pack, unpacking, re-packing, shifting
things around. Really, she needed so little. A dress or two for dinners out
and the Aretha concert, some stylish walking shoes and a new bathing
suit. Yet each time she walked through a room, she found herself grab-
buing something she could vaguely imagine using. After a while, it no
longer felt like she had to decide what to bring but what to leave behind.

Rudy, meanwhile, packed the night before, rolling everything into a
tight ball. Two outfits, a toothbrush, and a bar of soap.

“Seriously. It’s not safe to walk to anything?”

Joanna stares through the heavy yellow curtains at the blaze of traffic
lights and fast food signs. “Maybe we should’ve rented a car.”
“I don’t buy it. How much you wanna bet they get a kickback from the driving service.”

“It’s not too late to find a different hotel. We can probably get our money back.”

In the dim light, Rudy appears younger, less gray in her hair. The first night they slept together, Joanna told her she looked like a younger Gladys Knight. Rudy laughed so hard she fell off the bed.

“Let’s talk about it in the morning. You relax and take your shower.”

“Hey Ru,” Joanna says, disappearing into the bathroom. “I think we should find out where Aretha’s staying.”

Despite the room’s shortcomings, the hot water stays good for nearly an hour, and Joanna reclines in the tub, letting it blast until her skin puckers. Sticking out of the shower curtain is a little tag that reads: “Made in Thailand,” though someone has crossed out the Thai and written “LaLa” land.

Joanna can still salvage this trip. She closes her eyes and breathes in the steam. A massage, maybe. The pipes groan on the other side of the wall as someone turns on the faucet, and the water pressure is immediately halved. She grabs a bar of soap and runs a hand over her chest, across the wormy scar. It reminds her, always, of a worm in an apple.

“The Wound” was what Rudy called it when they first met, both of them reluctant inductees into St. Joseph’s Breast Cancer Survivors Group. Every Thursday, fourteen pale women in shapeless sweatshirts met in a room to talk about “what they would reclaim,” according to the uplifting brochure. Participation in the group was allegedly an essential part of their recovery. They even had homework.

Rudy, having endured a double mastectomy, had no patience for the stuffed animals and pink ribbons, the life affirmations and the love letters to themselves. She sat in the back of the room making wisecracks under her breath and knotting little pink nooses for her teddy bear.

At first, Joanna didn’t know what to make of her. A fiftysomething school teacher from New Mexico with an interest in siege weapons and a propensity for mom jeans. Rudy was not necessarily someone she could imagine seeing a movie with. All of Joanna’s friends were in their thirties, mostly white, wealthy lawyers from her firm with overachieving spouses and polyglot kids.

Joanna felt weak and uncomfortable around strangers, and she found herself enjoying Rudy’s easy company. Together they sat in the back by
posters of reproductive organs and partially developed embryos, eating M&Ms and snickering.

If Rudy was unsure of Joanna, she didn’t show it. The day Joanna showed up with a teal silk scarf around her head, Rudy laughed and told her she didn’t need it, that she shouldn’t buy into “all the scarf-and-padded-bra crapola.” She went to Joanna’s house when Joanna was still in the thick of alternating rounds of radiation and chemo, and wrapped a blanket around her on the couch. Joanna was so nauseous she couldn’t keep anything down, but Rudy did her best to distract her, showing her shiny photographs of bronze sabers from the Met catalog.

When they celebrated the end of Joanna’s treatment by going to a bar and ill advisedly chasing their meds with whiskey sours, Joanna thought she had found a new best friend. Drunk and careless, she admitted to Rudy that she was ashamed to still have both her breasts. That she hated herself for ending a five year relationship because everything her girlfriend thought about seemed trivial. Guilty that she was young enough at thirty-five to have children, if she wanted.

Rudy laughed. She reached across the bar and grabbed Joanna’s face. “Hell yeah,” she said, and kissed her.

Joanna climbs into bed and presses herself into Rudy’s back, her chin stamping a crescent of moisture on her neck. Rudy pushes back against her for warmth. They keep the air conditioner cranked up to drown out two men fighting outside.

“An inauspicious beginning,” Joanna mumbles into her shoulder blade.

“I tried leaving the television on,” Rudy says. “I thought maybe we could fall asleep with it, like white noise. It’s stuck on Telemundo. Not Telemundo, some kind of Spanish porn thing. A guy with a bad handle-bar mustache is giving it to a girl in a beer wench costume. I got through maybe ten minutes, but he has a plastic scabbard.”

Joanna laughs. “I don’t wanna think what’s under these sheets. Oh Jesus. Bedbugs.”

“Don’t even.”

They hold each other for a while, feeling phantom insects on their legs. Ten minutes, twenty, and Rudy begins to snore. It will start softly, as if she has food in her mouth. By midnight it will be a click, punctuated sometimes by a moan. By morning, a dry rattle. Ever since the chemo,
Joanna sleeps for no more than three hours, and even then it’s shallow. She nurses her worry through the hours, comforted somehow by Rudy’s oblivion, the sound of her tongue settling against the roof of her mouth. It helps Joanna measure out what’s left of the dark.

After some time, she thinks about the boy from the plane. Perhaps he’s somewhere in downtown Los Angeles, rolling under the yellow lights. They never even learned his name.

When the plane landed, Joanna got up first to let him out. She watched as he reached under the seat and retrieved a backpack, unzipped it, and pulled out a skateboard. Effortlessly he lowered himself to the floor, took two steps on his knuckles, lifted his torso onto the skateboard, and was off.

Joanna followed him down the aisle, her knees nearly brushing the back of his head as they waited for people to retrieve their bags. She felt foolish, imagining he would have needed their help. At some point, the boy pulled out a cell phone and started talking. “Nope,” he said. “It’s tomorrow.” He made his way past the stewardesses who smiled down at him, and up the ramp, scraping along with his fists. “Yeah man. I’m here. Easy fuckin’ peasy.”

At five in the morning, Joanna opens her eyes. Rudy’s awake, her legs dangling over the edge of the bed. The brakes of a garbage truck groan a few blocks away.

“Is it those guys from last night?” Joanna asks.

Rudy turns, deep hollows of sleeplessness pitting her face. “I just woke up for some reason and couldn’t go back to sleep.” She pulls the bedspread around her shoulders, fingering the pattern of cigarette burns. “You’re the damn insomniac.”

“All day on the plane couldn’t have helped.”

“I’m fine. Just cold and wide awake.”

Eventually she climbs back in next to Joanna, and they both watch the light edging through. “I think we should take a walk in MacArthur Park tomorrow. Broad daylight.”

“Ru. Don’t joke.”

“Just around the lake. I can’t tell my kids we were right across from it and we didn’t even see it.”
Joanna kisses her forehead and rolls away from her.

Later that morning while Rudy is sleeping, Joanna drinks coffee and eats cornflakes downstairs, the news on low. The lobby is nearly empty, save for the same desk clerk working the last hours of her night shift. Leaning against the desk, a man with a mustache and an expensive suit speaks to her in half whispered Spanish. After Joanna looks over at him one too many times, the man raises his eyebrows at her.

“You need to go somewhere?” He brandishes the same card they received the night before. Fleet Driving Service, LLC. “Ripley’s, Grauman’s. Wherever you’re going.”

She shakes her head and looks away, turning her attention to the television. A liquor store robbery and an elderly woman found dead in a car. Now for some good news, the anchorman says. Last week we told you about a dog in Echo Park that had been severely beaten and burned by his owner. Well, we’re happy to report that Hex has now found a home. A photo appears on the screen, a small, furless dog with stitches holding his flanks together.


Rudy walks in and grabs a handful of powdered donuts, the fire from an Oakland explosion burning on the screen.

“You should try and catch a nap,” Joanna says.

“I’m thinking of becoming a vampire,” she says, her lips caked with sugar. “The glittery kind, but black.”

“Too bad you’re retired. Your students would love it.”

“Oh yeah.” Rudy gobbles another donut and glances out the window at the sickly palms and splayed pool chairs. “So. Feel like floating?”

“If you want something healthier, they have bananas over there. And yogurt.”

“Jo-Jo.”

“Okay, fine.” Joanna sets down her coffee. “Let’s float.”

Rudy does her best impression of a seventh grader on a snow day. “I’ll float. You just try not to sink.”

With the exception of a teenage girl in a blue bikini, they have the pool to themselves. Joanna treads water at the far end and stares at her legs. In the refracted light, they appear longer, as if she’s a circus performer on stilts. Rudy floats in the shallows, water collecting in the empty foam.
bra of her bathing suit. She flexes her feet, spraying microscopic beads of water Joanna’s way.

“Come get a load of me, Jo.”

Joanna wades over and places her palms flat under Rudy’s spine, even though she doesn’t have to. Rudy’s body is made for floating, with her fleshy hips and paddle thighs.

No matter how many times Joanna tries, her body proves incapable of floating, something that Rudy finds hilarious. “Everybody can float,” she insists.

Joanna prefers laps, sidestrokes and butterflies that take her from one end of the pool to the middle in a single push.

In Vegas, on their first anniversary, the women swam in a stone pool stocked with fish, wedged between two artificial waterfalls. “It’s salt-water,” Rudy said. “Foolproof.” Joanna floated for three seconds before her head went under and she came face to face with the open mouth of a dartfish.

Rudy weighs nothing, and Joanna slowly spins her, watches her stare up at the clouds.

“I wish I could wear a little bikini like that girl.”

“She’s a teenager, Ru.”

Rudy cranes her head to look at Joanna, her face elfin with strands of hair plastered over her ears. “I know. But it’d be nice to be able to fill it out.”

Small black beetles float near Joanna’s shoulders, and Rudy threads her fingers through the water and moves them off.

They stay in the pool for two hours, until their skin is wrinkled and numb. When they can’t take the cold any longer, they swim up to the far side and stare out past the palm trees at MacArthur Park. Late afternoon, and they spot a man walking a pit mix. A cluster of women sitting on blankets, blasting a stereo.

“It doesn’t look bad at all,” Rudy says, pulling herself out.

That evening the women sit in the lobby, thigh-to-thigh on a brown leather loveseat, waiting to be retrieved by the driver.

Joanna has squeezed herself into a dark red dress, has flat-ironed her hair into yellow sheets that fall over her shoulders. Rudy wears her birthday present to herself, a green silk caftan. Both women are wearing earrings for the first time in months, and Joanna finds her piercings have nearly closed up in the interim.
When the driver finally arrives, fifteen minutes late, the women jump to their feet and hurry to the door.

“Have a nice time,” the clerk says, her palms flat on the faux marble.

They don’t say anything on the drive over, but their stomachs gurgle. It’s been years since they’ve seen a live concert. Not since Tori Amos gyrating on a piano bench, back when they were new lovers. In the car, they hold hands, their knuckles against the warm leather. A couple of blocks from the Staples Center, the driver drops them off and tells them to call when they’re ready to return to the hotel.

The next three hours, Joanna and Rudy are on their feet in a sea of people, everybody dancing and singing, glowing bracelets sliding on their arms. When Aretha takes the stage, Rudy cheers so loud her voice breaks. Joanna isn’t much on live concerts—being sandwiched in a sweaty crowd—but she finds herself getting into it. When Rudy sings along with “I Never Loved a Man,” Joanna smiles at her like they are privy to the last real secret in the world.

After the concert, they rush out into the street. Glancing into window after window, they end up in a fancy wine bar where everyone has drinks and sits on padded stools, holding the impossibly thin stems of expensive wine glasses. They look around for a menu or a waiter but can find neither, so they fill their empty stomachs with Pinot Noir. Rudy keeps her hand on Joanna’s knee all night, her eyes following the path of wine down Joanna’s throat, deeper into a warm spot somewhere inside her chest, and eventually back up like a wave to her face.

“Aretha!” Joanna shouts. She hears herself not sounding like herself. Like a bird. A hawk. “I fucking love that woman!”

“Language!” Rudy filches some sushi samples from a passing waiter who ignores her.

Joanna has never felt happier. She had hoped for this, to sit across from Rudy and not feel tired. To mark their lives in an unforgettable way. Now, maybe for the first time, she likes the uncertainty, the fact that she can’t predict the future. Persuaded by the chemicals in her bloodstream, the muscles in her shoulders unwind, and she swings her legs from the stool. Her shoes pop off her heels and dangle from her toes.

In the orange glow of the bar, Rudy’s cheeks look like green apples. She keeps offering Joanna tiny squares of tuna and shark, trying to fill her stomach, but Joanna turns her mouth away like a child. “You need to eat something,” Rudy says. Joanna lifts the shark to Rudy’s mouth instead and forces it between her lips.

A constant din rises around them, silverware and laughter, the purring of waiters, but for once Joanna isn’t worried or distracted. She isn’t
thinking about where she has to be tomorrow morning, or about Rudy’s next follow-up with the oncologist, or about the pros and cons of re-doing the upstairs bathroom. The hum of people around her bolsters her, elevates her, pulls her closer. She drinks another glass of the Pinot, and then finishes Rudy’s glass for her.

After a while, there are no more sharp edges.

Joanna is in the bar bathroom straightening herself up when Rudy makes the call. She sits at a glass vanity, trying to bring her face into focus. Unable to make out the subtle details of her eyes, only the line of her mouth and the shape of her hair, Joanna is vaguely aware that the cleavage of her dress has migrated lower than it should be. She tugs it back up to hide the scar. Though she can’t make it out in the swath of red fabric, she knows where it is, dead against her skin.

A white lotus floats in a glass bowl near the door, and on the way out, Joanna grabs the petals and rubs them between her fingers. She knows she’s close to the edge of what she’ll remember tomorrow, that important things will go missing by morning. She makes a deal with herself to remember the taste of the wine, of Rudy’s mouth. The music throbbing in her brain.

Rudy’s arm is supporting her when they walk out into the street. She’s too drunk to notice that the vehicle she’s tumbling into, her dress up around her hips, isn’t the private car but simply a cab. Her head feels heavy and warm, and she rests her cheek against the cool window.

The drive along Figueroa is bumpy, fast enough for the women to slide into each other across the slick seat. The cab smells vaguely of pickles, or of something that’s been pickled, a sharp odor that Joanna wakes to each time she dozes off. She tries to decipher the string of letters in the driver’s name but sees an alphabet of consonants. Outside the window people wait at stop lights, under the awnings of stores, young men who wax and wane.

Joanna squints at a woman crossing the street towards a cigar shop, a toddler holding her hand. She thinks it’s a toddler, but it doesn’t move like a toddler.

“What the hell kind of pet is that?”

“Close your eyes, Jo-Jo,” Rudy says.

Joanna is aware, if only liminally, that Rudy is in control and how unusual this is. If she is honest with herself, she will admit that despite the fact that Rudy has been in charge of thousands of seventh graders
over the course of thirty-five years, she still sees Rudy, in all significant ways, as incapable. She can’t understand why this is, just that it is, a knowing that has seeped into her body in the seven years they have been together.

Maybe it’s because Rudy only stumbled into Joanna by accident, her first woman after a lifetime married to a man in New Mexico, as mother to a nearly grown daughter and son, all of whom abandoned her after she told them the truth. She made a bed with her fake family. Let them make something with her, out of her, for decades, before she realized. Joanna has always felt sorry for Rudy, but for all the wrong reasons. Not because she lived a lie for so long, but because she was too blind, too incapable, to know it was a lie.

When Joanna comes around, she realizes she’s outside. The air feels different. Awake with her head on the green silk of Rudy’s lap, the protuberance of Rudy’s chin above her, the hard, cold resistance of a concrete bench under her. Downtown L.A. fills the edges of the sky where there should be stars.

Rudy looks out ahead.

Though Joanna is not yet herself, her mouth bone dry, one of her shoes gone, she knows where they are.

“I will never forgive you for this,” she says. Even drunk, she is aware that there is much she will never forgive Rudy for. That she can’t know how far she will go to withhold forgiveness.

Rudy stares ahead at the bands of people. So many, just in this one place, on this one night. Some move quickly on the sidewalks, clutching bottles wrapped in paper bags against their thighs. Others wander the patches of grass, circle, and collapse in a heap, crackling like dead leaves. They wear black and white, patchy blankets over their shoulders, or loose jeans and tight wifebeaters, ball caps and skull caps. No one looks particularly menacing. An old, broken man or woman with hair like a prophet, hands fluttering, head rocking, walks along as if he cannot stop.

“I know,” Rudy says.

Joanna should walk away. The hotel is just across the street, blue lights visible. She will have to leave Rudy, walk by the men on the ground, cigarettes dangling from their lips. Wait for the cars to pass. She listens to sirens from some worse off part of town. “I’m leaving,” she says, but she doesn’t move.

Pennies shine at the bottom of the lake.
Joanna remembers when she was eighteen, straight out of high school. She postponed college for a year and went to live near a food co-op run by her uncle and a bunch of hippies in Northern California. Every season but winter they grew and harvested something—cranberries, apples, sunflowers, yams—and every season but winter they slept outside in a barn. They woke to different people, strangers, whom they offered fruit.

Joanna walked into town once a week and called her mother from a payphone to lie to her. “Yes, we just had roast beef. Aunt Susan’s roast beef. No, no drugs. Uncle Jim wouldn’t hear of it.”

That summer, Joanna lost her virginity. Tamara Danelle Henley. In the woods where Uncle Jim grew and harvested cranberries in the ponds, they stripped, their hair floating, tangled in berry stems. Afterward, they licked pond water from each other’s fingers. In the afternoon they went back to the group, their skin smelling like peat moss. The girls stayed apart from each other for the rest of the day, as if being close might give them away.

The last time Joanna saw her Uncle Jim, he was smoking weed near the bonfire, in his bathing suit. He waved as her mother yanked her by the hair into the Buick.

Joanna presses her foot into the dirt, forcing it to yield. She wishes that something big would happen, something to make this moment seem less important, less memorable. That her dead mother would appear scolding, yanking her away, Joanna’s long hair in her fist. An angry animal on the loose, its parts poorly stitched together. A leg by the lake, a tail by the bandshell. An earthquake to open the ground, send them clawing their way out.

Joanna finds Rudy’s fingertips under the stone bench.

A cop has begun to patrol the periphery, shining a search light back and forth. The light dances across them and stops before moving on, as if it doesn’t know yet what it wants to find.