

Kate Kimball

White Daughter

It was summer—a hundred and ten degrees, dust sweeping across the valleys from the occasional wind, cacti looking almost neon under the haze of endless blue sky, the distant howl at night of coyotes paired with the quiet hum of semis and wind-blown trash and debris off of Route 64 across New Mexico. It was summer—and there was Lia, sleeping late, drinking warm beer in cans or chilled tomato juice at eleven a.m., turning on talk radio that never said much of anything, swatting flies from room to room. Everything was hot to the touch and completely repulsive. Waking up, Lia felt the smoldering sun across her pillow, pressed into her almost permanently wrinkled face. That's how her days began—full of resistance.

Later that morning, Lia stood on her porch, stretching her arms out, feeling the heat of the almost constricting air. *Paradise*. She had watched the outstretched brown land, the hills running like an open palm, and she listened to the sound of the highway. The interstate signs flickered in the sun like satellites or beams of spaceships that were uncertain of how to land.

She was confused by living at the edge of the reservation on government fee land—as though she was split between worlds and time periods. Her mother told her that was the thing with Begayes. They never could make a choice. They took whatever was handed to them.

Lia remembered thinking that the day was too serene when she had received the news about Andrew's conviction. That morning, she was smoking her occasional cigarette, flicking the ash to the bushes below. She didn't even care about possible fire. She was imagining her trailer being consumed in flames and destroying her few possessions. Andrew would like that. He would. He would laugh in that sullen, quiet way of his, shoulders shaking, head down. He would laugh and laugh.

She wasn't surprised when the phone rang, vibrating against the railing. Her neighbor, a woman who had long conversations in Spanish on her veranda, was hanging wash to dry on the line. The sheets beat against the sand and wind, and the woman spoke to them, yelled even, in her perfectly foreign language that sounded obscenely sexual. And she had this way with the sheets, as though she was about to caress them rather than drag them from the line. Her touch was quick and flawless—the ability of a much younger woman. The way her arms moved reminded Lia of her son as a child—when he would open his hands and mimic airplanes as though he was about to take

flight.

Lia picked the phone up almost too late. It was the district attorney. He was tall, thin, and wore bowties. He was the whitest man Lia had ever seen. He had once spilled his iced coffee all over her kitchen floor. He had apologized, but she had cleaned it up. She had said she didn't care. And it was true—she didn't. She had been cleaning up after men her entire life. White men, who around her, seemed whiter.

Over the phone, the attorney let the pieces of bad news fall out haphazardly, as though he had no real time to explain the details to her. He was doing her a *favor* after all, there was little in it for him. *Andrew might call. There was a decision. Please have a seat. Please. Yes. It went the best it could. Yes. The best. The outcome? A life sentence. A life sentence, Mrs. Begaye. No chance for parole. Really, considering everything, he really is quite lucky.*

And the sad thing was, she had to agree.

Andrew had been in and out of detention centers as a youth, and jail as he got older. He said he liked the comfort and the lack of privacy. He had once even bragged about the food and the people he had met, telling her it was like the fraternity that he never had the chance to join. "There's no chance for secrets," he told her once. "They watch you when you sleep, piss, even think about jacking off, everything. It's really *real*." He didn't care about the fist fights or the drills at night. Secretly, she thought he did do what he said he didn't. Secretly, she had known he would do that all along.

The white daughter was the surprise.

A man from Child Protective Services called later with *the news*. "We want to bring her by today, if that's alright with you." Lia shrugged, knowing he couldn't see her, knowing nothing she said or did could change matters. The man talked about the mother's drug addiction and accidental overdose. He talked about her hundred and ten pound frame bent over a sink in a convenience store bathroom several weeks ago. He talked about crystal meth—the elixir of poor people. Lia couldn't picture Andrew touching her. Her son was 6'5 and 260 pounds. She hadn't been able to wrap her arms around him in years. She gave him one of those half-armed careless hugs and a peck on the cheek whenever he had stopped by. She knew her son could suffocate a woman like that. She knew he could break a hundred and ten pound woman like that.

Lia listened to words like *family* and *guardianship*. She felt the heat of the phone as it entered her ear and wrapped around her brain. She felt cradled by the heat, as though it was something intoxicating, completely consuming and safe. It was a hill she was rolling down, a hole she was falling into. She should have been happy to receive such

news in the middle of the hottest day of the year. Lia didn't want the white daughter. But, after all had been said and done, she took her anyway. *A granddaughter. For you to raise. A granddaughter. For you.* Yet, the feeling that came over her felt like one of the beginnings of Andrew's statements of defense—empty, apathetic, confusing, and wrong.

“Just bring the potato salad . . . or your deviled eggs . . . and the ingredients for flat bread. Wait—I think I have flour. Just bring something. Doesn't really matter. Jon's doing the grilling,” Kai sucks in her breath and then breathes out slowly, as though it is causing her pain to form words. Lia looks down at the peeling linoleum in her kitchen, swats a beetle to the side, and begins running water for dishes. She listens to White Daughter, and is relieved to hear nothing, just the empty sound of the fan against her cheap walls. Her sister, her twin, left the reservation years ago. She married three times, and now, with Jon, lives in the city in a house painted light blue—the color of a forgotten Easter egg. Every year she throws a large summer barbeque with the typical flat bread and mutton that Jon grilled or deep-fried and every year Lia has to bring the potato salad or the deviled eggs. In the end, she settles on warm, cheap beer. She's always cheap. There are some things that will never change.

“Jon's whole family's coming this time, new additions and all. He invited some buddies from work to even things out with the guys. He always complains that there are too many women at these things, but you know, it'll just be us and Chris and the neighbor—Rosa, and Aunt Valerie and Jenny and all the kids, legit and illegit, and the triplets and Ma. Ma said she'd come, chair and all.”

“She's coming?” Lia can hear Kai's dog barking in the background. She says he's trained, but he runs wild and yaps at whomever he can.

“That's what she said. I'm picking her up, early or whatever, from the neighbor's house.”

“Who?”

“I don't know. Old Man Anabis, I think. The man who moved in two houses down. They're friends.”

“What?”

“They spend time reminiscing and being disgruntled about all the changes to the nation. Old Man Anabis used to be on the Board or something. Tell Jasalyn to come. She can bring whomever, a friend. Craig's coming, you know? The one I wanted you to meet before.”

Lia sucks in her breath, rinses her hands in the cold water. Her sister is always doing this . . . trying to set her up with someone. She says it's for her own good and that she doesn't have to get married or

anything, but a little fun might not be so bad. Lia doubts her daughter, Jasalyn, will come. She moved off the reservation to go to nursing school years ago, and when she was sixty grand in debt to student loans, she realized she needed to join the air force instead and settle on being a medical technician, and she quit college and enlisted. Every time Lia invited her home, Jasalyn would list off every excuse possible, every possible place she would rather go than back to the reservation.

Jasalyn wrote emails and sent them to an address she set up for Lia. She bought her a laptop for her last birthday so she could check what they said. Lia never turned it on. A few weeks ago, when rent was due and hard to come by, she sold it. She sold it to a man who said his son needed it for college. He was going to become an architect, he told her. The man had graying hair and wore glasses two sizes too big. He cleared his throat over and over—an annoying habit, she realized later, that reminded her of her ex-husband. She wondered if the man she sold it to was able to read all those emails from her daughter. If he had, did he reply?

“I mean, he’s a really *great* guy. Not like last year or the one before that. Jon knows him, really well, in fact,” Kai says again, popping her gum into Lia’s ear. Lia nods.

“Well, honey, I gotta go. Just bring yourself, the baby, and the eggs, okay?” Lia nods again, fully aware that her sister can’t hear her, won’t hear her. She stands in front of the kitchen sink, hair matted against the side of her face because she hasn’t combed it in days ever since she ran out of shampoo. “Okay then,” she tells Kai, before hanging up the phone.

White Daughter hates the outdoors. She cries if the sun beats on her perfect white skin for more than a moment. Earlier that day, Lia had scrounged around at the dollar store for a hat. “Here, use this,” she told White Daughter. She ran her forefinger along the baby’s cheekbones, and knew that they were from her son—his high, perfectly defined jaw line. She had his nose—wide bridge, small nostrils, and his long, thin toes, the mole on his back. “She might darken,” he had told her the last time he called and she told him about White Daughter’s sensitivity to sun. “Doesn’t matter because I know she’s mine.”

Lia had to remind herself of this from time to time. She had to remember her son when White Daughter threw up perfect white streams of milky vomit. She had to remember whenever White Daughter opened her white mouth and screamed from two in the morning until three or four or until white light filled Lia’s head. And more still—when she found herself entering menopause and buying folded generic white diapers in white plastic packaging shelved over cheap off-white linoleum.

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Lia always struggled with babies. She didn't have that natural ability that other mothers had of knowing what they wanted at all hours of the night. She had to be reminded to feed them by a complaining neighbor, or an orderly at a hospital. She felt this deep despair—unable to get out bed some days, unable to wash or eat. She felt alienated from them—and missed the strong security of having them underneath her skin. She missed their kicks and the jabs at her ribs. She missed the pressure of not being able to swallow the last bites of a meal, of feeling full and completely satisfied. She missed the strain of breathing. She missed the quiet hum of blood at night, when she could almost hear the beat of her heart flowing into theirs.

The doctor had told her it was part of a transition, an almost separation anxiety, which actually was quite common among new mothers. He gave her pamphlets and the number for a local hotline. But, for whatever reason, she always knew she was a better incubator than she ever was a mother.

“You're not holding her right,” Jasalyn picks up White Daughter, pushing Lia's arm to the side. “You have to make her feel safe.” She bounces the baby a little, and sure enough, White Daughter stops screaming. For a minute, Lia almost felt a sense of relief, as though she was just beginning to understand something about the baby. Progress.

“You always had a way with children,” she tells her daughter. To this, Jasalyn rolls her eyes. “She just needs to feel wanted,” Jasalyn kisses the top of her head, smoothing her feathery hair with her forefinger, and the baby smiles. Lia feels a little surge of jealousy, listening to the hum of the fan from the other room. She thinks about the baby, removed from a home in the city. She had an air-conditioned house with a backyard she could have ran laps in. The foster family even had a pool under construction. “They are wonderful people,” the CPS agent had told her when she brought White Daughter to her.

“Have you decided on a name yet? I still vote for Ava, but if you want to keep it in the family, I would say Nascha. What do you think, baby?”

White Daughter stares at Jasalyn and Jasalyn laughs. “Maybe she needs more time to decide on what she wants to be called.”

Jasalyn looks older. Her hair is wound in a tight knot at the back of her head, not a strand out of place. She still wears the turquoise earrings that she had once mocked Lia for wearing. “It looks so touristy,” she had said. Yet, Lia recognizes her mother's ring on her daughter's hand—the onyx stone in the shape of a camellia. It was for luck. Her mother told Jasalyn she would need it. Jasalyn's eyes are lined with dark liner that makes it look like she could pass for Indian

rather than Navajo. She would like that, she would. She always wanted to be something else—Polynesian, Italian, White.

As a child, Jasalyn had won an essay on what it meant to be an American. She wrote about hard work and endurance and family and values and privilege. The newspaper printed her picture—smiling and waving a plastic American flag. Kai said that she was so proud of her niece and that she really felt Jasalyn would become famous one day. “She could always write if the nursing thing doesn’t work out,” Kai said once. She was always in the habit of finding a plan B. She was one that always needed something to fall back on. But Lia felt ashamed and had no regrets about throwing the article away. The article, with its rhetoric about family values and patriotic beliefs of right and wrong, felt like an assassination, and there was a piece of Lia that still felt betrayed.

“I still think she looks nothing like Andrew, but she definitely has his personality. Difficult. All the way.” Jasalyn walks back and forth, pacing over the stained kitchen linoleum and bouncing the baby. “She kind of makes me want one. I mean, the idea of one works, but I know I’d get sick of getting up all night long.” She did this from time to time—said what she wanted and why it would never work. Lia smiles a little. That was the one thing they had in common.

Lia started peeling shells off of the hard-boiled eggs. The shells weren’t coming off smoothly, and she was getting frustrated. “I can’t even remember how to make these . . . you know?”

Jasalyn ran the eggs under the tap, peeling the eggshell back easily with her one free hand. “They’re easy,” she said. “Here, Ma. Take her.”

Lia could feel White Daughter’s blue eyes on her as she picked her out of her daughter’s arm. She bounced her up and down a little, adjusting to the weight. She, at times, felt the baby resented her. She wondered if White Daughter wanted Andrew. Did she know where her father was? Did she know what he had done to get there?

Maybe she would enjoy his crass remarks, his deep laughter, the way his breath smelled like gin and tonic no matter what time it was. Maybe she would enjoy his occasional need for violence and his love of video games. Maybe she would like how money was never an object and how he didn’t know the difference between a hundred dollars and a thousand. He liked to drive fast, and she could bet that he would forget to use a car seat. Did she know he had hundreds of dead baby jokes that he told night after night in a bar? Did she know that he, on occasion, needed to be kicked out of the bar by the owner? Sometimes he looked at a woman too long and came home with welts on his face from a bottle being knocked up the side of his head. Maybe White Daughter would like that.

Instead, she was here in an 8 x 11 bedroom in a trailer that had never been air-conditioned in its life, even when it was a hundred and eleven degrees outside. It was dry, and the heat made Lia worry that the baby would roast from the inside out. She put a fan over White Daughter's bed. "You see?" She had told her. "The heat might not be so bad with this. You might not even care about that house you stayed in." Lia felt that she was always over-compensating and trying to show White Daughter how good of a grandmother/mother she could be. And that was the problem, maybe. She was neither. Truly, that was not something she wanted. And, that had always been okay with her.

Jasalyn helped mix the hard yellow yolks of the eggs into a creamy batter, which Lia spooned inside each white half of the egg. Jasalyn's wrist flicked back and forth, the edge of her denim jacket pulling back from her wrist to expose slanted black print. Lia continued to sprinkle chili powder before finally making out the letters. Instantly, she felt heat rise to her face. "What's this," she says as she pulls for Jasalyn's wrist.

Jasalyn pulls away, hiding her wrist behind White Daughter. "Nothing . . . just a tattoo. Not a big deal." And it wasn't. Jasalyn had tattooed a mermaid on her back. She had a curl of sparrows on her shoulder. She had her name in Konji letters over her left ankle even though she had flunked Japanese in high school and couldn't even remember how to say *thank you very much*. The tattoos reminded Lia of her ex-husband, Jasalyn's father, who was always using his extra money, which was never really extra, to put ink onto his skin. Lia knew it was his excuse for staying out late, drinking too much, sleeping with any woman who didn't mind his roughness. He blamed his lack of fidelity on his Inuit ancestors, who had a common belief about sharing partners. "What about me?" Lia had asked him once. "What if my beliefs are different than that? What if I want you as my own?" He had laughed at her then. As she laid under the weight of him, she felt the heat of another woman steaming from his body. "You Begayes want *too much*," he had said. "You can want all you can, but you'll never figure out how to get it." His hand had touched her cheek then, and she had felt a surge of anger at the tattooed sun on the palm of his hand.

Really, Lia had felt that Jasalyn's tattoos were all beautiful. They did contrast against the beauty of her daughter's sand-like skin and made her look exotic, which was a far cry from other women of the reservation. Their tattoos ran together—globes of ink that looked like footprints, showing where they had been and where they would never go. Jasalyn's were always a cry for escape. Lia knew this, which was why she knew this one was different.

"Ron? Who is this *Ron*?" Lia felt a wave of horror sweep over her. Had she taught her daughter nothing? Here she was, tattooing a

man's name across her wrist. It wasn't the ink that scared her. It was the heat of his name. Or maybe it was the shape—the "o" being a noose that seemed to wrap around her daughter. This wasn't a lover. He was more. Jasalyn had been in love before. Lia always thought she experienced love like one trains for a marathon—vigorously and with no actual thought of completion.

"Ron, this guy on base that I know."

"What guy on base? You've never mentioned anything—"

White Daughter was starting to fuss. Lia bounces her again, talking to her in soft gibberish.

"Ron. The guy on base. I was meaning to tell you about him, I mean, it's serious. I mean, we moved in together kind of serious. I was going to tell you, but with everything with Andrew, it just didn't seem like the right time. I mean—"

"That you weren't even planning on bringing him up until things were more . . . settled? Leave Andrew out of this—you blame him for everything."

Jasalyn shot her that look. But she didn't regret what she said. Jasalyn blamed Andrew for a lot. She even had a way of blaming Lia's lack of motivation on his versions of violence. When the investigators had first visited her trailer, Lia hadn't been surprised. What had surprised her was what Jasalyn had told them—as though she had been waiting to tell them about Andrew for her entire life. She listed off the times he smashed holes through windows or walls, and told them about depression and anxiety. She blamed lost opportunities in school over Andrew's juvenile detention and the money that was always hard to come by to pay his fines. She blamed things on him that Lia didn't know he had relation to—the loss of her best friend's virginity, the family's forced move to the trailer at the edge of the reservation because of difficulties with his stealing from neighbors who had less than they did, the hands of older men that came after her when they thought she was like her brother—easy to come by and even easier to get rid of.

"I don't have to come to this, you know. I mean, I'm doing you a favor helping out with the baby and all—and the eggs."

"Please. How is that a favor? Do you go to Ron's family gatherings? Have you met his people?"

"I've met some."

"Hm . . . I see. Well, if this is an inconvenience to you—"

"It isn't—Ma! I'm not saying that—"

"And you've probably told him all about Andrew and all about—"

"No! Listen! It's not like that. It's just, I'm happy. Ron is a great guy. And yeah. I love him. And you can deal with that. He knows

all about Andrew. You know? Everyone knows about Andrew. It was all over the place! Newspapers! Television, Ma! People know!”

Lia listened to the hum of the baby’s breathing. She felt a knot in her chest like a constricting cobra ready to finish her off.

“Everyone knows, Ma. You can’t leave it. And this? Andrew? C’mon. Andrew’s inside everything. He always has been and always will be. Here we are, with his daughter, trying to separate ourselves from him? News Flash. You’re *raising* her.”

Craig immediately asks to hold White Daughter. “I have a way with children,” he tells Lia, winking. He’s like many men that have been interested in her. He’s older, the glint of an out-of-place diamond in his ear, his hair slicked back. He isn’t like the last one. He’s neater and doesn’t smell like bourbon. He isn’t like the one before that. He’s in shape. He has that clean look, like he cares about things. His hand brushes hers when he goes to pick up the baby, and for a minute, she feels pleasure.

“She has your nature,” he says, giving her a nod. He rocks her back and forth, and soon, White Daughter closes her eyes and scrunches her nose underneath her hat. Lia knows she will soon be asleep.

“She’ll grow out of it,” Lia tells him, finding herself falling into the trap of many young girls. Soon she will be laughing, being eager to be taken back to a time before all of this, before she felt her age.

Craig just smiles his white smile and turns to White Daughter, reciting lines of a poem that Lia vaguely recognizes. She thinks about him then, what it would feel like to be in his arms underneath the brightness of sun. Would it mean joy? Would it mean beauty? As they touch each other, would it mean anything at all?

Kai waves to her across the yard. Her dog is running around, yapping at the two boys playing with water guns—Rosa’s youngest. Jasalyn is helping Jon with the grilling. She hasn’t said a word to Lia since they left her trailer. Kai lights a cigarette and pulls the strap of her top back onto her shoulder. She wraps her arm through Lia’s and tells Craig that she needs to steal her sister away. “But don’t worry,” she tells him with a smile, “I’ll only say good about you.”

They walk across her yard and Lia smells the citrus perfume that Kai insists on wearing despite her asthma and doctor’s recommendations. “He likes you,” she says to Lia, tapping her on the back with her fist. “How you holding up?”

Lia thinks about this question, knowing that here is Andrew, again, sweeping across the words she will choose to say. She looks at her mother, asleep underneath the Texas Madrone and wonders if that

will be her in a few more years. She watches the boys circle with the water guns, and hears Jon whistle over the grill. This, only this, can mean paradise.

“It is what is. No shame. The baby’s getting adjusted.”

“And Jasalyn came? She really is quite pretty . . . takes after Ma’s people. She gonna get married soon, girl? You need another kid around. At least with her, she wouldn’t stick you with her offspring.”

Lia laughs and shakes her head. “I don’t know about that. She’s a stubborn girl. She’s not looking for a baby yet.” Kai laughs. She has this carefree way about her that has always been soothing to Lia.

Jon whistles over the grill and announces that they will be eating soon. “Bout time!” Kai calls back, telling him to bring her a beer. She swats her dog away when he starts yapping and jumping up on Lia. “He really is trained,” she tells her.

“You need to get your money back,” Lia tells her.

“We should wake Ma,” Kai says. “She was hungry earlier.”

They walk over to the Texas Madrone, and crouch down under the shade. Lia taps her mother’s hand lightly. Her head falls to the side, and lets out a sigh before she says her daughter’s name, cold and flat. *Lia*. The sound of despair.

“Ma—c’mon, wake up! Lia’s here and Jasalyn and Andrew’s baby. You want to meet her?” Kai holds her hand over her eyes and tries to make out the silhouette of Craig against the vibrant sun. She swats a fly from her mother’s chair. “Ma—”

“You need to shoot that dog,” she says, opening one of her eyes and squinting in the sun. “He yaps too damn much. Can’t even enjoy the breeze anymore. Can’t even listen to the tree. It’s all too much out here in the city. You can’t hear nothing.”

Kai laughs a little. “Oh, Ma. That’s why you’re such a joy when you visit! You need some lemonade,” Kai says.

“I need gin.”

“Can’t do that, Ma. Doctor’s orders, remember? Let me get the lemonade.” Kai taps Lia’s shoulder before leaving. She does this from time to time—leaves her with her mother that Lia has always felt is deeply disappointed with her. “Don’t let her be too hard on ya,” she whispers. Lia crouches down, takes her mother’s hand, tries to get her attention. She feels tired already. She waits and listens to the boys squirting each other with water.

“You name that baby yet?” Her mother whispers. Her voice is heavy and sounds like a man’s. A few years ago, she quit smoking. A month later, she had a stroke and wound up in the chair. Lia always thought about how ironic it was.

“Not yet, Ma. I can’t decide what to name her,” Lia tells her,

sitting down in the grass and kicking off her shoes. “She doesn’t look a thing like Andrew, but Jasalyn says she acts just like him. Stubborn. Hardheaded. All the way. Probably a little like all of us, I would say.”

Her mother sits there, blinking her eyes, holding her hand to her head. “You always did take what your men left you.”

Lia sits there, pulling grass from the ground, and knowing that there is nothing she can tell her mother. She thinks about the letters she never opened. She didn’t open the ones from California or Arizona or Montana or any other place that was stamped without a return address that were sent from the families and friends of the women. The time she had opened one of those letters, she wished she hadn’t.

She had read the rage about her son and what he did. She read about heartbreak and sorrow and tragedy and things that were completely unfair. She read about beauty and how he took it away. She read the lines that were poisoned with hate and salted with fear. She read it and read it and lived on it for a few days. It poured out of the milk carton into her cereal. It folded itself against her underneath her sheet at night. It breathed into her when her lips parted over her cigarette. It lined her silverware drawer and whistled over the radio. It rang inside her head until she couldn’t listen or speak.

“He ever ask about his daughter?”

“He knows she’s here, Ma. He knows she’s safe with me.”

“That’s fine, Lia. Fine. Better with you than with *him*.”

Lia watched a dragonfly overhead. She heard the faint hum and it reminded her of the fan in the bedroom—decorative, but useless.

“He’s still my son, Ma. He’ll always be my son, baby or not, this bad news, or none of it. He’s still Andrew. I still gave birth to him. Doesn’t change none of that.” Even as she said this, she knew it did change all of it. Things would never be the same.

Her mother laughed at that, shook her head, and patted her shoulder. “You say more and more stuff. Why’d you come here? To tell me?”

Lia shook her head no. She sees Craig across the yard and motions for him to bring her White Daughter.

“She’s falling asleep,” he tells her as he passes her small body to Lia’s arms. “You’re welcome,” Craig says before he walks away. Lia bounces her a little. “See, Ma? You want to hold her?”

Lia notices the baby’s perfect creamy skin. She sees her small hand and how she had curled her fist around Lia’s index finger. She notices her high cheekbones and how she was completely like Andrew and nothing like him at all. Maybe she was everything Lia had been taught in Bible school years ago when the missionaries came. Lia didn’t remember many of the stories. She knew the main ones—the flood, the parted sea, being in a den with lions and not dying, being

in a furnace and surviving the heat. She knew her mother's stories about healing trees and women that became part of the earth after they died. Lia wasn't sure about miracles. They didn't happen like that, and even here, with a baby as beautiful as Andrew was not, she wonders if maybe they suddenly do happen like that.

Her mother squints her eyes, holds her hand to her head, looks to the sky.

"I don't want to hold her."

"Ma, she's calm now. She's asleep, really."

"She is like her father, then, right? A White Baby with no name. Now you listen, Daughter. No Begaye ever justified his way out of the law. Liars before they were born—whole lotta them. Remember your father?"

"Oh—you know Pa didn't mean—"

"Yeah—you all loved him and his stories. That's all he had. Stories about where he'd been and how he lost that money. He'd tell you all those fancy tales. Let me tell you. He spent it. All of it. All the time. And you? You take whatever anybody gives you, always have."

Craig wasn't as neat as Lia had imagined. In fact, he was downright messy. He had trouble undressing her, and he fumbled over the buttons of her pants. He became frustrated with her top, and she relented and peeled it back for him just like Jasalyn had the eggshells hours before. He breathed heavily against her, and the sound echoed against her head. Now, her head pulsates.

Lia worries about White Daughter. She doesn't want to wake her. She listens to the hum of the fan and thought about all the possibilities she could call her. *Ava, Nascha, Nuna, Yazhi*. Really, she likes Jane. Jane Begaye. The furthest thing away from Andrew. The edge of the reservation—caught between worlds and time periods.

It's uncomfortable being this close to heat, and as Craig pushes against her, Lia thinks of the coolest wind in the world. She thinks about Andrew and his isolated cell and the picture in the paper after his conviction and how his teeth had become the color of the sand he grew up walking all over. Craig's hands run down her back, and for a second, she thinks about the bars of the prison and how they keep some in and others out. And for second, everything is that simple.

He runs his lips along her neck and grazes her collarbone. His tongue laps into hers. She wants it to feel good, but instead, she thinks of all the things she has never wanted. His tongue reminds her of every ten-cent bologna sandwich she had ever made her children. She thinks about their metal lunchboxes and how far Jasalyn had gone, tattooing a man's name onto her wrist. She thinks about the perfect "o" and how Craig's mouth swallowed her like the noose that branded her

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daughter's wrist. She could be lost and never return, her feet leaving without tracks.

Still, she is a Begaye. And her mother's right about them. They were liars from the beginning. Dark and forgotten. Lost and locked away. She knows this, even now, as she begs for Craig to go deeper and to pull her as tightly to him as he possibly can. Her fingers disappear into the folds of his skin and she feels like the metal shell of her trailer. This, and only this, can mean paradise. And it hurts, but still, she tells him she wants it and it is all she can do to make it true.

His hands try to caress her and she wants it to be soft, but instead, she feels as though he's trying to knead dough. She pictures her body rolled out like the white sugar cookie mix she will one day make for Jane to cut shapes into. Maybe Jane will frost them. Maybe Lia will take a plate to her mother and tell her about the new low-fat recipe she picked up in the city.

She closes her eyes again and tries to focus. She wants to forget this—her hair in unwashed clumps running through his thick, oversized hands, her body's softness, the sound of her name as he moans it through his teeth. She wants to forget this—the taste of deviled eggs and chili powder that Jasalyn had helped make, the heat of the flatbread, the lemonade that Kai had put too much sugar in, the fried mutton, burnt hot dogs and soggy potato salad, the plastic orange and green water guns, her mother's frail, dying body, the dragonflies in the air.

"Where are you?" Craig whispers to her as he runs his forefinger gently along her jawbone. She feels his touch, and for a second, believes she can be nothing but his treasure. "Where did you go?"

She stretches her arms out completely, reaching for infinity. "I'm here," she tells him. "I've always been here."

