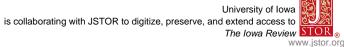
James McKean

Тоотн

I'm near the end myself so hooray for this citizen who leaves his car in midtraffic and climbs the hood of the car in front of him. stopped in the lane next to me at a red light in Oakland, California, on a hot summer afternoon. He finally has his say, swearing through tomato-red cheeks, fist balled, and spitting. I keep my window rolled up though I'd cheer if my mouth didn't bleed and words didn't stumble from my numb lips. Today I took a friend's advice but her well-meaning Italianborn dentist, who believes in cleansing by pain, could wrench my tooth out only at rush hour. I made it on time but crawl back in traffic that lines up like teeth. All I taste is iron and cotton. I swear the radio plays opera from Milan, a chorus of famous dentists come home, doing fifty molars an hour, their gap-toothed relatives suffering no more. I paid for his leverage. With his probe he pointed out what I should let go and what I might save. I saved the memory of two breasts at eye-level beneath the white, blood-spotted smock of Becky, the assistant who winced on cue when my tooth cracked, who caught it in a pan, who wrote my future on a little card and wrapped my tooth in foil like silver rigatoni, a relic, blessed with pliers, and in her hands forever wise. Wait, I've found Daly City to be a boundless stucco grin. Wait. The lady in the car next to me doesn't move as if the man jumping on her hood is full service, doing a jig, conducting. I'd like to thank him. I'm nearly home and will drink soup and lie down and think of him, afoot at last in lane two, his wonderful



paroxysms and rage, who left his car behind as if it were a bad tooth, the motor running and the keys locked inside when the light turns green and we all drive off in a great crescendo of honking.