

RICHARD TERRILL

*I Kept the Part about Turning Fifty*

“More on the theme of suddenly finding yourself at middle age  
and less perhaps about memories that are more telling to the  
writer than the reader.”

—Rejection slip

So I lost the part about walking to school,  
the new subdivision after the war, unfinished,  
cutting through Kocha’s field with all the dandelions  
(or a calf-high puddle of slush we waded in March),  
passing Ma Whiting’s house, the beer bottles, cigarette cartons  
piled even above the trash can rim, still life-ing into the street,  
the dead end where she lived with her seven kids and no husband,  
how they ate jelly sandwiches. It was all they could afford,  
our parents said. The piss and stale dirt smell  
of her kids on the playground. One seemed to be named “Poopy.”  
You could hear everyone, even his mother, call that out after school  
from the holey screen door, cigarette wrangling,  
misshapen housedress, the house  
with gray-green asphalt siding, the house  
that must have been there when Kocha’s was still a farm  
and our yards planted in corn or beans.  
“Poopy,” she called, “Poopy, get in here.”  
Her voice gruff as old stone  
smashed along their unpaved driveway.

I decided to cut the scene  
where Miss Campbell, first grade, huffs  
and pulls a Whiting girl by her stained smock  
to the sink like the one in back of every room.  
She bends the girl under the faucet,  
lathers a hand soap to froth  
and washes the dirty girl’s hair,  
fingers ram straight, but hands moving gently, effective

through the tangle that surely becomes dark blond.  
The suds cascade to the beige countertop,  
down the face of the pine cabinet  
where the art supplies were kept and, I remember,  
onto the checkerboard tile of the cold floor.