

On This Sunday: Joshua · *Kristina McGrath*

THIS TIME OF YEAR with everything just about to shoot up green, the weather zigzags between two seasons. A day gets going cold to good to cold. Nature can't be bothered making up her mind one way or the other. She comes and goes with what she's got to give.

But under her neglect, I prosper: And the fields prosper in the altogether. That's what counts. It all turns out.

I'm happy enough with whatever happens to the sky. Weather when it's all mixed up is a kind of company, like somebody talking to you, saying one thing and then another. Weather's how you have a conversation with this earth. Still it confuses a man up with clothes, putting them on and off.

Start of spring gives me that boy chill. I was always cold, never much for just shirt sleeves, and maybe felt a little bit of shame for that. A boy is more like his mother than what he has to be. So I'll just go ahead and get me that sweater. I'm cold and not about to say I'm not.

UNWANTED STRUCTURES

Coming back alone from Mazelle's tonight, in the quiet dark of the truck's cab, was just about the same as being there. I could hear the back roads echo up into the hollows above the wheels. How that woman can stand thinking of who-knows-what by that window for God-knows-how-long, watching at things so close that are so far off, I don't guess.

I like it when there's talk; otherwise it's so dead. Even if you say May, do you know where they sell some fresh good candy around here? Not around here, she might say, no place around here. No, not one bit of a place. At least that's something.

But sometimes talk is a bell and a whistle you just don't need and a radio's the best thing for the both of you. Her standing by that window without a word is better than somebody who talks to any old thing that walks by, always having to say what it is they feel like thinking.

At this age you don't want to throw too much thought at the night or too much money into furniture. I've smartened up since coal was king in West Virginia and I lived a married life. I'm settled near with everything. No talk, just move your feet is fine.

I may be superstitious but I drive a Chevrolet and own a G.E. freezer. And I don't do things by dreaming about them anymore. Why I've never drifted slow into a thing my whole grown life. I see what I want and I get up out of the house to get it.

I'll be getting that motor house from Tom Battes (call him Hop). Hop is a man of talent. When he fires two pieces of metal together, you'd swear it was one. But Hop's not much for putting things together. Mainly he's into what he calls deconstruction work. Unwanted structures, he says, that's his business. If it doesn't burn down, he'll take it down, haul it off, and he always leaves the ground real clean. Not that you'd know it from his own backyard, where he's always got a watermelon or a bushel of something laid up and likely gone bad that someone left as a calling card because Hop's a sick man. The neighbors clutter up his porch with casseroles.

Or piles of scrap iron, cans of motor oil, storm windows and pumps, parts of failed barbershops or sheds, display cases, refrigerator doors and coils. Somebody's always left with what other people don't want. Even if you burn it or pound it down into something else, a thing doesn't disappear or give up easily into the earth but works its way to a heap somewhere else, probably at Hop's.

I did enjoy supper with him last night and found him fine. Though he continues to be a very sick man, he looks real nice and he's never lonely because you can always see plenty of vehicles parked in his front yard.

If Hop has his way, I'll meet his price on the motor house. If I have mine, I'll be heading north, up 77, along the Cuyahoga into Cleveland, hoping westward for whatever I see. I want plenty more said of me than I died recently in Ohio.

The future is a road that I don't people with the hope of some particulars; whatever comes my way I'm going to like it. That clump of pines has kept me in its green too long. A person needs more than trees, a person needs a road, a good long stretch of it. Maybe some nice eating places along the way, that's about my one desire.

My sweaters taste bitter with farming when I pull them off up across my lips. So I said to Battes: Hop, I'll meet your price by the end of Spring, because everything's in motion, even the hills. There's not one single thing I see that isn't changing.

HOME

At this age, a motor house is a right thing. Home isn't one place anymore; it's pitched across the map and into yonder. Home is all the places where you've been, and where you're standing now with your feet all mixed up with your furniture, and where you were dead sure once you'd get to go but haven't yet. Home is a runner. It's made of metal atop 6 wheels or held together by yellow mud and horsehair.

That was my father's house that died in the woods. His mother reworked the same fields, sat in the same chair, used the same spoon for forty years on that place. They carried her out through the hollow to the doctor on her own supper table, through pine woods and creek water to the clearing of the road. Had to bury her right there, where at least she could get to see into town.

Her people built that house near what's now Neon, near Dirt Branch. After my mother died, Daddy stayed on in it and spent a life building rail track, then sheds, then wooden pups with pouts so real but just the size of half dollars. His years were headed straight to what little was left of the porch.

A person knew how to do everything then. The one that helped you build your barn was the one that set your leg. Even the general store owner was an expert on everything when I was a boy: a can of beans, some boots, a hoe, a pickle or tar for the roof. Green wood became a broom or bed. Ohio woods held everything, and I was taught to stay, like my father did, till the last of the house became a mudrise in the woods, with bits of forks and spoons that glittered up the ground.

Even though they might have looked pretty in starlight doesn't mean I'll let my life get whittled down to what's left of the silverware. I was taught to stay but that doesn't mean I'm not leaving. Your home goes the way of the earth. Another crops up if you make it be.

GEOGRAPHY

I may be old but I remember what dreams I took to having when I was a kid in what little school I had a chance at. We raised our hands and our hands were like peaches. Now geography, that was like dreaming, and it was a matter of interest to me. I stood square center on America and knew

my east, west, Pittsburgh, or Paris. I stretched out past mail box and fence post into cathedrals or deserts. I liked being smartened up about what was where and the weather that blew the soul into a place.

Your memory, the stories you were told, that's your geography, but only its start. I need to make me some new geography. I don't mind thinking now and then what I already know, thinking what's left and who's dead these years. But I don't need to dwell on wind like some. Recollecting is hard. It pulls the ground right out from under. You get nowhere but gone and I'm not fond of it. I trust I'm moving when my feet walk. Home is a hunter; it'll find me.

LOST

There's a certain softness to it though when a body stands so still, her hands at rest on the sink, those potato sack corduroys hanging down quiet around her ankles. There's a kindness to a body looking out a window like that. Sometimes you need to get yourself to cry, leave it be plain in your eyes. I can abide that. I can appreciate the night, just standing in the middle of it without a hey to anything. I'm just not fixed on it.

Don't be so worrisome, at least make a first-class effort, I'd like to say. But Mazelle's think-time is her business. If it takes her that much time and effort to make coffee like it was chicken and biscuits, then so be it.

Sunday's a large part of what's wrong with the week, if you ask me. Filled with all its quiet, with too much churchtime, it's slow as dust, especially in summer with every little thing lit up in the air. Your mind is heavy like tub water; the clocks get slow. Even if you don't go by way of any church, you can still feel Sunday in the air, the end of all creation and everything at its start all over again.

Some people need to make life hard like a puzzle that has to fit or be forgiven when they're dead tired. But I'll just go ahead with what I have to do today. I'm pleased enough with plain and simple. Though lambing isn't, nor plowing and growing. There's too much sky and wind around those jobs, a person would be a fool not to notice, get struck in the heart by it, and dream about Ivory when a lamb gets born, or when the fields come up.

So something new sprouts up, or you stand alone in the middle of a just-plowed acre; so you changed the face of the earth, at least the speck of it that's turned your way, and you think of who used to be your wife. That

doesn't make you a fool. When a day is filled with buzzflies, smell of the earth, it's a poor heart that won't leap backwards or forwards to Ivory.

But I have no business with the past or future. They don't belong to me. I lost my claim on them when Ivory shot out of this place and left me with a Tuesday. Pondering doesn't sit right with me and I don't like the hard questions too often. Who you love, what you lose, and when you die, those are under God's headings.

I have a real notion that things work out the way they're supposed to. It's a relief to know you're not going to get what it is you lost. That's what lost means. It means it isn't in your house and you don't live with it anymore.

I get a sense in my bones of what's just not possible. Then I let it fly from my hand like a bird, or a kid on a bicycle for the first time. Set off your fate into the world, steady it first with the truth, she'll do fine.

Truth, that's the hard part. Sometimes it's so far off, out a window, down a road. There's not a single thing to see, but something's coming to you any slow second from the night. You can't tell one thing apart from another, a barn and its trees, what used to be and now. You stand there breathing like a well breathes a bucket. It makes a person stay up half the night in a chair, though sometimes it's true, there's just no use disturbing an otherwise fine piece of bed.

AMEN

I know more than you think I know, I'd like to tell her. A woman like you, alone like that for all these years. I've got ears and this town's got a mouth. If you have to stay apart from here because you're still mixed up with years ago, so be it. As far as I'm concerned that woman you still love is just another tree or creek, and we've all got rights to sit in the shade or drink water.

If you need to stand by that window till kingdom come on account of any creature, man or woman, you loved, then that's your business and none of mine, Joshua Day's.