

Turning. Returning

My mama's story—before we and everybody in Fort White knew about Daddy, Gail, and the room he'd rented for a month down in High Springs, before I started waking in bed with my own fresh piss cooling around me,

before the greedy-eyed sympathy (*how hard it is to keep a man in your bed*)—about my birth was mostly about him. *I was too afraid to hold you, she'd say. You were mad! Oh, you were screaming-mad.*

But your Daddy wasn't afraid. No, he picked you right up, still all purple and bloody, showed you off to every nurse and doctor in there.

Even after, she told it. I could picture him: glee-stumbling

down Lake City Medical Center's Pepto-Bismol-colored halls, white t-shirt festooned with her blood, standing with military precision, shoulders thrown back like he's gripping a two-by-four between the blades.

Except he's holding me. It was years before I found the pictures—years when the space between them firmed up and I could hide in it. In the envelope marked *Della* and the day of my birth, there were half a dozen

snapshots, and each one showed her, holding me. One after another, she's holding me. In one, she's touching my hair; one, my mouth open wide with want. In one of them, her eyes and mine are closed.

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