

**Helen, Kly and I
 splash ourselves wet in
 the near clear river,
 our Eurotas, we're
 cleansing our bodies,
 anointing, before
 races we'll win, in
 six teams of eighty
 naked girl bodies under
 sun and sky, we'll fly,
 we are mares, tickled
 by smudged slime and the
 water's course, caught in the
 currents and on**

No, I'm okay, Nora replied, balancing herself, checking the ground. If she took her mother's hand they both might fall. Her mom wears the brown mittens that might look better on a buffalo, her mom's stiff when wet mohair mittens. Nora's mittens are umbilically attached, one on each end of a long braided yarn string strung through her sleeves. Nora's plastic snow coat crunches as she tromps through the street's sooty snow or tiptoes over patches of black ice making the little button loops of her red rubber galoshes more than a little nervous. She walks with her mom to Tillim's on the far side of town. Established in 1960, the same year Nora was born to Cynthia and Don on Christmas Eve, the Tillim family still runs an upholstery showroom nearby to this day. In the '60s Tillim's was a full on fabric store. Red-cheeked from the

she was relieved, exhilarated and excited cuz this birth of hers was meant to be i'd be all hers with no one else to lay claim to me just what she wanted but she didn't consider me that i might want a father that i might want some semblance of an ordinary family someday she didn't see but how could she--she was happy and selfish and, well, she was she, and she had me born a few days late, on valentine's day in nineteen ninety five i don't know much about the pregnancy except she thought

**the wildly green banks,
 we cannot stop our
 laughing, so loudly,
 geese and ducks quacking
 girls will do this, laugh
 maniacally,
 that's us, ducks and geese,
 I am one of these,
 a purple duck, when
 I was a wee babe
 given 'A' names, not
 Penelope yet,
 but Arnaea or
 Arnacia or**

to make, something new, a dress or two, one for each of
 them, maybe matching. Something for spring. They'd
 pick zig-zagged bric-a-brac trims, buttons and thread.
 Nora had to tiptoe high to see these, all in color order in
 racks she couldn't reach. The man with dark coils framing
 his face, the bespectacled one with the warm eyes who
 smiled sometimes, his head capped and wearing the long
 black jacket they all wore, with white triangular bib and
 baggy black trousers, black and white wiry beard with
 smooth straight curls falling in front of each ear. He
 measures and cuts Cynthia's yardage and takes her money
 for it. From a small gold-clasped coin clutch Cynthia
 searches and spends her coins and bills, then she drops
 the wallet back in her hairy wool satchel, one of the bags
 she brought back from travels long before Nora was born.

*it was kinda fun and that she believed she looked beautiful before i was born, but i was a handful,
 still i was hers--she figured that out, surprisingly she didn't get post-partum depression, given what
 would happen with her later, evidently we went everywhere together and as luck would have it a
 lesbian couple moved into mr dominguez' house down the street when he died and mrs dominguez
 moved in with one of her sons you know they had another son who was supposed to be at the*

Armira were
names given to me
before my parents
had me tossed into
that wine dark sea, those
parents who bore me,
Icarius and
nymph Periboa,
not sure why they tried
to end me, to be
rid of a she who
was not a he, my
mother's bidding, she
naiad of water,

after college in Japan. She travelled alone in the '50s,
 hoarding hanging bags through Iran and Afghanistan, Iraq
 and Pakistan. Later through Mexico, long before Cancun
 was man-made, when pyramids remained mysterious
 unexcavated mounds--through Uxmal and Tulum,
 Chichén Itzá, San Cristobal to Oaxaca—then Taxco for
 souvenirs by the silversmith Spratling got while that
 master still lived. Her sling bags were wool with itchy
 twisted yarn for straps, others a tight cotton weave
 coming down their sides framing colorfully woven fronts
 and backs, maybe with beads or braided fringe and
 tassels. Cynthia had a full wardrobe of such satchels, she
 took them with her whenever she left the house so it was
 into one of these she'd flatten and fold whichever calico
 was chosen at Tillim's. Maybe the envelope of a Butterick

*pentagon on nine eleven but wasn't so anyway these girls had the house spruced up before they
 moved in about a year later--renovating it into a sleek two-bedroom with a great kitchen and fun
 patio out back and a portico garage they lived there for a year—sometimes taking care of me--then
 one got transferred to DC so they moved to alexandria and olivia moved into their house with
 gabriela who must have been around fourteen, another single mom with a single daughter, like me*

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testing me, to be
 like she, a footrace,
 a suitor race down
 Apheta, the street,
 Tyndareus, my
 father's brother, my
 uncle, wanted much
 to win--my father
 made it happen and,
 in return, I was
 flung into the tide,
 it made no sense, but
 that is what they say,
 I rode the wide waves,

charcoal drawing each week when she was a little older,
 the other was named Tally—why Tally's name appeared
 on playing card scoresheets Nora had a hard time
 understanding. Just like her cousin Kent whose name was
 written large on a billboard showing cigarettes near the
 swamp—why his name was there so big, Nora couldn't
 understand. On the way home they'd walk the same side
 of the street as they came, passing again Stephen
 Abernathy's house. He lived in his wheelchair and looked
 so like the Mad Magazine boy, Alfred E. Neuman, the kid
 on the cover, that Nora thought it might be him. The final
 issue of *Mad Magazine* was published last year, in 2019
 after sixty-seven straight. They pass Cornelia Muller's
 house, single mom of Ruth and Joey, who made sugar
 eggs with scenes inside at Easter time. No sidewalks on

*and nora met olivia and gabriela first at blue star at the blue ball because nora was doing some
 consultant work for the blue star arts complex, one of the bits of income she continually cobbled
 together like she ran the san antonio dance umbrella for a while, out of a law office nearby where
 she had her own office so she could bring me since she worked alone--these gigs were great I guess
 they were ideal for us, so that's the sort of thing she would do, and david was at the blue ball*

**wine-like tides splashing
the flat Spartan coast,
ebb and flow take me
past where I should go,
but ducks purpled from
being in the sea
found me, fed me and
felt for me, carried
me back from the sea
to the shore, returned
to my parents though
they'd let me go, twice
born to them, omen,
blessing, those fearless**

was probably placed there to prevent cars sliding inside the marsh, Nora thought. A perfect perch from which to watch Cynthia clamber cautiously through the thick muck in her rubber boots to snip a cattail or three with the clippers, also in that sack, before continuing home pretending she wasn't clutching swamp stuff on long tall stems. For years they'd walk that walk—to Tillim's and the swamp—past Nora's elementary school and the long curvy driveway to Doctor Rose's pediatric practice, past where a woman claiming to be Princess Anastacia lived, across from the Talbert family whose collie would lovingly accost wee Nora in such a way that she was strapped to their few front steps by the canine licking her face. The dog was told to stand down so Nora could stand up by Mrs Talbert whose name was also Nora, but not

dressed up as she always was with Salvador Dali mustache and Frida Kablo frock and nora wearing the sky blue vintage blue and white polka-dotted dress she gave me with the crinoline skirt that poofed out she said david brings into the ball with this curly-haired woman with big dark eyes matching her black hair wearing a polo shirt and khakis and slung across her chest was a strap at the end of which was a phone nora said she'd never seen a peer of hers with a portable phone--

**fancy-feathered birds,
 so Iphthime had
 a sister in me, and
 five brothers, had we,
 none tossed to sea,
 just me, we grew as
 gardens grow, now we
 are parthenos, my
 beautiful cousins
 Helen, Kly and I,
 girls before marriage,
 Spartan cicadas
 prepared for chorus,
 the cicada song**

plant was in Pearl River since 1907 . Nora went to the
 Pre-School Playhouse in Pearl River when she was four.
 Lederle’s outside sign looked like a giant chocolate bar—
 like the Swiss one’s Nora’s dad Donald liked. Her father,
 Donald, went to Switzerland once a year or so for his
 work at Geigy, a Swiss-German pharmaceutical
 corporation. Lederle Laboratories was also a
 pharmaceutical corporation but they specialized in
 developing vaccines; they produced the only gas
 gangrene antitoxin used by troops during World War I, as
 well as an tetanus antitoxin and smallpox vaccines; they
 provided diphtheria antitoxin for dogsled races in Alaska
 in the 1920s; they produced one-quarter of all blood
 plasma, one-third of all typhus and influenza vaccines and
 one-half of all gas gangrene antitoxin for World War II

*that’s what she called it—not a cell phone not a mobile but a portable phone--anyway, nora
 evidently ran right up to her and david introduced them then olivia asked “what do you do” and
 nora replied “i do whatever i want” and took olivia into the restroom where she kissed her: they
 made out in the bathroom—right when they met--then the story goes that olivia offered to drive
 nora home and nora said sure so when they stepped outside and nora saw this brand new shiny red*

**sacred to muses,
 voice of goddesses,
 at that sunken place
 where rill is replaced
 by marvelous muck,
 dissolving with grace
 green grime of the marsh,
 rich in deep muddied
 murk, thick throat calls of
 frogs, slimy long snakes,
 the texture of toads,
 a tufted turtle
 and all of the small
 lingering growth whirls,**

prescribed much later in her life, Lyrica for fibromyalgia,
 Viagra for erectile dysfunction and the anti-inflammatory
 Celebrex. They also produced one of the first two
 COVID-19 vaccinations approved for emergency use
 during the pandemic that began in 2019. Next door to the
 Talbert's, next to the school, lived Cathryn and Rowena
 and James. At Rowena's elbow fingers grew due to the
 scourge of a drug her mother took as Rowena grew
 inside: thalimdomide. Banned in 1961, it took till 2018 to
 learn why it did what it did to thousands of infants as it
 helped mothers' morning sickness subside. Past Four
 Corners onto Sickletown Road where Nora took ballet
 lessons from Mrs Platt, ballerina wife of Ballet Russe
 dancer Marc Platoff. (1913-2014). In the '40s, he played
 Broadway's "dream sequence Curly" in the original

*camaro convertible olivia's so olivia drives nora home there's this attache case under the passenger
 seat filled with season tickets to the spurs games and a handgun under the backseat—
 unbelievable--and mike casey and garrett follow—i guess they got stoned or something and then
 they all went to the bonham the gay club downtown while i was with mary next door or somewhere
 i don't know where gabriela was and nora gets me and puts me to bed and then nora and olivia*

twirls as life begins
 here, guided by great
 mothers, thick soupy
 swamp surrounded by
 lances, tall erect
 grasses, islands of
 sludge, bugs all about,
 rushes, reeds and sprouts
 —
 this is what Helen
 is named for, the shoot,
 that's she, the growing
 new green pushing its
 way up from the depths,

Ted the butcher himself, and to consider candy. Ted's sat on a ledge off of which it too might slide into some sludge below and behind. If cars parked in front, dashboard to display window, were to slip and push into Ted's shop window, all would be gone in swampy marsh gook. Nora thought about these things. But that never happened. Across Strawtown Road, at the foot of the hill, was the 1840s stagecoach stop now the Clarksville Inn, standing at what was once a crossroads for ancient Indian trails. Catty-cornered to Clarkesville Corners was a photography studio run by women. When Nora was a little little girl she was taken there for her portrait. She remembered being atop a platform in a small chair just right for her, dark all around except on her where a light shown bright blinding her. She let her fingers play with

went to bed—well actually beds, plural, by their account they slept in almost each of the seven beds before they fell asleep in separate beds in separate rooms sounds pretty crazy right, every bed remember there were seven always seven beds in our house cuz nora was always hosting artists in the house, artists visiting san antonio or she brought artists here with miguel marínez and nora got a grant from the texas commission on the arts for a project called vān—pronounced vain like in

eager for height, for
 light, mighty indeed,
 Helen is a swamp
 bird is she, goose or
 crane, heron, diver,
 and daughter to Zeus,
 by a sea-nymph lass
 of Ocean, vengeful
 Nemesis, chased by
 Zeus, she turned herself
 into a goose, Zeus
 switched into a swan
 and after a chase,
 he had her--she lay

photography studio suddenly appeared this store with the weirdest things. All kinds of pipes to smoke and posters to hang, very bright. Psychedelic, Cynthia said. They bought tiny pins there of Blue Meanies and Green Apple Boppers from the movie, *Yellow Submarine*. Cynthia took Nora when she was about seven to see the magical animated Beatles movie musicale recently released. They stood in slush and snow waiting for the bus, getting splashed by passing cars. Cynthia never learned to drive. Further down Strawtown Road had been a gristmill near where wheat was ground for George Washington's revolutionary troops. More infamously, the mill was the site of New York State's last witchcraft trial. Naut Kanniff, known locally and colloquially as Jane, dressed brightly and coiffed her hair oddly some thought. She

vanity or vein like in artery with the emphasis on the art, or like in spanish ven, ellas ven—they are—or ven—they come—anyway, you get it, artists would come to san antonio if they got as far as austin or houston or dallas or maybe laredo even or on their way to marfa they should come to san antonio too to be and to see and be seen just like the house was all full of people meeting me, taking care of me, shifts of folks in and out so nora could get out to go to the supermarket or

an egg found by a that larger home with siblings Bob and Katie (eccentric
shepherd who took it herself) and their mom who Nora believed was named
to Leda who put Carmen Carmen. Their dad died on December 21, 1973 in
the ovum into a hit-and-run crossing the street in the front of the house.
a chest where Helen Elias Carmen was always absent, never there when Nora
hatched, or maybe this played with Alice. A revered bassoonist, Mr. Carmen
happened: Zeus slyly taught at Yale and Manhattan School of Music, played
saw Leda bathing Pablo Casal's festival in San Juan every summer, gigged
in our river, he with orchestras in Minneapolis and Cleveland, and with
turned into the swan the NBC Symphony and the New York City Ballet. He'd
enveloping her bring Alice used toe-shoes, and she and Nora played
in his bright white down, prima-ballerina in Alice's big cold bedroom. Carmen
a rape nonetheless— Carmen had an old copper-colored gown Nora wore with
Leda lay and hatched the pointe shoes, constantly falling down like a spinning
 penny twirling and landing flat, pretending grandly to be

*whatever cuz she had another one of don's old toyotas so we were fine but they wanted someday to
 buy a van like vān so they could cross texas picking up artists and bringing them to san antonio
 but the lawsuit happened, the one with the esperanza when vān was a co-plaintiff with the gay and
 lesbian media project which had the gay and lesbian film festival that we used to go to when I was
 little running around the guadalupe theatre until I got a bit bigger and would watch the films with*

two eggs in the safe
 soft foothills of the
 mountain looming by
 Sparta's wide west side—
 one egg held two boys,
 Castor with Pollux,
 the other held girls,
 Helen and Kly, but
 Helen and Pollux
 were by Zeus, mortals
 Castor and Kly, by
 Tyndareus, lithe
 Leda's strong husband—
 Helen and Kly with

Peculiarities in town piled up—butter not churning, cows
 not milking. At her trial, Dr. Abraham Corneilson, the
 three-hundred-pound physician who lived across from the
 mill, was made judge while prominent others—both men
 and women—were jury. According to Arthur S. Tompkins
 in the 1902 *Historical Record of Rockland County*, at a
 secret meeting at the mill it was decided they'd "bind her
 hand and foot and throw her into the mill pond." If she
 drowned, she'd be innocent; if she lived, a witch. Plans
 changed. They took Naut to be weighed on the mill's
 large flour scales: if lighter than a large family Bible,
 she'd be witch. Naut Kanniff went and was weighed,
 tipping the scale over the weight of the large Dutch Bible
 beside her. She was free. Her persecutors faced scrutiny,
 but Naut went home. So wrote Tompkins, "Thus ended

*nora and olivia until the esperanza got in trouble with the city, because when nora came to san
 antonio the city's arts department was getting mad at esperanza for being a community service
 provider and not so much an arts provider but that's what nora had worked for in dc the blurring
 of those lines between arts and politics and cultural manifestations as cultural creation you know
 what I mean—most arts organizations do that now, but then it was rare, and that's what*

**these twin guys were raised
by Leda and her
husband, my father's
brother, my uncle,
Helen's adopted
Spartan dad, Zeus'
earthbound daughter has
goddess half-sisters—
Aphrodite, and
Artemis and cool
Athena—Helen's
half twin sister, Kly,
Klyaitemnestra, is
daughter to Leda**

followed Memorial Day parades where the big drums that played gave Nora a tummy ache. Every Memorial Day, the Miles family would stand on the porch with Papa Day, a WWI vet, and watch Don lift the flag so the family could recite together the Pledge of Allegiance. Past too, the library where the Children's Room was large and lined with taxidermy in glass cases, long tables, and wide shelves filled with picture books, primers, popular fare in big print. A round table by the fireplace had little tiny chairs and big flat books all about on the ground near the hearth waiting to be picked up and put away at the end of the day. Then back up the hill, past the elementary school. Past the old Dixon place all broken down where they found old time eyeglasses, cups and saucers and Cynthia found and kept these big tin signs that read "Vegetables,"

esperanza was doing and they would meet at our house and nora gave graciela and gloria books and reports about arts policy, i guess, and esperanza still got in trouble, defunded because of their behavior and the rest of the arts organizations in the city were penalized also with a budget cut and so esperanza sued the city and the mayor and it became the first arts lawsuit since the nea four and vān and the media project were sponsored fiscally by esperanza so they became co-plaintiffs on

PENELOPE

ELEANOR

LUCY

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