



Amy Brakeman Livezey
On Monday, 12" x 12"
mixed media on panel

Polygamist Cabin

You Know That Girl?:

YOU KNOW THAT GIRL THAT WAS KIDNAPPED BY HER SCIENCE TEACHER THIRTY YEARS AGO WHEN SHE WAS 15? Her picture on the cover of *People Magazine* with her dyed black hair and raccoon eyes? Her teacher handcuffed behind her looking at her butt? Well that was me. Let me get this straight. I wasn't kidnapped, I wasn't locked in a room, I wasn't beat, I wasn't tortured, I wasn't even a virgin. No one is by 15. I went with him and it was good, all of it, but especially the sex. Which everyone found hard to believe. But it's all they wanted me to talk about. It's all they wanted to know. The doctors, the cops, my dad. They pretended they didn't want to know. They wanted to know.

Discovery:

He didn't expect it. Not the sirens, not the photos, not the handcuffs, not the names, not the jail, not the cops smacking their lips at her, not the divorce. We should have kept moving he thinks. Then we would have been safe. There were storm clouds slowly covering the sky. Cumulonimbus. He watched her being led away, a stain on her Levi skirt. He remembered his mother taking a deer heart out of its bloody carcass. She asked: do you know the phrase tugging at your heartstrings? Well look. He saw a lattice of fleshy lace, the sinews crossing over and over. His mother pickled that heart. They ate it all winter.

My Classroom:

The second thing everyone wanted to know was when it started. It was April, when you're so glad to finally have heat and sun and light. In my seat at the start of biology class at 11:00, the sun, it filled my head, it spilled on my head, I could barely see the board through the light. Oh, to be warm again and wear skirts and bare legs and short sleeves and not be cold and not have to wear long pants and sweaters. You know how an old classroom with wooden desks feels in the spring? Everyone taking a test and all you can hear are squeaky pencils and the distant sound of the meadowlark and sprinklers and maybe a song in your head but you don't know what song? And you feel hot in a good way. We were learning genetics and he kept talking about the biological imperative. His wife picked him up at school. She wasn't hot. She drove a stupid Honda. Her face round and her face white. Pasty. Like the dough you eat as a kid. She always looks like she forgot to put on makeup. We used to joke about taking up a collection to buy her some Maybelline. There were never any kids in the backseat. Just her. She wore her face like a curtain when he walked out.

His Classroom:

His desk is neat. He needs order. One ruler, one eraser, one red pen, one Kleenex box, and one golf ball. They water the lawn at this school until it becomes a bog. It's so stupid. This is a desert. But still the sprinklers urge back and pausing, back and pausing, louder than the pencils on paper. What do these students know about the biological imperative? He spins his pencil in time with the sprinklers. How long before he dries up? Why do I teach, he thinks. If he hadn't been kicked out of the house at 14, he might have gone to medical school. Neighbors feeding him, letting him sleep in their cold basements. Pity stinking up their pores. Setting him up to be odd man out, always. He looks at his students, barely older than he was when he was on his own. One girl will always show promise. Just like his wife did, once. Thank God it's April and they have shed their winter clothes like a black widow sheds skin. The girl with a cat's face stares and he stares back. It's so easy to get her to light up. She will do.

The Drive:

He lets me drive. That road. How I love it. I can feel it now, oh man, even the grip on the wheel. Past Draper, past Riverton, past Provo, past Point of the Mountain, past ponies, Appaloosas and Arabians, past the subdivisions. Tender budding lawns and tiny tidy flowers giving way to corn, hay, alfalfa, sunflowers, silos, barns, hawks, herons, meadowlarks, blackbirds, cottonwoods, cattails, ditches, sprinklers, tractors, rivers and those giving way, finally, to red dirt and red rock and the great silence of the desert.

The Drive

He lets her drive so he can touch her. His cold hand. Her warm thigh. That's all. He worries her buttery hair with his fingers. He will dye it black. She'll like it. The chip-chip of a Wilsons warbler, the beryl sky. They will be safe at the cabin. He was raised by polygamists. Growing up his house was full of babies, milk smells, the sounds of sucking and gurgling and crying and spitting, diapers, rags, grimy hands and sticky walls. He didn't fit in. And the wives. Who had the babies, who fed the babies, who held the babies, who baked the bread, who rinsed the garments, who scrubbed the walls, who canned the fruit, who skinned the deer, who cooked the venison, who froze the jam, who taught the children, who slapped the children. You had to make sure the wives liked you. Young men were expendable. The last half mile to the cabin is the best. He cannot wait. The smell of dust and pinyon.

After:

After the trial, after boarding school, after the backhand glances, after I moved, after the slog of my twenties, after a marriage, after a divorce, after my thirties vanished, after I thudded into middle age. Just like that. But still. I hold it like a postcard and I let myself remember. It was raw and it was tender. The first time I kissed him as though he were a doll from my collection. Then, not. Days, naked on the hot red rock. Not talking. Breathing in the desert. Rain. Whisper of aspen. Clouds arranging and rearranging. Nothing felt like that. Before or after.

Before:

He thinks of the cabin. Russet. Faded. It looks like red rock. Set low in the rock where the road turns from dirt to dust. Galleta and blue grama grasses. Monkey flower columbine, the seed head looking like eyelashes. Purple sage and Mormon tea. Pinyon. The cabin is the same russet as the ground. Almost invisible. Built by the polygamist to be ready for the Communists dropping the bomb. Or the Millennium. Or both. It is a place to hide. Inside there are tins of tuna and sardines, sacks of white flour, rice already chewed by the deer mice. Ovaltine. Powdered milk. Tang. Children's' boots line the walls. No beds, no windows. A huntsman spider, fat, content in the corner. The glass Mason jars look like candy. There are canned peaches, plums, tomatoes, apricots, beets, artichokes, and at the very end, nestled like lovers, two pigs feet. The cabin waits. In his mind he opens the door.



Ellen Graham is a freelance theater director in Seattle. Her work focuses on the West, and stories of open spaces, both on the land and in the heart. A prize-winner in *Glimmer Train's* Short Story Award for New Writers, she has also been published in *Everyday Fiction*. She is at work on a series of stories about growing up in Salt Lake City.

