



script

# the orchard on your land

brett bajema

The fruit trees grow low as they age.

Planting them makes you notice  
when they die—how they die.

Land was easy to understand, like breathing.  
You thought that trees were

trees, and either way, they grew  
taller as you went north.

You wish you knew, or could  
feel the earth, its skin.

Think of six years old looking at  
your hand—making sense was easy,

but we are all alive  
and we are all moving  
forward.

And you are on the orchard, watching  
quail in the morning, darting

where the pear bushes grew wild,  
where you left them to themselves

and returned to find no rows,  
returned to find that

every man's is a story of loss,  
that birds live in the orchard

like they did in the forest before.  
And you think you know some of them,

the quail living under mossy  
slash-piles and old limbs.

And reaching out, you tried to follow them  
slowly along the trees—they let you get so close.

And when they run, it is towards the wild.

when my father taught me to use the  
lathe because "he wouldn't always be  
around":

john taylor

There is nothing but the hum of the machine, leather  
on steel, wheeling the length of ash round. Then,  
I watch him dip the gouge in the pale wood  
and send whorls spinning into the air like tiger moths  
that land on his forearms and the backs of his rough hands.  
He does not brush them off. They bury themselves  
into his coarse, dark hairs and remain. Then,  
without permission, I pull the tiger moths, the ash  
shavings, off his arms and hands, pile them neat  
on a staining cloth, and fold the corners in.

heights

j. addison martin

"Hey look. He's stuck," said a single outstretched finger.

Joel Simons had climbed 25 feet up the tree. The cold sweat from  
his forehead caused the weighty helmet to slide down his skinny head while  
his butt harness rode up his crack. Sandals were a mistake. He reached up  
for the next rung, breathing heavily. Kristen was watching him, along with  
the rest of the 7th graders: short greasy boys smelling of aerosol deodorant,  
and taller girls who acted strangely and whom he did not understand.

Kristen was likely drawing her wavy brown hair behind her right  
ear, one hand on her hip, squinting in the sun to see Joel, or more like-  
ly talking to Denver-I'm-So-Awesome-Deipersloot about his black eye.  
Somewhere above, a bird squawked. Joel gasped and held to the tree's  
rope ladder. His head spun. He hadn't the length of breath to voice it, but  
inside his head he briefly debated the issue and concluded that he was  
stuck. Very stuck.

Joel had a bunk on the top where his Toy Story pillow and the old  
quilt his mom made him did not get seen and laughed at too much. A short,  
scrawny kid dressed in worn knits, he chose the top bunk to avoid the late  
night wrestling, except for the occasional kick he received from beneath his  
mattress. Crusty socks, stretched shirts, and bedding littered the floor by  
the time Mr. Gary came round to remind the enthusiastic campers that it  
was lights out. Mr. Gary wore long socks pulled up to his knees. After he  
left, Denver wrapped white t-shirts around his legs and stomped around  
the cabin criticizing the others.

"Take that underwear off your head," he said to Billy Shuster.

Denver leaped to the door and began flickering the lights. "It's lights out you evil wicked children. Do as you're told. Brush your teeth. Don't eat your belly button lint. Jesus wants your soul." All the boys were laughing and jumping around Denver as he moved to the center of the room. "Stephen, are you going to give Jesus your soul?"

"Fuck off." Stephen turned over in his bed and pulled his blanket up to his shoulders.

"Ooohh," everyone cooed together.

"Stevey, Stevey, Stevey," Denver shook his head. "Your soul needs a warshing. Everyone?" He looked around with arms raised meeting the reverent gazes of the sitting children. Joel, laying down in bed, peeked over the wood lip of his bunk to see the happenings.

"Should we baptize this lost soul into the fold?" Eric Vierra pulled his black wide mouth Nalgene bottle out of his duffle bag and held it up to Denver. Hoisting the bottle high, Denver continued. "What do you say, my brothers?"

"Dooo it. Dooo it. Dooo it." Denver unscrewed the lid. Peter Holoway covered his face. Joel kept watching, his breathing elevated. Why do they follow him?

"In the name of the Father." The chanting grew louder. Denver was approaching Stephen with steady strides and fixed eyes. "In the name of the Son." The vessel was raised higher. The cheering reached its climax. The water seemed to churn. He was right at the bed now. "In the name of the Holy Ghost." The bottle tipped. Then, down came the water, spluttering on Stephen's head, his hair, his neck, his pillow, his face, his thin red eyes. His fist.

Mr. Gary poked his head in again. Next time there would be a stern scolding.

The bird squawked, this time much closer. Some of the kids below were beginning to chatter. They couldn't be as uncomfortable as Joel, though. Hadn't his parents told him not to climb trees? After all, Jesus commanded Zacchaeus to come down from the tree.

What did his parents know anyway? Not each other. Not him. Not Joel. If they had known Joel at all, they would have known he did not want them to split up. They should have known. They did know, and they did it anyway. They said, "This is best," "It has to be this way," "We both love you. We just need a break from each other." That was before they sent him to this stupid camp. What they did not know was that Joel knew. Joel knew the Bible; he knew what *to know* means. He knew his dad had gotten *to know* his teacher, Mrs. Phillips. His mom knew his dad knew Mrs. Phillips. Sandra.

"Joel," cried out the woman holding the other end of the rope. "You can't stay there."

Mrs. Phillips came over one day when Joel was sick. He had stayed home with a fever and she arrived to bring him his homework. But when Mr. Simons walked in, buttoning his thin shirt over his exposed torso, well, perhaps Sandra too had developed a fever. Needless to say, Joel did not complete his writing assignment, nor did he bother with math or history. He did pick up his science book, however, blew his nose into the attached note with the assigned page numbers written on it, and flipped to the section on black holes.

The theoretical existence of densely packed matter with such high mass that nothing can escape its gravitational pull, not even light. Thus it

affects all existence while remaining unseen. (Our very own universe likely rotates around one.) Joel's eyes stopped on a picture of the unsuspecting Milky Way slowly being crushed under the weight of forces unseen, unshakeable powers of control and manipulation. Its spiral arms had nothing to cling to. What happens when we get sucked in as far as we can go?

Joel stayed home for three days, sick for Wednesday and Thursday, and since Friday was practically the weekend anyway... For all three days, Mrs. Phillips came by, insisting that Joel call her Sandra, insisting that Joel's dad call her Sandra. Joel did not want to call her Sandra. Mrs. Phillips kept coming, checking up on him over the weekend, then chatting with his father. She would flip her hair, straighten her blouse, nod her head at him, and curl those red painted lips.

Joel remembered once how his mom had showed up at school. She had a private meeting with Mrs. Phillips, which she came storming out of in less than ten minutes. Joel was happy just to get away. What had she told him that night, seated on his bed, in his room? "Sometimes adults must choose whether to act or react. And sometimes they make the wrong choices. But pain can be good for change. Do you understand? Joel, I'm leaving your father."

What did she mean? It sounded as stupid as the things Mr. Gary said. "Look around you. See how even the trees point us up to God. The rivers flow like many branches of a tree, each going their own way, but all arriving at the same swirling ocean of God's divine purpose."

Well, there weren't any rivers around, but trees were in no short order. Joel figured he'd give it a shot. He looked around him. He looked up. On the inside of a branch some feet from him was a nest. Weeds and

garbage were interwoven together in a tight round structure. A red bottle cap stuck out on one end.

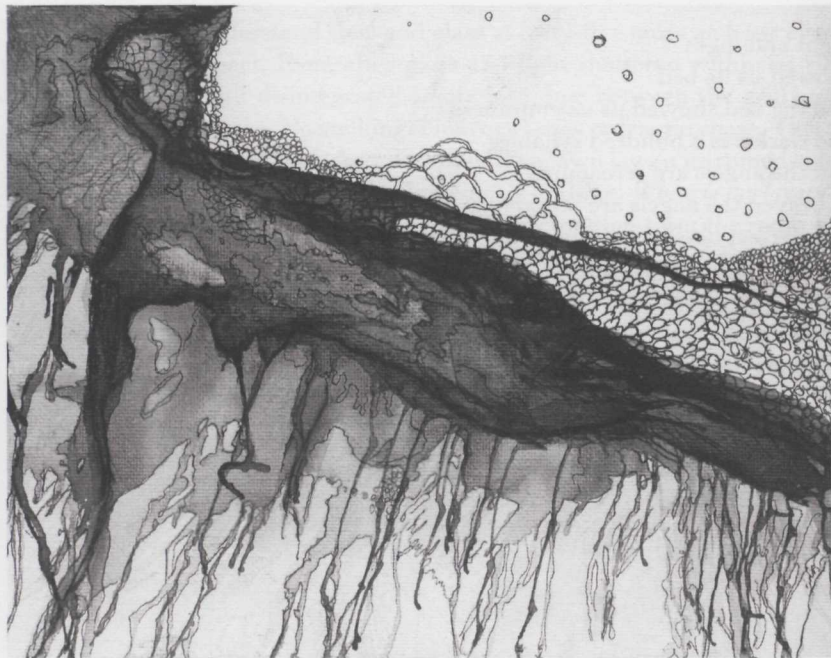
"Okay, Joel, you should just come down now. Let go and lean back. I'll lower you down."

Joel rolled his head back and released. His arms hung outstretched as he spiraled toward the earth. His eyes stayed on the bird nest until his feet touched the dirt.

"Finally," Denver said then spit on the ground. "What happened up there? You scared of heights or something?"

Joel bent over and picked up the small clump of soil with Denver's spittle mixed in it. Before Denver had a chance to flinch, Joel smeared it on his black eye. Denver slapped at Joel's arm and fell backward, scooping the mud from his seemingly less swollen eye socket. "Ah, sick! What the hell was that?"

Joel smiled, an easy, disarming smile. He looked over at Kristen, who also smiled, and said "Well Denver, are you going to give Jesus your soul?"



## motorcycles

blaine eldredge

At 18 my father laid down his motorcycle in a rainstorm and slid through a stop light. The scene ought to have happened in sound: car horns first, then rubber tearing away from tires and metal cracking back in on itself. Second bystanders: screaming, oh-my-godging the gore of their own impotence. But then, bear in mind, it was Los Angeles. No one saw him. The scene would look best in slow motion with Rachmaninov playing: spray shattering out from the motorcycle, mixing a little with blood, rinsing across the face of my dad, John, raking along behind. From above it must have looked like a Jackson Pollock painting, and just like a Jackson Pollock painting, because the trails of color, the light from my dad's motorcycle, the temporary lines tires push in the rain, drag through one another, but the ends never collide.

It would be a predictable ending. Young man buys motorcycle. Police still looking for the body. Instead, my dad slid to a stop against the curb, his own body wrapped in the crumpled frame, and so they are bound together.

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The motorcycle was developed at the end of the 19th century. Ignominious beginnings to foreshadow greatness, the first engine-propelled bicycles were steam powered contraptions called velocipedes. The first model to use the internal combustion engine was built in Germany in 1885. It was the *Reitwagen*. A fitting name, so far as "riding car" implies a jet-propelled rocking horse with the training wheels on. Not useful in itself, the *Reitwagen*

was used to test engines for larger automobiles still in pre-production. It was a way of getting the most power onto the smallest frame imaginable. It was, in short, what a motorcycle has always been: a rocket with a saddle.

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Take a moment to think about the sex appeal of the motorcycle. It is possible to feel confident straddling a machine spinning 5000 times a minute. There's the connection: the handlebars running bare down to the frame, bear-hugging the engine into shaking submission. In their best moments, motorcycles feel like they are only better legs, a body of bone and muscle that gets 60 miles to the gallon. There's no action on a motorcycle that doesn't involve the whole of it. Even the paradox of turning, pushing to motorcycle away from the sweep of the road involves rider and bike and hips as a pivot point. Being in love doesn't need a motorcycle. But then, being in love doesn't need a kiss either, although both sure do help.

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My great uncle was in his eighties and living in Florida when Alaska called to him. It was on his bucket list: *Ride a motorcycle up the Alaskan highway*. He made it as far as Kentucky before he realized his kidneys would not last him. But then, Allender was not a man easily defeated. When the second world war ended, he had hitchhiked to Italy looking for a boat home, broken into a museum, stolen a pair of French dueling pistols, and then finally found one. See, a group of officers needed their motorcycles transported down to the docks, and Uncle Allender volunteered his expertise to drive them there. It was technically a lie, insofar as he had no motorcycle experience whatsoever, and true in that he believed he could figure it out. Which he did. To be broken down in Kentucky, then, with no war ending and the English language on all sides was comparatively easy. Putting out

his thumb again, Uncle Allender managed to secure a ride both for himself and for his bike, all the way to Seattle. From there, he rattled his eighty-three year old frame two thousand miles to Anchorage. The freedom of it: beaches, single-story shopping centers, and palm-treed meaninglessness filtering away in pines and the crack of early frost. *Ride a motorcycle up the Alaskan highway*, his bucket list said, and held the subtext: *Do not come back*.

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There is a stigma against motorcycles. It's got something to do with the assumption that they mean instant death. Or at least they are slow suicide, a donorcycle, a wild and unnecessary risk. And in some regard, they are. Motorcycles are deliberately dangerous: they model the risk of death we live with and generally ignore. In the space of an evening walk, we might have a very nice time, or fall in love, or get hit by a car, or breathe the exact wrong air that slingshots ebola into our circulatory system. Life arranged does a very good job diluting the risk of death. The problem, though, is that it also dilutes everything else. So motorcycles are a bit irreverent of mortality. On account of this, I've concluded that they actually hope a great deal more than any pedestrian or sedan-driver with an earbud in. First, because motorcycles embrace peril. Any practice that skims along the surface of death asks what's beyond it. Any practice that periodically brushes death trusts, on some level, that it is worth finding out. Second, they are an answer to the great British essayist CS Lewis' question: "Has this world been so kind to you that you should weep to leave it?" A motorcycle and a motorcyclist do not ignore death. But they do hum to the conviction that in this life, where the love of security paints all walls white, death is not actually a very high stake.

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*How many races do you think I won*, says Jim, and it's not a question because I know the answer and because he uses it to win an argument. *How many races do you think I won*, he says, and I wonder how many races a person ought to win in seven years. In 1980, my grandfather Morris died, and in 1881, my uncle Jim began racing motorcycles, a pursuit he would continue for the next seven years. All motorcycle races have their accidents. The back wheel slides out on oil, the turn comes too greedy and too low, and down goes the rider in a tumble of complementary colors. But then, sometimes the leader goes down, slipping suddenly under the wheels of the driver behind. Then it's kaleidoscopic. How worth it though, for the speed. Jim's smile gleams in his doughy face, and he turns 22 again. *When you're turning hard*, he says, *you can feel the heat of the tar under your knee. If you crash, sometimes your pipes will melt right down into the track. It's like racing over lava your speed makes.*

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The world, see, is producing more and more orphans. This is because mother and father are irrelevant if neither means a story. It's said that many middle-aged men buy motorcycles out of boredom. It would be a nice explanation: middle-class businessmen swollen on the Keurigs of their success sitting in their living rooms and nothing to do. Nothing to do is curable. A lawn of grass would be sufficient so long as it keeps growing and gives his little domain an adversary. Boredom does not need a rocket ship.

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See: privates rushing information to Somme on Harley-Davidson FUS Standards and Steve McQueen fleeing across Germany on his TT Special 650 Triumph. See Soichiro Honda building motorized bicycles from war-surplus engines and James Dean cruising without a cause on a 1949 CZ.

See my my own grandfather, Bob Eldredge, eyeing his cousin's Yamaha SR500 and the country's other coast appearing in his mind.

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Down the valley, Tim worked for the railroad and had a 1977 BMW R-70. When he sold it to a woman in town, I thought he was in league with Satan. I was seventeen. I was willing to fight against any deity, good or bad, that told me I couldn't get my own motorcycle. It had started like this: Garrett Gardner's uncle had cancer and a motorcycle in competition for his life, and when the former won that contest the latter passed to Garrett and myself. It was a 1980's Honda CX 550 with the fairing flattened on one side from the time his uncle laid it down. It ran, though, its asthmatic engine hiccuping into a coughing fit of life. In the street, we stood on either side of the motorcycle, one hand on its humming gas tank, the other above, on the throttle. A little mathematics: torque describes the nature of a force to twist an object around its axis, or,  $T=r \times F$ , or, 75 hp multiplied by 12.5" at an angle of 45 degrees means well over a hundred pounds of force. Or, having your wrist on the throttle of a motorcycle is like being friends with a foreign God. Power, and remarkable power, on your side, if only you knew how to talk to it. The first time I sat on a motorcycle, I didn't know much of anything beyond my desire to go faster. In an ideal world, to lift off the ground. But the second time, I was no longer cursing a suburban neighborhood bouncing along behind Garrett. It's hard not to sound like an enthusiastic shaker evangelist, but then, there I was, 17 and pushing back across decades, somehow, until the motorcycle and I crossed ages. The wind, flapping away at my shoulders like it could make my sweatshirt into a leather jacket and introduce me to my grandfather.

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I'll admit it. On some level the action of almost killing yourself is the point. Almost, but not quite, killing yourself. It's why motorcyclists take one hand off the handlebars to acknowledge passing riders with a low wave. Motorcycles are dangerous. They occupy a world where worse things can happen to a person than to die. Where it is better to be daring, to be fast, to risk until speed is a way of knowing God. Because motorcycles are not trying to kill you. Everything else is trying to kill you. All the time. It is part of the consequence of being some of the little matter that is. The stakes, then, are extremely high, and motorcycles have always known this was true.

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At 18, I found a 1972 Honda CB 500 buried in the garage of a kleptomaniac with the manicured beard of a garden gnome. The fairing was missing along the right side. The actuator was pinned across the right-side carburator, dumping an impotent flood of gasoline into the engine. I felt like Schliemann looking upon the mask of Agamemnon. Because the motorcycle did run, shaking across the back roads of Goleta California sans title and license plate. It wasn't highway ready, but when has that stopped anyone, and so at 18 I took the 5 headed north. Older motorcycles, though, have capricious dispositions. At 70 miles an hour the shifter went slack, leaving the bike thrumming along in fifth gear, and a few miles down the road, the famous California traffic built up in a barricade of red light.

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Motorcycles, in their varied dispositions, share a story. Sour old Tolstoys pulling into Sturgis in dark cuts, marines on combat pay swinging aboard Ducatis, high school dropouts and heroes and hillbillies igniting the woods on old Yamaha 150's, my math teacher, Mr. Leckie, fleeing pre-calculus and his pot belly and his wife and then me, trying to sneak out of the house

at midnight on my dad's Suzuki. Me not quite convinced that the story I was in was dangerous enough, that the stakes were high. Me never meeting my grandfather before Alzheimer's took him. Me, and John and Jim and Allender, and Garrett and his uncle and Tim, all joined all the way back through Steve McQueen to Hildebrand & Wolfmüller, staring at the *Reitwagon* and smiling at the potentials of its speed.

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At 18, my dad slid through a stoplight in Los Angeles and nothing hit him. I'm there too, 18 and spinning in the median towards stalled traffic. Because motorcycles are the quintessential expression of freedom. But then, freedom does not mean I and I alone. It is instead an alternative story, where an engine heats my knees and I'd like to think I've got a fair chance of fighting in a bar, and all orphans have a lineage of big engines and little steel frames. And even death was worth adventuring, for if speed is worth more than life's little comforts, then very little of what we know is relevant to what we desire, and cracking through the steel skin of death might mean a better and truer adventure than we had left.