

months when he wasn't drinking, he thought of ways to make her happy. He had helped her put out the carolers, every year, even though now it's clear how repulsive they are. Was there a word to describe what he must have been thinking when he did so? Was there a word to describe what it was they had shared?

"Where should I put this?" Donnie asks abruptly. He's picked up the OED and hugs it now, close against his chest.

"Back where you found it. By the old dictionary." Looie doesn't say, though to Donnie she probably could, that she doesn't want either of the books to get lonely.

Brett was supposed to pick up Donnie at six, but he doesn't come, and no one calls him. After a while, Looie puts the empty ice cream bowls in the sink and Donnie make waffles in the toaster; there's no syrup, and Donnie takes a look at the butter and when Looie isn't looking he throws it in the trash. So they eat them plain, in the living room. Looie has been meaning to clear off the dining room table but Donnie says he doesn't mind. No one turns on the lamp, but Looie thinks the carolers look better in the growing darkness. She almost can't see their faces.

Looie sets her plate on the floor. "Honey, why don't you arrange the carolers so they look out?" she says.

Donnie goes and kneels by the bay window. "We didn't get out the Christmas lights," he says. "You know, to put around your figures."

In the darkness, from the direction of the wing chair, the squirrel rustles. Before it worked its way down the chimney, the house's stillness had seeped into Looie's chest; it had streamed from her fingers like light. The squirrel seems to have taken the paper toweling; the old wrappings are probably soft, Looie thinks. Just right for a nest. It might like the pickle box, too. The squirrel can have it, she decides; she doubts she'll pack the carolers back up. They really are hideous. They are part of someone else's life. "I don't think I need the lights this year," Looie says. She pushes her hands through her cropped hair, uncertain if she is sad or angry. After the holidays are over, she decides, she'll pile the figures at the curb.

It's late when they hear a car pull into the driveway. It's Brett; they can hear a door slam, and the sound of his voice. He swears, maybe because of the icy sidewalk, maybe because he's out, at night, when he doesn't want to be. Brett is not unlike his father, who was like his father

before him. Looie moves to the window and looks out. It's full dark, but lights are lit along her suburban street, and the snow, still falling thickly, seems to glow.

Donnie comes and stands beside her. "Grenmaw," he says. He's already pulled on his jacket. If he meets his father at the door, there will be much made about the dark hallway, the broken light fixture. Maybe Dad will say something about the smell. But he won't see the squirrel. His father won't see the squirrel.

Donnie's hands are in his pockets, but he leans toward his grandmother, and he smells like ashes and ink.

"I have to go, Grenmaw."

"I know you do," she says. She wipes her nose with the back of her hand. "Hiraeth," she says. "The squirrel's name is Hiraeth."

Donnie doesn't say anything. Together, they listen to Donnie's father's slow approach. Outside, the snow falls but it's probably already melting; Looie imagines it dissolving upward, creating fog.

"Never hit a woman," she tells her grandson. He has to hear it from someone. They both look forward, not touching, into the gentle and riotous snow.

Janice Deal is the recipient of an Illinois Arts Council Artists Fellowship Award for prose. Her story collection, *The Decline of Pigeons*, was a finalist for the Flannery O'Connor Award for Short Fiction and was published by Queen's Ferry Press in 2013. Her stories have appeared in literary magazines ranging from the *Ontario Review* to *The Sun*, and she has completed a novel, which was a finalist in the Many Voices Project annual competition.

JASON E. CARTER

Domestic #10, 2013
Oil on linen, 32.33 x 42.25 in



COURTESY PAUL KOTULA PROJECTS. PHOTO CREDIT: TIM THAYER