

about Dilly's face—a small pearl earring had replaced the simple gold stud that she usually wore.

"Alice gave it to me for my birthday," Dilly said when Rosemary asked at the very same moment that Sammy Sorensen zipped past and plucked Dilly's snowball cap from her head.

Rosemary and Dilly both chased him, Dilly's hair flying, her arms stretched upward; but when Sammy tossed the hat to Robby, who held it out, taunting, "You want it? You want it, Dilly Deere with one ear?" and then pulled it away and tossed it over her head, where it landed in the snow, Rosemary did not hand it back to her friend after picking it up. Instead, she looked at Dilly's outstretched arm and her pleading brown eyes and the earring beneath them, and then tossed the hat back to Robby, who then threw it to another boy, who then threw it to another, and as the circle grew bigger and the chanting grew louder—"Dilly Deere, Dilly Deere with one ear"—Rosemary watched Dilly jump. She watched her body arch. She watched her hair bounce in and out of the naked, punched-in side of her face. She watched her lopsided mouth grimace and the more her arms stretched in the air, the more she jumped, the more Rosemary thought that her friend looked like a freak.

Years from now, Rosemary will see Dilly again and she will remember the time she played keep-away with her friend's hat. Dilly will not recognize her, but when she says, "Excuse me," and reaches past Rosemary for a napkin in the crowded student union, Rosemary will notice a faint hairline scar on her chin. She will watch her carry her tray to a table and as she sits and talks with other students, Rosemary will notice a familiar tilt to her head and will think, this is Dilly, who moved away from Cotton Creek after sixth grade. This is Dilly Deere.

And in that moment, Rosemary will remember things she has not thought about since childhood. She will remember the sewing lessons and the icy sidewalks. She will remember the cats and the pine trees and Sister Claudette's bald head. She will remember the cold linoleum floor and how beautiful her quilt looked as she and Dilly pieced it together. She will remember lying on her bed and sobbing into her quilt while she pondered what it meant to be good and what it meant to be horrible and what it meant to be misunderstood. She will remember that she has the quilt still.

And when Dilly laughs, her hair will fall back and Rosemary will notice the fullness of her face. She will see that she's inserted an earring in the new ear that matches the earring she wears in the other. She will notice that when Dilly smiles, her smile is broad and level. Rosemary will remember that it was lovely to have had a friend. She will look at Dilly and smile and be truly glad that she is whole.

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ROBERT BHARDA

Spreading Her Ashes on the River, 2018

Digital image from organic collage, 24 x 18 in



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