Geode Year
by Serena Solin

Maybe I did leave the back door open. Maybe someone opened it later.

The dog poked it with her nose and found that it moved. She went out into the neighbors’
yard in the fall dark. She crossed that yard, and then the one behind it, trotted out into the street
like a raised flag.

The young man who did it bore her back to the address on her collar. Left her in the tarp-
lined trunk of his car. Knocked on the door. Told my sister the dog was dead. Then my mother.

We had the dog less than a year, from early spring to the crackling center of autumn. She
was supposed to be a solution. She was the advice of a professional, and what a treasury that
turned out to be.

I was not in trouble for thinking there were no sounds without histories, but for saying so. I
told Mom in the car that the doctor wasn’t going to be able to prescribe it. The trees on the
highway rode roughshod over cars on their way back from the city, signifying a real new season
about to arrive. I remember thoughts of snow, a small rodent looking at the backlit reflection of
his own shape.

We were going the opposite direction at rush hour when I said this, from Calico Rock
towards Hoboken. I was whiteknuckling it in the passenger seat. My muscles were doing their
salicylic acid thing: a symphony of silver nettles flowing through a vicious leg cramp.

As it turned out, I was right: The doctor’s prescription had nothing to do with instances of
texture I can’t unfeel, for example, the gossiping of the yardmorning birds like my girl pressing her cheek against my face if I had just shaved. I told the doctor this phrasing was an overdiligent way of putting it. He got the idea. He said he could tell I know about a lot of things because I’m good at rooting, a term he came up with for when I find things under the surface of the world. He said trustman and I believed him. His prescription was Meygen, a Golden whose purpose was to teach me accountability and to help give our home a cohesive center.

He did not suggest that I return to Ede’s high school, nor any other kind of high school; he said to treat Meygen as an additional lesson on the homeschool curriculum. He was not surprised that besides the three of us there had never been a living thing permanent in our house.

He threatened nothing to me, but Mom was silent all the way home, except to say it is hard for her to sit there and pretend that I know things I do not know. He was in fact the nicest doctor I ever saw, but he couldn’t fix the problem. That was what it had been all along, of course: not the things I can do, but the one thing I can’t.

To fill up the space in the car I tried to explain to Mom that when I touch things with the wrong capacities—paper, really, the only thing—it feels like someone is slitting the skin between my fingers, trying to deny that I’m amphibious, creek-wading, green. I tried to tell her that the sound of turning pages is like a massacre on native soil, blood and scalps like artichoke leaves littering a buttered plate. She turned up the heat and WFUV and took the quickest route home.

For the first time in my life Mom, Ede, and I brimmed with the inertia of potential energy and brought the dog home. Early spring was like an impending solution. Meygen was small but had my mother’s cringing careful forepaws, conscious of the totems of our house already.

She padded around so close to quietly I forgot that she was an event unto herself: only
when she licked the dishes in the dishwasher could I sense, faintly, the addition to the Union of several unwieldy Midwestern territories. The biggest change was in our mudroom, where my mother installed Meygen’s crate and hung her leash, a thick strand of old man rope. She couldn’t even come up the stairs yet when we first got her, she was so little.

I spent several days, in fact perhaps even longer, looking out the window as Mom walked her in the morning. I watched them disappear into the forest and then return, Mom taking off her windbreaker when they came back, both of them limping primitive, oh did they run together. I think at the time there was snow on the ground. On those days after breakfast I took a long time washing dishes so I could listen to Mom calling Meygen things like sweet girl and pookie, two names she does not call me or my sister even though she loves us too, and best.

My girl came over to meet Meygen just after, brought a bluehued mound of orca and iron quartz for the low table in our living room. After saying you’re welcome to Mom, Angel got down on the floor with the dog; laughed and scrunched up her face. Meygen lay her tongue on Angel’s knee. Angel asked her what it tasted like. Hickory smoke and acetone and girl smell.

The gift didn’t quite seem to stem Mom’s worry that Angel was at once a crevasse and a charged particle going round our household but unable to stay. A friend of Ede’s, she said to me, don’t you think a bit inappropriate. Of course, Angel had been coming in the basement window after Mom went to sleep for years. Before I thought of being in her body, or at least in those terms. She was in my arms sometimes, but I woke up a lot with her behind me, her legs around my legs, her tits against my back and then we both slept well. After we were done doing it in those early months I would say to her: my Angel, although I have on occasion used her Christian name, which is Dahlia. Every so often Mom asked Ede how long she thinks Angel and I would
go for and Ede, knowing Ede, said not long now.

Every so often I’m reminded any intimations conveyed from Angel to me must be expressed in the multitude of events that precede us, then and then for her I triangulate. It could never be as simple as me saying quietly how beautifully the yellow light of the living room shaded her highriding bottom lip. It crossed me then that there are no holes and shadows, just the vulnerability of looking for them in the slight chill of the two of us alone. We had learned to speak to each other, but there were lumps of granite in the vein of shalt between us: Some things I couldn't explain to her, and some things she couldn’t know. She is the only person in the world who has ever asked me if I want to learn what they’re all trying to teach me. If the letters on the gold tag of Meygen’s collar made it worse. If paper is the sharpest or simply the most commonly encountered. I have thought often that it wouldn’t hurt so much if Angel could soften the shapes of the words for me, her cursive no more weaponlike than string.

A little after: my sister began dating an Aryan whom I recognized immediately as exactly who he was. I wondered if this was how Ede feels about Angel: wifeship urging on, at once a separation and a syncopation. The difference was that Angel lived across the street from us since she was born. Enough time to adjust to the sounds of her voice and body so that when she spoke it was only the her-now I heard. It is hard to know someone your whole life.

Rolf slept in our house several nights before Ede let him see me full-on. Not that I blame her. His cheeks were like you could see through them. Nigh to get used to. Not taller than me, but better looking and quick. Rolf knew my girl from school—they all knew each other from school. He talked to me like man, dude. Asked so few questions I knew Ede must have warned him. In his voice and the tapping of his sneakers I heard a young girl and a diary, Holland, the
screaming muted in the movie version. He made me so deep down frozen the winter would melt me.

Neither Angel nor I took to Meygen the way Ede and Rolf loved her. They made recordings of Meygen learning what stairs were, not knowing how valuable the videos would become. The whole scene could have seemed natural if he hadn’t been so obvious in everything: a man with a sheepshead barely at manhood all the same, moving slowly through the place that had been mine, leaving lines on my sister like a racket press. Correcting her when she taught Meygen to lie down, roll over. *It’s more about where you hold the treat than what you say with your voice.* The two of them talking together and sometimes with Angel was a new language foaming like dishes in the sink on the holidays: familiar in every part but tedious too. Mom thought he was great the first time she met him, Meygen limp with pleasure in his arms. That night I went out and sat on the roof of our house. A heaviness.

Sunday mornings were for Ede to tell me what she’d been up to. She told me about Rolf and his whiteboard paint bedroom while we did a thawed out mid-May breakfast. She wondered what those sorts of chemicals would do to my interlocking sensibilities. Maybe, she proposed from behind the kitchen counter, that’d be the answer no doctor’d thought Mom would go for.

In a burst I knew the joke was not hers. To think of him penetrating her with that type of thing. I hid in the closest place I knew how: Mom’s houseplants are year-round full throttle alive—the ones in the kitchen are taller than me, and I am the tallest thing in the house.

With a big breath and an eye-roll Ede gusted into the chair at the kitchen table, pulling toward her what was left on the table. A hulk of a math textbook. I was as always averse to paper, but when she writes she knows to protect me from the edges with her arms. It was a
subject that suited her: the petering in and out of cylindrical containers, hieroglyphics carved in a flourishing sandy tomb. When it moved her to do so, she lay out things for me: from acceleration equaling change in velocity over time, the formula for the physical displacement of a projectile, physical displacement being the important part. I always liked it but I knew it was too much work for her to keep doing.

I didn’t look at her. We didn’t speak.

Mom came in, Meygen following, looking over her shoulder all the while. Ede put her hand down to stroke the dog’s head. My mother looked at me as if to ask why I was crouched like a sniper in the indoor greenery, but as was becoming more common, said nothing. Poured herself a cup of coffee. As soon as I was excused from the meal I had not eaten I was gone. A fierce sense came over me like a thick black cloth over my eyes.

At night my mother slept like a beast;. I did not envy Rolf and Ede the novelty of the sounds they made that spring when they thought I was sleeping. Sometimes it was when Angel was over. That night, that first night, in the grasp of a warm fear, I told her I wasn’t really in the mood.

I did my best to let it pass. But somewhere in my youth or childhood, an expression crawling: knowing he would blow the whistle. Knowing he would fire the gun. Knowing he would chase me for my father. Knowing the cranelike motions of his arms. Do it again when I’m home, I told her, in a voice I’d never heard before, and I’ll hit him, I swear.

Every time Ede came into the house the whole summer after, it was for the bigness of her room on the second floor and nothing else. Angel told me to hangtough and built these domesticities for me in which she wore an apron and had dinner on the table at six o’clock every night.
In school at the kitchen table I learned about giving credit where credit is due. The doctor said I learned well from tapes, which I already knew. I tried to tell him I like concepts I can touch but I have trouble finding them. He suggested Meygen like a watery cassette and I told him—again—that while the sounds she made were saccharine, there was no interest for me in the low broiling of administrative history. She didn’t even bark at the door. He proposed me being responsible for measuring her food out. Even the muted plastics of her tupperware were dull. Dog food raining into a low bowl. Meygen eating. Early colonies near-starving every winter: Jameston, same old.

Instead, Angel helped me. Arranged vocabularies of silverware for me to study, little percussive projects. She did her own work near me but only on the computer. Always make-up work with her. She joked that we were the weirdest summerschool, and coughchuckled. For every day she was there in our kitchen there were three she was gone: working all day long looking after much littler people than me.

Outside everything baked and waved gently like sea sponges near a deep sea vent. I carried the air conditioner up to my bedroom and put my face as close as I could to it. It blocked the window, made the room seem smaller. I put a chair up against the door so Meygen wouldn’t come in. I felt sorry about it but with her at the end of the bed it was too hot to sleep.

I wasn’t grounded but Mom wouldn’t look at me. Every night in August, she made chickpeas with oil. She talked about the unbaptized, tried to teach me about Constantinople. What is a silly empire besides the rattling of a teaset? She said to my sister that I didn’t know how to think, but all the time I thought about the crinkles in her lips and how if I could I would kiss them and how they’d unfold.

The doctor had a lot to say about Angel. He said she’s a good thing. She knows how to
read and knows about paper, although she can’t ever feel it the way I do. She said no matter what, I’m brilliant. She saw me sitting empty on my bed and she put her arms around me and I felt that they were thin. She put her head on my shoulder. She said hey hey hey. Her concern snapped my throat. In this way, we made it through the whole summer.

By the time Angel had gone to enough school to skip it, I’d raked leaves for every house on the block. We planned it out carefully. I did not tell Ede I was going, or where. I didn’t lift my weights. I got up, got dressed, and went. Angel took breakfast for us from her kitchen, and her father’s car; Dahlia you’re too old for this kind of behavior, she said he’d say, and that’ll be the end of it. She was taking me away from something as much as towards it, though she could not have known as much.

She played deep music in the car and although we didn’t go very fast I could feel calcite in my wrists and eardrums. As she drove she mouthed the words like a gumchewer, changing lanes wildly on the turnpike, brown hair groped at her ears. She had wanted to take me to the quarry for as long as I could remember and it would have to be far enough.

I had expected the quarry to be somehow more like the concavity of an explosion on a concrete street, but it was reflective as the jagged quartz Angel had brought back for us, for my mother. While I stood at the edge of the parking lot and kicked around, Angel went inside the little observatory and dealt with the paperwork: bought a bucket for her, a smaller one for me. The shape of the quarry itself was pipe laid flat, then quartered, an evaporated semblance, raw stone. The sky one flat silver too, all sun and teeth in the air.

In the beginning I tried to arrange what she collected as best I could but after a while I stopped and followed her. I couldn’t look for rocks because to make them distinguishable to me I
would have had to change them to the wavelengths of little histories. Instead, I watched the little slides of sweat in the back of her neck, morphemes to lick arbitrarily and iron with my hand into the collar of her shirt.

She threw a duller quartz at me and I caught it and surprised us both. I could only ever walk there with her, for no valley, no limestone soul, makes me know the way she does.

Later that day we sat at the edge of the quarry, her feet swinging in, talking about how it so happened that we were there together. A serial chalcopyrite day, the sounds of home so far off the turnpike and well into the rolling wasteland of the interstate. I grasped the handle of her bucket, much heavier than mine. She offered to show me the most resonant sound she had been able to make: the hollowness of a geode against the sheen of her shovel.

The Toyota Corolla in the parking lot was covered with dust, dustier now that our shoes were off, even hers, pressing on the gas with these little socks she balls up at night so she can find them in a hurry in the morning. Before we got on the highway she threw a rock she didn’t want at a squirrel in the bushes and it peaked away. It was already leaning to evening and we still had the drive. I thought for a moment whether it would have been better to call my own house phone and leave a message just in case Mom came home. I didn’t think much on it. Too late to restitch myself into her body; as sorry as I am now, I so rarely have anywhere else to be.

At the exact moment Meygen died I was inside Angel in the backseat of the Toyota. An empty factory parking lot. The walls of her felt hot and red. In this place I couldn’t hear anything except her ankles slimming against my ass and her voice in my ear saying I’m yours baby I’m yours.
We got home not long after to find Rolf’s car in the neighbors’ driveway. I caught him looking at me, his cheeks flushed even through the windshield. No Mom yet, no inclination of her. Angel let me out in front of our house and Rolf got out of his car too, snapping the door shut like an inspection.

You’re in trouble, he said, Ede’s gonna kill you. The dog, he said. Can’t find her.

Ede came out then into the porchlight and saw me or my outline, her eyes laboring. The door, she said, first softly, then louder. I heard in her voice only the distant humming of girls in a factory about to catch fire. The fuck didn’t you close the back door? You left it wide open. Didn’t you see Mom’s note? The one on the fridge that says close the back door? You didn’t. You didn’t—Did she see it? She squinted towards Angel’s house. Did she forget too? Didn’t she remind you?

I began to feel the paper folding inside me again. I could hear this, too like a timeline: could hear each individual note in Mom’s scream when she realized the door was left open and the dog was gone.

Ede and Rolf got in his car to go looking, gone long but nothing. I cradled the bag of stones to my chest so close I could feel the jutting feldspar against my skin. There was nothing to do but go inside and wait for in the way of a war wife I already knew.

In the mornings after Mom ran the same trail. I couldn’t see her from the window but I knew. Mom left Meygen’s leash on the coat rack in the mudroom. When she went out for walks she took it with her, like Meygen was coming back with her or else they were going somewhere.

I watched Rolf come pick up Ede before school and drop her off again in the afternoon.

As it got closer to the holidays I found that almost every night I was missing Angel’s laugh
and moan and how quietly she got up to pee. Even when she was there I looked at the back of her neck and couldn’t feel it. She wrapped her legs around my waist but I sat upright. She has lots of hair, Angel, lots of it weeping on my chest. I didn’t talk to her for a long time but I didn’t want her to go. I could see the shadows of the dogs on my wall in the dark but I knew they should not stand so tall.

I didn’t want to have the dreams alone so I made her stay, but quiet. I went downstairs to wash my hands, found one of Rolf’s yellow hairs in the sink.

Mom wanted me to learn a language and borrowed old tapes from the library. As Angel and Ede’s school days grew longer, extending into night, I fell asleep with my head on the kitchen table listening to a cassette of a man speaking Japanese very slowly. I couldn’t understand everything.

The holidays have been bad for us each year; gift wrap around every single thing. My presents usually don’t come wrapped, but this year they hadn’t come at all. Christmas was a day foundering in still no one talked to me.

When the snow came down, thicker this year than last, I went out into the backyard. The patch where we buried Meygen was dry and soft and I lay down on it. Snow accumulating in the yard like scalloped Moroccan rafters. No lights in the shallow forest, just the towering of our house over me. No windows illuminated. The blueblack of the planet.

When I dug the hole to put Meygen in my mother watched from the kitchen window with a scarf over her mouth and nose. It doesn’t seem like grass will ever grow over it. When Ulysses S. Grant died, they draped the buildings of New York in black fabric. Angel loves that joke—who is buried in his tomb. I hoped she could see me. Whiteplains of snow erasing the road.
I heard the clicking of a light in the house, saw Mom two stories above me taking her makeup off in the bathroom. She saw me through the window and I looked to her, my body sweating. She stayed where she was for a moment, then raised her hand and closed the blind.

I went inside the house and sat at the kitchen table. Even in the cold the plants threw tremendous arches on the walls. I pulled the closest thing toward me: a thin paperback, thank God for paperback, the stucco of the cover invading me but pushing through it nonetheless. The letters scraping against each other like knees on concrete, getting dirt in scrapes.

The sound the first page made as it ripped out was no history I’d known before: not a genocide but a hunger strike in Ireland, blindness, vying for freedom, taking nothing but water. What I would have done for water. The fibers thickened in saliva and the corner of the first page sliced my tongue as it went down. Ink blackening my mouth not the first page but the next three, pulping my throat. The pages became easier; it wasn’t long before I didn’t gag anymore. The binding too. Tearing the pages in a rustling frenzy to get it over with as quickly as possible.

It might have taken years but there would be no trace of the book on the table when I was finished. My throat cried out for water but even after it was done I did not get up. My mouth raw. My gums like woodchips. So many ways to take the world inside me, and now this one.