

ANN TWEEDY

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**Taking Stock**

last year, the lebanese  
palm reader pictured domestic  
peace, a single union, in our separate,  
unscarred hands. now, godless  
and short on faith, i recall the howl  
of sirens four years previous, when our packed  
u-haul accelerated downhill  
from a gas station in crook county,  
wyoming. neither of us was sure  
about moving cross-country but you were  
less sure than i. when the two cops  
arrested you for a suspended license  
i managed not to scream.

we had to get to san francisco  
for your interview, so i forced an absurd smile  
when the lead cop said, *we don't take  
triple A bail bonds, travelers checks  
or credit cards. today's Saturday. if she can't  
post bail, we'll haul you 200 miles  
to sundance and let them sort it out on Monday*

at the corner store, in line for the cashier,  
i remembered how the clerks in mansfield,  
massachusetts would stare  
or ignore me, the crazy  
woman's daughter. for a self left  
to the goodwill of strangers,  
i felt a welling of disdain.  
still, i sucked that dusty air  
down to my diaphragm and said  
*my husband's in jail—will you cash these in?*

## Small Town Vignettes

if i try to go back there  
my soul resists  
but i can tell you this:  
girls in shorts as spring nears summer  
trying to showoff their legs and thighs  
because what else is there?  
in school the desks said things like  
i blew eddy and he was 12 inches  
yum yum yum yum.

or i could tell you about churches:  
the little brown one that my mother  
got kicked out of for talking badly  
of a fellow parishioner.  
she thought the other's trained hymnsinging  
overdramatic with its trills and tras

she was arrested twice on the steps  
and then convicted  
once for trying to get in. it didn't have  
beautiful stained glass like the white  
congregational perched on the common

and the minister was from texas not one  
of the beloved local boys everyone remembers  
shoveling driveways or winning fieldgoals  
on thanksgiving. and it wasn't st. mary's  
that you had to be popular to go to  
but it made the news and my fifth grade  
year miserable.

or i could tell you about my paper route  
in seventh grade—the gang of boys that said *die  
dog bitch*, playing some kind of ball game  
in the street. i wondered coldly if they would kill  
or rape me for the endless minutes that one of them  
stood in front of me. but the texture couldn't be wrought

without the insinuating dss woman: *Your mother  
never answered the door but we could hear  
footsteps inside* and i wondered how  
that was a crime but in her language—

in front of a judge—  
it meant hiding *something hiding something*,  
or the hum of airplanes from the municipal  
airport that continuously permeated  
our house. they didn't carry unobtainable  
dreams like commercial jets  
of places and distances. they were flown  
by private people mostly probably  
born with money and so i never dreamed  
of being in one bound for some other place  
but still their hum and buzz are the sound  
of home however little sought after  
that sometimes is

## **underfoot**

at one point along the river,  
the grass was so lush i was afraid  
to step there, as if some living, breathing  
thing hidden underneath  
caused that springiness, but i stepped  
and stepped again, marveling.

not far from Eugene, Oregon, can i say this?  
an unmarried middle-aged man made himself  
a friend to the neighborhood. he restored  
cars on property he rented and hired  
out-of-work fathers to help him. summer  
nights, on couches and car furniture  
outside his trailer, joints passed freely.  
hot days, he lined a truck bed with plastic  
to make a pool for children to play in. little

by little, girls and boys loved him. one laughing  
six year-old slid naked on a bedspread only to imagine  
its pompoms as the frills of his mustache.  
she said she played with him repeatedly alone  
in his trailer, while, just outside, her mother  
watched her older brother. a four-year-old  
taking a bath explained how he licked  
her pee pee as mommy raced home  
to record the lion king. at trial,  
defense counsel tried to confine the girls' families  
to the chalk marks of alcohol, pot, and poverty.

**courtroom recess**

my mind drifting in and out  
of love   husband problems  
a long unmet need for sleep  
when the clink—clang—ing  
rouses me

at first i think  
of jacob marley  
paying for his greedy sins  
in some impoverished afterlife,

remember where i am  
in time to anticipate  
three Indians  
drudging in  
shackled by the wrists and ankles  
paying for whose sins?

## **touring juvenile hall as part of the court of appeals**

in the substance abuse cottage, the two youths who told the story of that place had earned the right to wear their own clothes by accumulating good conduct points. school, computers, cafeteria food—sometimes good, sometimes bad, like anywhere—were among the topics on the agenda. afterward, the superintendent explained how meals really improved morale and so they worked hard at them. as for outdoor activity, that was up to security, but at least everybody walked to school every day, single file.

the violent offender cottage was a bit different. classes were held inside the building; all the residents studied at their own levels but attended together. one of the youths explained that they weren't allowed internet access. he also tapped his head, then told us with a prideful smile: *there are some real amazing minds here.* on the way out to the courtyard where residents could sometimes exercise, we passed one of the school shooters. sitting at a library table talking with a mentor, he was learning something that would be of use perhaps in another life. outside, the superintendent outlined the impact of mandatory minimum sentences: *juvenile hall has become a prep school for prison. our emphasis on communication will disserve them.*

during the tour, i was fraught with conflict about how much to look, especially at the kids in standard-issue sweats who were simply going through the motions. it felt like a kind of betrayal: to want to look deeply into a life and never have to live it