

## WHAT I KNOW ABOUT THE MOON

I have this memory from when I was so young I can't decide whether it's a memory or just a dream. I know I was real little because my mama is in it, and she died before I started kindergarten. She's talking about the moon, and about the god who lives there. Not like the church god—a one-and-only, creator of everything kind of deal—just a god, the moon god. She says he built his house into that massive rock so he could watch the whole world's dreaming projected through a little window in a dark room, a pinhole camera the size of an above-ground swimming pool. She says that's the only way you can watch a dream if you're not the one

having it—a blurry, upside-down projection. But the god in the moon is smart, she says; he knows how to grind huge focusing lenses that sharpen the image and widen the angle, taking in a whole night's dreams as he glides across the sky. He makes prints and keeps them in enormous file cabinets, spending his off hours rifling through his collection, looking for things he might have never noticed before—memories, images, bits of songs, unspeakable feelings. Stories.

I ask her what the sub-satellites are for, how come the moon got eight little moons of its own? She says the god put them there as waypoints on the road to his house, set his kids up with their own domains and set them loose. And like their father, they're all collectors. Not of dreams, but other objects—dark matter and orbital trash, scraps of old satellites and spacecraft, rocks and radiation and stardust. She tells me about one satellite god devoted to collecting moon cheese, and even as an impressionable kid I laugh it away.

Maybe that memory and everything in it is dogshit. But ever since, all I've wanted to do is get up there and figure it out. I do know that people go up there and experience something, and if they

come back down they're different. Better, sometimes. Always smarter and stronger and with this weird look in their eyes like they're about to land a punchline. Sometimes I wonder if my mama ended up there instead of in the ground, if maybe my whole life since she died has just been a joke. And if it is, I want in on it, you know?

I can't know what it's really like up there because I haven't been yet. But I heard plenty of shit. I mean, I know this one guy who went up there, Lincoln Barber, but we haven't really talked since like middle school. But he definitely did go, all the way to the moon itself—I read about it. He said that it was huge and terrifying, like entering the foyer of a house with infinite rooms, unending hallways. That he lost and gained many things in the process of exploring it. Called it the crucible of true knowledge. Came back to Earth a changed man, wiser. Don't know why he came back at all; sure as hell sounds like a better place to spend the end of the world than Hale County, Alabama.



## STARS FALLING ON ALABAMA

At the end of Lee's gravel driveway there's a barbed-wire fence. I used to tease her about it, countriest fucking thing, but she quit caring, says she likes the vines that grow on it, their thistley blossoms brittle and grey but still hanging in there. I kick a rock over into the grass and set off up the road towards the Citgo, walking on the crumbling shoulder with the fence on my left, Lee's big mutt Harris zigging and zagging all over the place in front of me, looking for any smells he can find that aren't just smoke. Hasn't rained in at least eight months. Half the trees are already bare, the other half split between shriveled browns and pines