

KERRI LEIGH HUFFMAN

Family Christmas

Well, my aunt welcomes me with, “Kerri, you’ve gained weight.” And we’re surrounded by white, it’s like a soft cloud, but also

blinding. Then my cousin’s daughter, filled with teenaged exuberance and ignorance asks why I didn’t make it to Grandma’s funeral and

I was just too shocked to say that I never even had an invitation. Even before the hot pepper jelly and cream cheese snacks were gone we had

packed up and promised to be in touch soon. In the car you sit behind my father, who is behind the wheel and me behind my passenger mother.

And her, “Oh, Harry Stop” makes me look up from my book and in the same direction as her to the black cat limping in the middle of the road.

It’s dusk and its black fur against the waste-grey of the road is hard to make out, but my mother and me, we’re scooting back and forth, over the

arc of the road, trying to catch the cat. Then, in mid-sprint the button on my coat pops off and scatters across the asphalt, skidding to the side

of the road. And the sound of a ten-pound body being struck by a van makes an echo that doesn't leave my ears for days. We fill the air with screams

and sobs and are deaf, searching for air and warmth. Under my palm, through matted wet fur, the tremors in the cat's hind leg last only for seconds. My mother

makes me carry on, knocking on doors along the side road, my ears ringing with the horrible thud. I stand outside a kitchen window, the pane obscured by the steam

of an almost ready Christmas turkey, but I can't even move towards their door. Across the street a woman in the doorway nods and talks to my mother.

And you, sat behind my father, still, in the warmth of the car.