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II. Self Portrait at Dinner

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II. SELF PORTRAIT AT DINNER

Mary Maroste

My palms are cut,
the same pattern as the maple tree
I built my first real home in.
5 transparent cardinals
whispered in my ear &
I slipped my father's socks over my elbows.
How was it possible that I was so quiet?
Every leaf changing color
fit in the mailbox I nailed to my back,
red flag peeled off.
*In another life I grew tulips,
I didn't sweat through my sweaters.*
I sewed twigs on deer heads,
my freezer overflowed,
sour grapes, mix tapes,
a painting of a rabbit.
*I measured each apple
I tried so hard not to starve.*

IN THE CAFÉ DOWN THE ROAD

Bradley Miller

I believe in Billy Pilgrim. At the particular time I'm writing this, I feel as though I exist in two places at once. One of my favorite artists at the moment, Joni Mitchell, describes the process for recording her masterwork *Blue* as a kind of method acting, relying on her sense memory in order to become the persona required for her performance. In meditating on my own life, I thought this might be a helpful technique. I wanted to return to a place where I had previously spent a lot of time and try to write about it. Between the end of high school and when I went away to Western Michigan University, I mostly remember sitting. That sitting took place mainly in two coffeehouses. When the group tired of one, we went to another, drifting between them. For me, the summer of 2012 through the end of 2013 seemed a complete waste. That was, until I brought it back for another look.

As I'm sitting at Tongues, the first of the old hangouts, I feel as though I'm back to how I was two years ago. The dim lighting, the chintzy piano in the corner (a quarter step out of tune), the leather couches, and the exposed brick wall all remain. Here, I had played open mic nights, met lots of artsy types, and spent many days sitting outside smoking cigars with my friends. I decided to come back because I thought that by doing so, I'd trigger some inspiration to write. Though it's November, the winter already seems to be going strong. I'm in the downtown area of Wyandotte, a city a few miles south of Detroit that presses up like a thumb to the river. The last time my friends and I were here was nearly two years ago. At that time, I was still going to school nearby and I came down at least every other day to hang out with them. We made Tongues our home until we made our way to the Grind. If all you're doing is sitting and talking, it helps to at least change the scenery a bit.

The scene at the Grind, as at Tongues, remained static in my mind so it's easy to recreate. Sara came over to talk with us and give us free drinks. I had a few classes with her in high school, and now she plays the role of a barista who wants to be one of the boys. The place was practically empty, so my group pretty much had the place to ourselves. Like his girlfriend Sara, Pete was also a former classmate and he sat to my right. To my left, was my friend Craig who I've known since