

## **Killer**

Recently, my sister tells a story I have never heard. She is six and I am a baby, and we are at our grandparents' apartment in Brooklyn. Ellen makes me cry, maybe accidentally, maybe on purpose, and my grandfather scolds her and becomes so agitated he has a heart attack and dies. He drops dead on the living room floor. My mother moves from room to room, unable to calm herself or take action. She is so confused she unzips her dress. My mother and grandmother are crying and speaking Yiddish in hysterical blasts while my grandfather lies dead on the floor. Ellen tells the story in Starbucks. She leans in with a sad expression and says, "It is something I have always felt guilty about." I am excited. The story makes me feel like an insider. Ellen says she talked to our mother about the incident when she was 50 and Toby was 75. Toby said, "What are you talking about?" Ellen said, "It happened. Don't you remember?" Toby searched the middle distance with one of her shy-or-crazy looks and softly said, "I never wanted to think about it, so I put it out of my mind." My mother loved her father. He was the one she loved, and Ellen killed him, so to speak. Or I did: small, invisible provocateur.

## Day

I found a day of my childhood in a part of the city I did not know. It was on the sidewalk where highrise buildings had given way to low houses and hedges with white flowers. Images floated across a thin screen like a brain scan where memories are stored. I was riding a bike with pink streamers. I was riding from my house in the canals to Lido, where my best friend lived. After school we would watch seagulls drop shells and eat the wriggling insides. We found a log imbedded in the sand that was our boat, and when the waves boiled up, the log shifted like a loose tooth. We screamed. We screamed every day. Her brother lifted weights without a shirt. I told friends at camp I had flown in her father's plane, a sea plane. I said the wings were silver, and dolphins had jumped from the foam below. I had not laid eyes on the plane. We cooked bacon. We slept in the same bed. She could kick a ball harder than anyone, and one summer I invited her to camp. I pressured and pushed, and once she was there, looking out-of-place and unhappy, I acted like I did not know her. That is not the thing. That is not the thing. Her thick hair floated across the screen under a velvet band. Soon she would not be beautiful. A yellow car with fins eased toward the dunes, making a sound like breathing. Otherwise it was quiet. She saw me on the lawn, my bike splayed awkwardly beside me, and her face said it all. I asked why she sat with other girls. She shrugged. I rode away. I did not ride away, imagining streets where I would find myself stretched out, letting life take me. I drew a map to this place, and by the time I was finished, the geography had shifted.