Most Excellent Writing Fiction Submission

The Hike

“I see a curve of light shift from white to red,” said Allie.

“I hear stones tumble and stop. A coyote climbs the ridge above,” said Camila.

“The stone is cold,” said James, “clouds pass like a falling scarf, reveal the moon.”

“James hugs his knee,” said Allie, “His other leg is flat. He doesn’t look at Camila or me.”

“The lights of far away houses are brighter than the stars,” said Camila. “A snake rattles at a coyote’s approach.”

“I don’t like to look at the town,” said James. “The canyon cuts the sky into a jagged V.”

Allie said, “The wrinkled clouds are lighter than the sky.”

“I smell the earth smell—dung smell. Rain is coming, and then the sound of bullfrogs and crickets,” said James.

“Today,” said Camila, “The cicadas’ buzz filled my ears like water. A crow fell from the sky.”

James said, “I shiver in this warm air.”

“James and Camila are standing,” said Allie. “He looks toward the canyon; she to the town.”

“Allie rests her head on stone,” said Camila. “Above the town there are fewer stars; here she watches thin clouds churn, cover and uncover pinprick stars.”

“Allie will be asleep before too long. I want to talk to her.” said James. “The fronds of the palm tree ahead make the sound of rain at lengths. Its great, short trunk crowds the path. Rats nest in its grey skirt.”

“The fallen tree extends to me. James takes my hand. We sidle between the palm tree and
mountain, climb bone-white branches up mottled rock. Rat eyes glint from under the palm leaves’ shade,” said Camila.

“Our footsteps ring clear off the canyon walls,” said James, “softly, then softer still. Ahead we’ll follow the creek bed. The stone loses its moon glow.”

Camila said, “My parents married where the trail ends. The mountain’s leg obscures the town. The sky is lighter behind us.”

“Allie laughed when I reached for a pen,” said James, “I drew loops upon loops that met in the center, textured it with repeated pen stabs. It was a flower. Then the song changed—lush bass at angular intervals gave way to a wall of sound with a wobbling treble and I was proud of the transition. I put it on a CD, cut out the flower, and taped it to the case. Before long, Allie smiled.”

“Time passed slowly. I sat behind James,” said Camila, “in three of my classes, but at lunch he sat by the teacher’s desk. They watched movies and I said I wasn’t smart enough to laugh. After school I sat in the bushes where the ground was cool and nobody would talk to me. Allie always found me.”

“I never could talk to Allie while Camila was with her,” said James, “or Camila for that matter. They drove past me with the windows rolled down while I walked home and I could hear the CD I gave her. Camila sat in Allie’s lap on the couch and I sat across from them. They looked at each other before answering.”

“Here the moon hides behind the mountains,” Camila said. “The trailhead branches off in many directions. All but one loop back on themselves. When I visited family in Mexico, the man I met on the beach asked me how old I was. ‘Seventeen,’ I said. He had short red hair and a cute belly. The beer had a lime wedged in the neck. When I drank it, it seemed to flower.”
“I can’t help but feel,” James said, “that nobody likes me. I came to the classroom where Allie eats lunch and she yelled at me, ‘Get out!’ In the sixth grade we sat next to each other and when the bandages came off her wrists I asked her what her scars spelled.”

Camila said, “He put on the CD James made for Allie. She left it in my car. My parents left me the key card. It had pink lettering and and the image of long, waxy leaves in faded blues and greens. Sometimes James walks with me between classes. I watch his eyes move from thing to thing at the pace of rational thought and when his eyes rest on me, I see him consider Camilla. I smile.”

Allie said, “The clouds are thick and low now. If I don’t talk to Camila I’m worried she won’t talk to anyone, that she’ll sit outside and write until she has heat stroke. She left her diary out the last time I was at her house and I read that when she was fifteen she lost her virginity to a man she met on the beach in Mexico.” Allie closed her eyes and opened them slowly. “A car passes below, shines light on a stretch of dark lawn and the think trunks of palm trees.” Allie closed her eyes.

“There is a lot more,” said the man, “to your house than you think.” The clouds turned like dust in heavy oil. Allie felt watched. “Let me help you,” he said, and with that the red-tiled roof lifted itself from her house. The tree she stood under bent back, touched its crown to the street. Its leaves whispered as slowly it righted itself. Allie thought the grey walls, moon smudged without the roof, seemed like chicken bones; she felt them shift as the clouds shifted. “Have you seen my mother?” she asked him.
“Inside,” he said and turned away from her. A light turned on, warm like citrus; tree branches framed her mother’s bent-over silhouette, quartered by window frame. Allie opened the kitchen door and felt a pull like undertow at her waist, dragging her to the brown vines that clothed the wall between her house and the next—a wolf howled—she closed the door behind her.

James said, “The path ends. Here the mountains scoop a high-walled bowl, dusty, scrub lined. Camila sighs and lies down on the ground.”

“The mountains, the stars are at a slant. I see the jagged tops of trees and rocks, outlined and dark. James sits beside me. Mist falls,” said Camila.


“James speaks,” Camila said. “His glance follows the line of the sky. His arm traces the mountain.”

“It’s raining hard now. I stand, bring Camila up with me. I lean to her, she stands on her toes, brings her face toward mine.”

“James turns his head. My mouth meets his cheek, the corner of his mouth.”

“Mom?” Allie called.

“In here,” her mother replied. Allie thought it would rain soon. “Have you met,” her mother continued, “the man who’s opening a used bookstore down stairs?” Her mother smiled.

“Our house has one story.”

Her mother smiled. “Be sure to lock the courtyard,” she said and pirouetted away on muddy feet.
Allie stepped into the hallway. The man had been waiting for her outside the door. “Are you opening a bookstore?” she asked him.

“There is a great need for what I sell. I think,” he said, brushing the side of his nose, “that you’ve been here before.” He gestured to the courtyard and winked. Allie sat down on a bench. Behind her vines climbed the wall. She felt hurt.

“Something’s coming,” he said, “you might not want to let in.” Something growled.

“Your father’s working in the computer room.” The man turned his back to her; he pointed down the hallway.

Allie walked the far door. The tile felt gritty under her feet. She sat down in front of the door and examined the low bookshelf next to it. “Dad?” she called—a snarl—the door opened—moon white teeth. Wolves leaped to her throat, pushed her back; down.

“It’s raining,” said Allie.