

Excerpts from *When the Ground Would Break*

Emmalea Russo

Fake Afterglow

We hold hands but I know this shouldn't be the way our bodies interact. I refer to him using terms of endearment—*baby, babe, hun, sweetie*. The two of us are confused about this. But our hands keep clutching. Life will be a series of sites and non-sites, I think. It will go on and on like this: land and space without events or actions. It will be a comfort to watch things pass by without participating or laying claim. Two floating hands in the afterglow of near death. The ambulance arrives.

We Are All in the House Waiting for Something

I wake up in the house which is centered in a field. This is the house that we decided not to move into. But we've got it. It's somehow ours. The house isn't walking distance from anything. It's "out there." It's dark when I wake. All of the women on my mother's side of the family are here. The house is empty save for one giant bed where we all sleep. Some are pregnant and some are ill. We are all in the house waiting for something. The stained glass windows alight from the inside so that if anyone is standing out in the field, they will see the yellow-orange-red-blue of glass geometries. There is the lush emptiness of green fields. It's almost the winter solstice and so the fields are the green of waiting-to-whiten. We are about to perform some ritual.

Jersey Shore, Spring Equinox

Ideally, nothing happens. Streamlined boats cut through dense waters, lodged. Longterm couples, brain divorce, complete happiness. What do you do best? Lying in the middle space trying to remember the kind of boat. The dull edge between seasons. This season you will: make a good sentence, figure how to streamline the day, mutter less. The exact middle, middle, middle. At the very edge of New Jersey, where it splashes. Intrepid things and perfect. It's not novel anymore. And the astral insight infiltrates my day to day like a therapy. I'm ecstatic. Define "unhappy."

Malibu and Other Edges

My mother and I drive north towards Malibu along the Pacific Coast Highway. We are in a white convertible. Mountains to our right and the Pacific Ocean to our left, where we notice a tidal wave forming. Formed. It hovers over us for a moment before we get soaked. And, die.

And then this: Another tidal wave, the one after death. This one breaks the windows of a Santa Monica apartment where my family and I stand in the bright light. These are the drawbacks of living on the edge of land.

A year after my death, I'm driving along a Louisiana highway with him. It's sunset and he looks towards the gulf. He says *it's moments like these you really get the sense you're at the very bottom of the country*. The sensation has something to do with vast flatlands. Out past the flat is water. *Yes, I say*. I keep saying yes for years. The gulf or the Pacific Ocean or the Great Salt Lake or the Delaware River or the Mississippi. Many years after I hit the bottom of the country, I make a list of every time I hit the word *edge* in a book.

edge, looked down at the unprotected drop
edge, over which I soon saw her
edge of the water, over which I continue
edges frozen, soon it would be solid ice
edge of tears, then froze again thinly
edge, let the river run over the wound in my head
edge of nothing
edge of the blackout curtains
edge of the sea
edge of the sea
edge of the retreating sea
edge of low water

The human body hiccups at the edge. The body usually must stop here, even if it is briefly. The body's instinct is to preserve itself and an edge presents a sudden change, a shift, even if it is a subtle inkling of shallow water introduced by miles of flat sand. The Jersey Shore.

My legs shake in liminal space. In a seizure, at the edge of consciousness, the body might stop walking if it is walking. If it is sitting, the body might stand. After, the one who was taken hold of might not remember this shift. *Something's not right. Wait, something is wrong*. Or, a simple and brief scream. *You stood up and put your arms out in front of you and screamed*.

Yes, I say.

I don't remember. But my body has moved in ways that I would never direct it to move. One arm out to the side, one arm on my chest. A creeping walk backwards down Broadway.

