

## But it Moves

D.J. Thielke

Science is nothing to be scared of, I promise my eighth-graders. Science, I say, is what gives us words for what the earth, the universe, already know in a language of cells and change.

They are busy copying my name off the board.

I tell them to think about time, think about how we talk about the abstract idea of it like something physical: a road we're traveling on. *The road of life*, we say. *Moving past something, leaving it behind; or stepping into the future, looking forward to something.* The future is ahead, the past behind, this is how we place ourselves.

But, I say, earlier cultures spoke about time as a road that you walked backwards on. They faced the past, its landscape visible and familiar, while taking tentative, shaky steps into the unknown behind them. The future, a darkness over the shoulder they had to carefully, fearfully move toward.

My students are quiet for a moment.

Then one says, So, life is a highway?

My husband Brady laughs when I tell him, his teeth like wet, blue aquarium pebbles in the light from the computer screen. He says he doesn't know why I put up with it; he says I should switch to high school; he asks me what I think about starting with a key ring.

What? I say.

Not a decorative chain, just the ring, he says. It can't be too valuable.

I wonder who would ever call a key chain valuable.

Sometimes Brady is a computer programmer. Sometimes, when programming isn't going well, he tells people he is a stay-at-home dad. Currently, he is obsessed with the Canadian man who traded his way from a paper clip to a house. He started following the man's blog when he was still at a KISS motorized snow globe. He has decided to imitate the project but can't decide where to begin. A nail would be too aggressive; a screw, too dependent; any piece of stationery, too derivative.

Bastard really had it figured with a paper clip, Brady mutters. It's perfect.

Our son Harold comes in the study with war paint lines of mustard dripping down his cheeks, giggling. At twenty-nine years old, he has a tenth-grade reading level, a disposition too good for the world, and extra genetic material on his 21<sup>st</sup> chromosome. He likes to hear the story of Moses leading the Jews out of Egypt.

How? Harold asks, raising his hand like an Indian chief. He understands the idea of a joke, in theory.

In the beginning, I make my students draw backwards timelines. At the left, they draw a box that says *today*; at the right, the line should go off the page. I tell them to mark dates from the scientific history overview from their textbook in blue, and events from their personal life in red.

Within five minutes, they feel tricked. Almost all of them started with their personal lives and then tried to squeeze centuries of scientific discovery in as an afterthought. One student has *i get an iPhone* next to *madame curie discovers radium*. Another only has about a centimeter between *Jurassic period (dinosaurs!)* and *AD: Christ is born*; from the right angle, *Christ is dinosaurs!* They keep asking for more sheets of paper to add to the past, their work like tablecloths crumpling against their lab partners' elbows.

There's so much, they say. How are we supposed to fit it all?

Exactly, I say.

Every year I do this, I want them staggered by how much science holds in its palm. I want to ease them into the idea that we are covering grand topics, massive developments of land and sea and cell that we are still struggling to understand, that started before we had the idea of time and continues, continues to continue, through and past their own life. I want them to look with awe on what has come before, what is happening, and what we don't know.

Mostly, they just look annoyed.

When I gather the papers at the end of class, I notice many have ignored my instructions and added a line or a box at the right side, made a closed system, a beginning. Few have written anything with it. One says simply, *start*.

In the evening, I corral Harold from his video games to mount the two treadmills dominating our living room. We watch the news and trek stationary distances while the red lights read one mile, two miles, three. The risks for him are clear: congenital heart defects; reflux disease; ear infections that lead to deafness. I never had an ultrasound, never let sonar waves bounce off that clean flesh. This was in the days when the tests were linked to ear problems in babies; this was

in the days when ear problems seemed like the worst thing that could happen to our child. *Happy and Healthy*, Brady and I said to one another, like a bargaining chip, a mantra, a prayer.

Obesity is the hardest. Harold is big, too big, but there is no sense of gravity, of real weight to his body. Even pushing 300 pounds, he wears his roundness like a parade balloon—buoyant, boyish, bobbing and floating. During a commercial for a home improvement store, he slows his machine.

Mom, he says. Mom, listen please.

He does not believe you are paying attention unless you are looking at him. *Listen with your eyes!* he once yelled during a tantrum. I slow my machine to match his, hold his gaze.

I want, he says, and then mutters the rest.

You want a kitten? I repeat what I thought I heard.

No, he says. With a sink.

Oh, kitchen, I say. That's nice, I say.

In a house that is mine, he says.

He started pushing to live on his own about three years ago. It was hard, but Brady and I found a safe apartment building in a good neighborhood and agreed to give it a try. Harold was back within five weeks.

It was boring, he lied. There was no one to talk to.

We'll talk about it later, I say, and turn up the speed on the machine again.

Later, I'm reading in bed when Brady slumps in from the study, his eyes round and rounded by shadow, dazzled by hours of the computer's moon-like light. He complains that the United States does not foster the right atmosphere for a bartering system. He has decided he has to accommodate, he says: swapping small knickknacks for money for slightly larger knickknacks on eBay. He has sold a tube of chapstick and bought a small copper frame.

You have to start somewhere, he says.

I thought I was going through menopause. I hadn't had my period in eight months, but the second week of school, I wake up surprised and sore. I think it is my students' fault. It's hypothesized that the dominant female in a system determines the menstrual cycles of the females around her. I wonder who it is, this Dominant playing with her hair or chewing on her pen or making eyes with her lab partner. Her hormones must drift through the air as I write at the board, settling on my shoulder like an evil parrot. I wonder when I stopped being the Dominant. I wonder why my body should cling to the possibility of making something alive.

There is a boy in my class, Jacob Murphy, who has the tidy sweaters and

timid neck of a fundamentalist Christian. He does not like to speak in class. He raises his hand, but never higher than his shoulder, and his small face twists into a dutiful grimace. There is visible sweat on his brow. I think he must have a very specific idea of honor.

His mother has an aggressive heaviness about her, like she always wanted to be fat and lives with the threat of it being taken away. She sits in his seat at Parents' Night while her husband stands behind the chair. Jacob Murphy's father is also heavy, but the extra padding makes him look deceptively friendly. I return his smiles while giving my welcome speech, call on him first when I ask if there are any questions.

He gestures to the timelines I have laid out on the students' desks and asks how I'm planning on handling the creation of the world. I had gotten a look at Jacob's timeline as I was laying them out. He had written *Eden* at one end.

I'm fair, I tell the parents. I allow for a margin of error. I make sure to refer to the theory of evolution as the *theory* of evolution—which scientifically means unproved. Not a law, but generally accepted as the best we have right now.

Jacob Murphy's father says, But what if our children hold different beliefs?

I say, Science is not about belief.

He chuckles. Science is what we believe is *the best right now*, he says.

Well, I say.

Well, he cuts me off and waves his hand, like he was expecting as much.

The same things happen for me as for any other parent, just not at the time expected. I no longer lay out Harold's clothes. He crosses the street by himself. He graduated from high school five years ago, when he was twenty-four. I will never get as much pleasure from teaching nineteen years of eighth graders as I did from teaching Harold about butterflies.

If he is tired after our workouts, though, I sometimes still help him with his shoes. I am always surprised to discover he has man's feet. Long and hairy, with lumpy veins winding across the slender bones branching from ankle to toe. The nails are yellow, the skin tough at the heel and whitened, like a mold growing over an orange peel.

Sometimes he asks me to tuck him into bed. He tells me about work that day. He has a part-time job at a craft store and knows the people who shop there by name and hobby. Mrs. Jensen is a scrap-booker; Mrs. Collins is a knitter; Mrs. Grossman buys miniature jingle bells, no bigger than peas, in three packages at a time, several times a week. We imagine what she is making.

A wind chime, I say. A Christmas garland.

Harold shakes his head. A shirt, he says. Like for a knight.

A suit of armor? I say.

A suit of armor of bells, he says. She wants to make music wherever she is walking. She wants everyone to know where she is.

Teaching evolution is kind of like swimming through the breakers; the school year gets smoother, if you survive. I remind my students they learned the laws of thermodynamics last year.

They stare.

I ask if they remember the favorite child of the thermodynamic family? The conservation of energy? Which states that? Energy can neither be created nor?

Destroyed, a few drone in at the last second.

I tell them to remember that—that all things were once something else, because this is how energy moves. I give them a handout showing how domestic dogs came from wolves.

They nod. This does not sound so bad, dogs from wolves.

I ask them to work with their lab partner and list other animals that have similar characteristics without being the same species. Most are used to this by now. They write *fish* and *reptile*; *reptile* and *bird*. But Jacob Murphy looks stricken when his lab partner jumps ahead of the game and suggests that the human tailbone is reptilian as well. When the bell rings and the students scatter, Jacob Murphy tosses me a look of moral disappointment so authoritatively, I feel myself blush.

After dinner, I go to find Harold for our workout. I see him hunkered next to Brady in front of the computer, their thick, twin silhouettes like tulip bulbs.

Why did the paper-clip man want a house? Harold asks.

I don't know, Brady says. Probably just for the point of it.

Point of what?

Point of—Brady talks slow as he types—doing it just to do it, I guess.

But what did he do with the house? Did he live in it?

I don't know, Buddy. Maybe so.

Will we? Will we live in an eBay house?

Maybe so, Brady repeats. He is not listening with his eyes. If he were, he would see Harold's face has a horrible sort of hope.

eBay is now the homepage on our computer. I don't always remember to check my emails, but when I do, I see a few from a name I don't recognize. I have to open one and read *It may surprise you to know that there are many famous and academic supporters in favor of Intelligent Design*, to realize it is

Jacob Murphy's father.

Brady and I joke that we are Method-ish. He is from here, and raised on all the dried, chewy spiritual fruits his humorless parents could manage, but the faith didn't stick. We still celebrate Christmas and Easter, and we used to take Harold to church when he was younger. We stopped because he didn't like to come up from his knees after prayer. He would stay there, under the pew, his cheek turned to the carpet, studying people's feet. He screamed when we tried to coax him up. One of the deacons asked if maybe we couldn't find a more family-friendly service for him.

*What good do you think you're doing, Jacob Murphy's father writes, teaching these kids that God didn't make them who they are?*

Sometimes I still read Harold stories from the Bible, when I think of it or when he asks. He likes the story of Moses leading the Jews out of Egypt, particularly the part where the angel of death passes over the painted doors.

That's how the angel knew which ones were the good guys, right? He always asks.

That's how the angel knew, I always say.

This has never seemed deceitful or duplicitous.

The rules about this sort of over-zealous, aggressive parent thing are clear: report it. Pass it off to the principal, make him go to the school board, put all the responsibility on the greater system. Protect the individual from any liability, any accountability. Protect myself first. I begin to draft an email, polite and distanced, to Principal Wyatt, but I never manage to press Send. I reread Jacob Murphy's father's words and feel an empty, animal feeling tense my jaw. It is as though reporting him is stepping back from a fight. It is as though his emails are half of a fight I've already been having with myself.

In class, I pass out an article about Siberia's Institute of Cytology and Genetics. They are breeding a population of foxes for tameness, making fox-dogs. At least a few of the girls squeal. Harold did the same thing when we saw it on the news. The pictures are that precious.

I ask them to consider what they think about making foxes into fox-dogs. What are the differences between wolves becoming dogs over time and people changing foxes into dogs? Discuss with your lab partner and write a one-page response.

They stew and mutter. I walk around and hear snippets about dog psychics, puppy farms, doggie day care. Some cannot get over the cuteness. Some ask me what Cytology means—the study of cells, I say.

*In the beginning was the Word, Jacob Murphy's father quotes, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God.*

I am a science teacher; I know the names for what the world understands as cells and change. Microgenia—a small chin. Macroglossia—an oversized tongue. Epicanthic fold of the eyelid; upward slanting palpebral fissures separating the upper and lower lid; single transverse palmar crease: while our palms fold twice, for life and love lines, these are one, not separate, for Harold.

I imagine writing back, *Yeah, but they weren't always good words.*

Brady's frame has become a crystal hairclip has become a pair of headphones. He has bought and sold a set of six plastic tumblers yesterday alone, trading up to an elegant, though broken, pocket watch. He tinkers over it, makes it tick again. Until the eBay bid rises above fifteen dollars, the pocket watch lives on our nightstand. Sometimes I wake up, sweating and disoriented, to the ticking. It makes me dream of footsteps padding carefully, furtively through snow.

*I refuse to believe that my beautiful family and life came from monkeys,* Jacob Murphy's father emails me.

I draft an email that says, *Thank you for your interest in my class.*

I draft an email that says, *I believe that children have the right to hear all explanations and weigh them with or against their own beliefs.*

I draft an email that says, *We didn't come from monkeys, we came from gorillas, you baboon.*

I delete them all.

*I think it is wrong to change anything that God has given us as it is natural and to change it would be unnatural,* Jacob Murphy writes in his one-page response about the fox puppies.

I give him full credit.

Harold has become Brady's Project Assistant. Our workout channel is changed from the news to the Home Shopping Network so Harold can keep track of buying trends. He yells them into the next room to Brady at the computer: *those bears with quarters on their toes! Those brownie pans! Window cleaners!*

The pocket watch stays on our bedside table, the eBay bid stalled.

You know what you're doing? I say to Brady. You know what he's doing?

He can handle it, Brady says.

That's not what I meant, I say.

You're too protective, he says and strokes my arm.

He gets annoyed when I ask him to wear a condom but does, eventually.

I wonder about the sex lives of other couples with disabled children. Be-

cause it's always there, in bed with us, like a sudden chill. True, there's a familiarity to our love-making, or the memory of familiarity, and sometimes I can pretend we are our former selves—that up-and-coming Associate Programmer, the passionate teacher, the happily married couple ready to share their lives with a baby—and having sex is less of a chore than it is a comfort. But mostly we are more like the ghosts of our former selves, colliding out of habit and need but without desire, without hopefulness.

Brady is a methodical lover, but he pays too much attention to my nipples. It's my fault. Once, early in our marriage, I told him nipples were like fishing bobbers floating on the surface and underneath, attached but unseen, was my clitoris.

Jesus Christ, he said. How backwoods do you think I am?

In the spring, my students will have to watch a film for their health requirement of a penis becoming erect. The film is shot using heat vision, like something from an espionage thriller. Even the good students always laugh.

*Some day everyone you know will be dead and everything you hold true will be gone*, the emails get rougher, more demanding. *Do you think Charles Darwin will have anything to offer you then?*

Brady orgasms but I don't—too much ticking. I move the pocket watch from the bed table to the study, but then I can't sleep. It is like someone has switched off my heartbeat.

The speed with which time passes during the school year is always surprising. August is a distant memory, and September is on the wane. We should be moving on, syllabus-wise, beyond theories. We should have started talking about the biological intricacies of specific species, starting with bacteria and working our way up. But I linger, or I find more excuses to bring evolution up. This is, apparently, how I fight: through my students. They are smart, and not yet old enough for their beliefs to get in the way of new ideas. Jacob Murphy sits in the middle of them like a small, courteous quarter I want to lift from a puddle, wipe the muck off of, and pocket. I want to make sure he understands, they all understand, that, just because a theory isn't proven, it still makes sense. Not everything has to be proven to make sense.

Jacob Murphy's father writes, *I don't understand how anyone could hear the beauty and truth in the Word and not believe in it.*

I pass out a worksheet with two dogs paired up next to each other. On one side, there are small, floppy-eared, rag-tag dogs; on the other, creatures of brawn.

If these dogs fought each other, I say, who would win?



My students are very uncomfortable with this. One of them raises her hand and stutters something about dogfights being illegal.

But if they had to, I push. For food. Circle which dog would live.

The exercise goes quickly. They know what is being asked of them, and they don't like it. They draw hurried circles around the larger dogs and slouch over their sheets, ashamed.

This, I remind them, is the idea of natural selection. The strongest survive, and so are able to mate and produce strong offspring. Evolution is nothing but patterns. All it is, I say, putting on my biggest politician smile, is the hope and promise that things get better with time.

They still do not like this. It goes against everything they have been taught by Disney movies and picture books. One girl bursts into tears. When she is coherent, I understand that she has a puggle. She points to one of the uncircled dogs. It seems to pant with friendly abandon, its little jowls lifted in a smile.

Jacob Murphy's father sends me the entire first chapter of Genesis. There are typos, and I think he has typed it out by hand. I find this touching, resentfully. I read the same story to Harold that night from his illustrated children's Bible. I show him the pictures as I go: God, a blurry man-shaped cloud, hovering over dark water. Adam, golden-shouldered and thick-thighed, tromping through paradise. Eve, hair covering the indiscreet parts.

When I am done, Harold nods pensively and asks which animal I think Adam named first and if it was the dolphin.

It's just a story, baby, I say.

They're just stories? he says.

I start to say yes, then to say no. Harold can understand a lot, but he does not have the capacity for nuance, for doubt.

*When I think about what you're teaching them, I see only cruelty and foolishness.*

In older times, Harold's head would have been bashed in as soon as it appeared between my legs. He would have been left at the edge of the wilderness or smothered or drowned. Four years ago, there was a study that showed 91-93% of pregnancies detected with Down's Syndrome were terminated. I did not have an ultrasound; I was scared my baby would be deaf. I do not like to think about what I would have done if I had had an ultrasound. Evolution is the patterns that set the future, the promise that things get better—but better for whom?

*I offer a creation that is filled with love and ends in forgiveness.*

If I'm honest, I want Harold to believe. In all of it. In God making the world

and taking care of every last person. In painted doors protecting the good guys from the angel of death. Instead of answering him, I flip to that story, of Moses and the doors that saved the first-born sons. I show him the picture of a door with a red slash drawn across it. Harold nods again, satisfied.

On my lunch break, I do a little Internet research on Creationism. They believe that dinosaurs lived concurrently with humans because of early written and illustrated records about dragons. The rest of the literature describes the presence of *dragons (dinosaurs)* in the 4,000-year-old world. *All we know for certain*, the website says, *is that there were large, scaled, reptile-like creatures that went extinct, perhaps with the help of humans.* I imagine Jacob Murphy, the juvenile gallant, slaying a dinosaur in Harold's jingle bell chainmail. Then I imagine him at home—sitting across the table from his father, holding a piece of toast carefully with the fingertips of both hands, asking in his polite, hesitant way for a cell phone—and this seems no stranger than the first fantasy. Does his father let him lean over his shoulder at the computer screen, possibly help draft the emails he sends to me? Does his mother ease her weight next to him on the bed and read him the Moses story?

What the hell? An English teacher appears over my shoulder; she makes no effort to hide her repulsion as she scans the website. Are you seriously teaching this stuff?

Not teaching it, no, I say. I close the browser window with the embarrassed, jerky click of a pornography addict. God, no, I say, and laugh.

Jacob Murphy's father writes, *blasphemy and doubt are the easiest sins.*

There is a party waiting when I come home. The pocket watch has sold for eighteen dollars. The boys are ecstatic. Brady kisses my cheeks and Harold runs on one of the treadmills, really runs on it, with his arms straight up, howling.

We order dinner from a Brazilian place and eat off the good china. We open a bottle of red wine and pour Harold half a glass. His voice becomes cavernous and slow.

I help him get ready for bed as best I can. I have to stand on his mattress to pull the shirt over his head, and it takes a long time to get his arms through his pajamas. I'm aware of the skin on him—the sheer volume of it—and the layers beneath, the fat, the muscle, the bone. I lead him to the bathroom and lean against the medicine cabinet while he brushes his teeth. I have had two glasses, which is perhaps why the sight of Harold's gentle attention to each tooth, like it is a rare and fragile egg, makes me want to cry. He garbles a story from work today: Mrs. Sanders bought two cartfuls of balsa wood. She makes luxury bird-

houses. Every window has a tiny flowerbox filled with tinier silk flowers.

How much wood would it take—he pauses to spit—to build a basement?

Basements are made of cement, I say.

Even for birds? he says.

Birds don't need basements, I say, and lead him to his room. Harold gets weepy as I heave his legs under the sheet. He whimpers, What about tornados?

Go to sleep, I say.

Brady is pacing by the computer when I go back downstairs. His face looks as flat and starched as the screen. He swoops down on the keyboard, slams out a few characters, flops into the chair. He grins at me in a way that could be called maniacal. He tells me he just snatched an aluminum stepladder out from under another bidder.

Brutal place, this eBay, he says.

I have a dream about Jacob Murphy's father. I am in my classroom, packing up the day's assignments to go home, but the room is stretched and distorted, like it is a painting of itself. It is late. When I look up, Jacob Murphy's father stands in the doorway. The fluorescent light in the hall is bright and gets brighter. His silhouette is paunchy, like a gourd. I don't know it's him, but my body knows.

His dream self says, I want to talk.

I'm tired, my dream self says.

He steps into my classroom. Just for a sec, he says.

And then, it is as though our heads stay in the same place, strung at either end of a taut wire, but our bodies change. Our shoulders hunch. Our upper lips lift. There is blood moving to my hands and down my shins, I feel its heat. I feel fists forming, sprinting legs, animal movements of claws and teeth. We dart in, swipe at each other's noses, retreat back to circle and sniff. In the half second we are still—in the half second before I wake up—my dream self knows I'm going to kill him. I'm going to reach a neat and scalpel-sharp fingernail beneath his Adam's apple and tug loose whatever cords I find there. And I'm excited.

The shirt across Principal Wyatt's chest is bumpy, like a child's crayon shading, and I realize with a wince that it is his chest hair. He tells me there have been complaints.

I'm handling him, I say on impulse.

What? he says.

I thought—my mind trips slightly, rearranges its skirts—sorry, who's complaining?

A few parents, actually. They mention an exercise with dogfighting? That's

not exactly normal, is it? As far as your syllabus is usually concerned?

I'm trying new things, I say. I'm not moving in order, exactly. More like backwards. Or out of order. It's kind of been a theme.

A theme? Principal Wyatt blinks at me. There's a portrait of a young girl, his daughter, probably, over his printer; her braces look like medieval weapons.

I say, I try to be fair.

Commendable, he says. But if this is a *personal*—he pauses, and I see a series of words scramble for the top of his mind: issue? Crisis? Breakdown? until he settles on—*problem*, we can talk about—

It's not, I say.

*Do you understand that you are condemning yourself? Not only to a hell beyond imagination after you die, but to an empty life.*

Well then, Principal Wyatt says. Let's get back to the old, straightforward syllabus, shall we?

I pull some chicken breasts out of the freezer for dinner, but then I can't find the skillet. I can't find the electric teakettle or the muffin tins. I can't find the oven mitt shaped like a cow's face. On a hunch, I go into Harold's room. There they are, in a cardboard box. I heave it into the study and empty the contents in front of the boys with a satisfying crash.

What's this? I say.

Harold shifts from foot to foot. He looks at Brady and then at the ceiling.

I'm packing, he says.

For what? I say.

He shifts faster and says nothing.

For what, Harold? my voice rises.

Why don't you go get started on your run, Brady says to Harold.

It's not time yet, Harold says.

Brady says, If you run now, you can finish early and help me this evening.

Harold looks up a little while longer. Then leaves. Brady turns to me.

Are you out of your mind? he says.

Something in me cramps up, then rips.

Harold thinks you're giving him an eBay house! I yell.

So what? Brady yells. Maybe I will!

Maybe in twenty years! I try to laugh. Maybe if you're lucky and start moving a hell of a lot faster, you can give him a tire iron or a shoelace or something!

Brady's mouth opens. Then collapses.

Not maybe, he says quietly. We *will* give him a house in twenty years. Even

if I never finish this project, some day, we will leave him a house.

He lets me sputter and hiss half-baked rebuttals. Then tries to stalk off with as much dignity as he can muster, hauling a stepladder under his arm.

I tell my class to open their textbooks to chapter two, the first time the books have been opened in weeks. I take them through the line of change—one cell, two cell, three cell, four. I explain it in uninspired, broad strokes, slashing the ideas like colors on a canvas, muddying it all into brown. It doesn't matter how beautiful the words are; it is still the truth.

I take them to today, to the human body.

I say, There are 20,000 to 25,000 human genes.

I want to say, *The complexity of your body is a thing of awe, whether or not it is divine.* I want to say, *The thing to be scared about, really scared about, is that humans are, in fact, all alone. And put in charge.*

Instead, I tell my students a story about Galileo. How he was put on trial and forced to recant his statement that the earth moves around the sun. How he did it, he recanted. But how, as he was led out of the courtroom, he announced, “But it moves!” over his shoulder.

I try to think of something brave to tell them, to announce what I believe with that same Galilean fire. But I have nothing. Nothing to announce, no clear belief, losing the fight after all. Quietly, I ask them to consider what else we assume to be true today. And they are quiet in response.

*What a merciless world you have, and how merciless you will be treated for your sins. Who are you, to be a prophet? Who are you, to lead these children into doubt and despair?*

I am a convenient Christian, a science teacher, a mother. I know the words for the language of cells and change. Sometimes I get a glimpse over my shoulder and I can see the shape of the future there, built on patterns already laid out. Evolution is a momentum endlessly onward. It will take that extra, pesky 21<sup>st</sup> chromosome and shave it off the possibility the body carries. It will take the simple and beautiful and pure and discard them, toss them into a snarling, truly merciless history.

Can't I hold all of these things at once? Can't there be a God that loves small, smiling dogs and pure souls, even if the rest of us have to fight it out? Let me take on evolution, I can handle it, I'm strong enough. But let Harold have his God and safety behind painted doors.

Three years ago, Harold did not come home because he was bored or because he had no one to talk to. Harold came home because someone had spray-

painted *retard* across his apartment door. In his nice apartment building, in his good neighborhood. They had marked him, marked him as unfit. He didn't even tell us about it. Brady still doesn't know. I only found out because I went to pack up his things afterward and saw it there.

Huh, Harold said when I tried to confront him. I do not know anything about that.

He understands the idea of a lie. In theory.

On Saturday, I make Harold a lunch of a turkey sandwich on whole wheat, some carrot sticks, a nectarine. As an apology, I add a hundred-calorie pack of cookies, and drive it to his work.

The craft store smells like glue and a lint drawer. I wander through rows of brightly colored fabric, letting my hand skim the bolts of silk and fleece. The fluorescents buzz and the other shoppers give me collusive smiles. Everyone ambles, browses, meanders. It is a place of warm and harmless possibility.

I spot Harold a row away. He is talking with a large woman in a red sweater. I start toward them but stop.

The woman is Jacob Murphy's mother.

She has some fabric and what looks like a bag of feathers in her arms. Even in profile, I can tell the aggression and sullen fear I saw in my classroom is gone. She smiles at Harold with a genuine warmth. Her flesh looks fluid and comforting, ready to draw Harold into the folds of her body and hold him there.

Harold spots me. He raises his hand high in greeting. His face is all sweetness, already forgiveness, every feature set with an exclamation point. Jacob Murphy's mother follows his gaze. Her expression has the unthinking openness of an oyster, and in the half second before she realizes who I am, in the half second when there are still traces of welcome lingering on her face, I am struck by the similarities in us, the core, base, cellular similarities: from our bodies, we brought life. From our bodies, we can make life. And the word for that was always, ever, miraculous.