

## BEFORE BEGINNING

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*Michael Evans*

A guitar would undo this scene,  
would drag the bent man under his reflection  
in the motel's turquoise pool.

My mother blushes in the riot of the glare  
rising from the chlorinated water.

Someone has told a joke  
or said a word

so unlike the linen-finish of this late 50's print  
—its colors a fading halter of plaid & hand-tinted reds—  
that laughter dismisses me

(years later, the viewer)  
from the need to know.

Enough that she is laughing  
twenty minutes south of Bangor.

Enough that it is August & the man bending over her,  
his arms obscuring the ridge of her collar bone,

is not my father.

There's no doubt  
he sang to her until the thin walls thumped  
from fists next door—

& they laughed into the pillows.

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His right hand touches the place  
at the back of his neck where the aneurysm will rupture  
within the week.

He is watching her

dive into the pool, & she is halfway gone—  
her legs at the center of a fountain.  
He cannot imagine that he could die,

that he could drown in this pain that surfaces  
behind his ears & spreads until his jaws catch.  
He cannot imagine that he could ever not

be part of this scene.

Facing straight into the camera's gaze,  
undated by smiling & his thin hands,

he looks

nothing like me.

He looks nothing like my life

could ever have looked  
had he lived beyond those days beside the pool.

I imagine his pain,  
the way it begins as if by chance  
& (as if by chance)

the way it ends

in that moment of stunning relief.