# BEFORE BEGINNING

*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.