

My sister disappeared in 1998. She was fifteen.

Passing the township sign—*Rockwell, Ohio: Where Art Comes Alive!*—and turning down Brightwood toward the old neighborhood, I recall the soft-spoken police officer rubbing his hands together in slow circular motions as if rolling a tiny ball of clay.

“We have evidence to believe,” he said, searching for words, “well, we’re upgrading this to a missing persons case.”

My parents sat with their waxen expressions on the garishly upholstered loveseat, its pattern of madly blooming azure delphinia too festive and bright.

Mostly, I remember the three-foot-tall crucifix carved with a chainsaw and given as a wedding present to my parents by a distant cousin, some kin belonging to the outer asteroid belt of our family of which we never spoke, mostly carnival workers, drug addicts, and tent-revival preachers, any of whom might have easily acquired such a thing. Whether this holy icon had been given them as a joke or in earnest, my parents never quite solved, though they also couldn’t, as faithful Methodists, rightfully conceive of tossing it into the trash. They were stuck. So they hung it up.

That night the corpus of the Lamb of God, with the gouge in his side looking all the gorier for having been incised by a snaggle-toothed Stihl chainsaw, forever imbuing the wood with a pungent gas-oil mixture, stared down on the five of us—me, my parents, the two officers—from its place on the wall with its blunt, trapezoidal eyes, a leer more android than loving savior. All the same, I prayed to that rustic, robot-faced Jesus. I prayed for Eleanor to come home.

I park on the street and emerge into the mosquito-choked air of late August. Dad holds open the front door and hails me like I might not remember the address. I wave back and retrieve