TWENTY-NINE POINTS OF REFERENCE

Betty Jo begins with hand circles. Her middle finger is a compass needle that points towards Tokyo. The pointing’s easier if she imagines herself in a juniper hedgerow, making her way towards saffron tulips. It’s something felt, she says, like the robust tumor growing in a notch on her knee.

It’s rough for anyone to play hopscotch with a tin can full of milk, but politics aside, Betty Jo’s only getting older, and I’m reminded of golden grass every time I see her.

Today she’s an ostrich standing on her left leg with a silk bandana wrapped about her face. She balances Tommy’s expensive Nordic microscope on her forearms and a glass of chocolate-covered sprinkles with her upright knee. I want the glass to be holding something different, and Tommy claims Betty Jo should sleep with him in the tomato fields because she borrowed his prize possession without asking. Tit for tat: the Hoover Dam is just another concrete wall.

I know what the glass cannot contain. We’re temporarily out of salt pork and mottled potatoes. (I feel feverish over the loss.)

The circles only get bigger, so Betty Jo puts the microscope on her head with sprinkles on top. Her hip bones punctuate the center of each motion.