

## The Dictum of Recognition

Last night, my mama and I were driving down the barely visible Highway 30 on the way to her new house. The road was empty, give or take the occasional car. We're only a few minutes away, and I can't stop thinking about what she had told me hours prior, how I always come home for such a short amount of time that it never seems like I fully settle in and relax by the time I leave — and, that I'm too hard on myself. The latter statement seemed like an aside, a 'Well, I wasn't going to mention it but now that we're talking about you I might as well.' Both observations are true and do not come as a surprise to me, but what she left out of the former is that I rarely ever feel truly settled in anywhere. This is no one's fault, not even my own, so I don't mention it. I wouldn't have anyway. Instead, I say Wow, is that fog? It's so thick you can hardly see the road. She says, My God, I know, it's been getting really foggy lately. And I, internally, recognize this density as one of my own. I think to myself, I understand — I get it — I've felt it too, thoughts I wouldn't ever say aloud.

But let's say I did, or let's say I could, what would she say? Maybe, describe it to me. I would say, I feel it like a sick disease, one growing exponentially in my gut. I think there might be a snake in there, and it's circling itself in an endless loop, and I wish it would just eat itself and go away. Sometimes, I think it feeds on the contents of my stomach, because at times it grows very large and pushes up against my ribs. Or, even worse, it'll start to slither its way up my esophagus, scales scratching its lining as it leaves behind a trail of uncomfortable slime. And it's so big that it presses up against my brain and I can no longer remember words or thoughts or where I am. It slinks just far enough up my throat to where I can't breathe out of my mouth, but

never far enough up to where I can yank it out. If I ever were able to yank it out I would do so and then I would kill it.

One day this will happen, I know it will, but much to my discomfort and embarrassment it hasn't yet. But for now, and in these moments, I remind myself repeatedly, *Dictum, noun: A formal pronouncement from an authoritative source. My Dictum is that I am very much at odds with my current circumstance. My Dictum is the relationship that my breath has with the number four. My Dictum is the feeling of blood inside of my index finger. My Dictum is the feeling of my teeth against my lip.* And then, maybe I'll stare transfixed at a made-up point on a usually white wall in hopes of reprieve. I'll defocus my gaze until it looks like I'm underwater.. *My Dictum is that I am not going to have a heart attack right now.*

We're now pulling into the driveway. I am so carsick. My mom tells me to rest; Okay, I'll try.

And then, mama, when do you think the fog will lift? Maybe tomorrow, baby. *My Dictum, maybe tomorrow.*