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Family Reunion

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Family Reunion

Howard Schaap

We sit around as the sun's angle slides down the wall into twilight. Dad stumbles over words and names. Mom scrabbles for old stories since she has no new ones. My oldest sister straightens up, speaks of a thinning vertebrae; another sister squirms in her seat, starts again with a second lover; the last sister wrestles with a first stubborn son. I, the baby, now crucifiable by age, announce a new promotion. Grandchildren from floundering adults to potty trainees are sprinkled among us, as we grasp for collective stories—fishing trips to stony lakes, the hideous outfits in which mom dared dress us, a list of animals and pets and their feats, then silence.

The collective food ages on a plastic counter. Outside, the asphalt shingles shed a few grains in the inimitable wind. We're watching the season slide down into winter, digging in our toes and fingernails, looking back up this sheer cliff for the clefts that will mark that we've been here at all, for the cracks in which to plant stories in the memories of our toddlers lest we be swept away without words.