

LOUISE LEONG

Curb Alert 3, 2018
Gouache on paper, 24 x 30 in



JEFF EWING

Michael Collins

In the kidneyed design of spilled wine, the future presents itself, roseate and transparent as I've heard diseased cells sometimes appear. I stand for a second transfixed like an amateur sideshowman guessing the weight of the past, lifting the mothers of old friends grown lighter each year until they just slip away.

I recall those years before you moved away from our unaspiring town (within which the future could gain no foothold) as a time of ironclad friends bolted together like convicts, fumbblings overheard from the stairs blueprints to our clumsy guessings. You weren't the first of us to fail, or the second,

to slouch home to your dinner, to ask for seconds and try to forget the deadening feeling of fading away, of dissolving like an old photo. Then and now a guessing game, a long blindfolded march into our futures that allowed no missteps—we believed what we heard, did as we were told; accepted as fact that friends

were dead weight. Come spring we shed those friends like husks. Later, lying awake counting the long seconds till morning, I might hear a voice I hadn't heard in years, loud and laughing in my ear. I'd shoo it away like a fly, turn to the other side—nothing but the future mattered then; it wasn't a time for second-guessing as far overhead Michael Collins floated, guessing correctly that he would be forgotten, that his friends—bouncing kids swinging a nine iron—were the future we all deserved. His fame measured in seconds, still he wished them both well as they lowered away. He's the one I think of most, whose voice I hear

as I stand alone on an eroding shore, the bulk of the herd lowing in the distance, and study the clouds. Guessing which will inundate the fields and which float away harmlessly, how much rain it might take to separate friends from enemies in drag. Days dissolve in seconds, the past denies that one long night ago it was the future.

I heard you were back, home again after so long away. I'm guessing you missed us, your predictable friends, Collinses free of any empty hunger for a second future.

Jeff Ewing's poems, stories, and essays have appeared in *Catamaran Literary Reader*, *ZYZZYVA*, *Willow Springs*, *Sugar House Review*, *Crazyhorse*, the *Saint Ann's Review*, *Lake Effect*, and the *Penn Review*, among others. His debut short story collection, *The Middle Ground*, will be published by Into the Void Press in February 2019. He lives in Sacramento, California, with his wife and daughter.