

## Front Royal, Virginia, 1996

Maybe start with the stairs. Or the smoke. Or the metal bucket. How damp the whole basement felt. How cold. Start with the mystery of the water-well you feared falling in. Or the pull-chain of the small, dim bulb. Yes, start there. Your grandfather smoking cigarettes from the top step, looking out across the basement.

He must have liked the quiet, the dark. His workshop in the corner cluttered with handsaws and hammers, sawdust and nails. All the work, waiting. All the projects. All the short, simple quips—the voices, the jokes—to make a child laugh. He must have liked the quiet. The glow of the cigarette. The wafts of smoke. The metal bucket packed with ashes.

Someone a long time ago, you were certain, had fallen into that well, and what had happened? You didn't want to know. You sat a few steps below him, looking up, listening. The rumble of the washer, the dryer. The low whistle of wind. The story, the legend, of bats living in the chimney flue. Your attention caught—your whole childhood caught—in your grandfather's simple moments. The flick of the lighter. The first puff.

Yes, start with the stairs. Or the smoke. Your grandfather's grey hair in wisps—eyes glowing behind his glasses. Maybe another joke. Another puff.

Maybe turn the story in on yourself. Who were you then? Who were you going to be? Or, simply, watch:

*He taps the last of his cigarette into the bucket. Says he's done. C'mon. Upstairs. And you follow him back up to the dining room. He leads you in a simple chant, another turn for laughs, pounding forks on the table. He shouts, "Food, food, we want some food," as your grandmother smiles from the kitchen.*

Travis Truax earned his bachelor's in English from Southeastern Oklahoma State University in 2010. After college he spent several years working in various national parks out West. His work has appeared in *Quarterly West*, *Hippocampus*, *Barnstorm*, and *Split Rock Review*. Currently he is in Bozeman, MT.