(excerpted from) The Interview

Mamie Morgan
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My dad’s job in Afghanistan
was to pick guys up after mission.

He once made it outside Kandahar
before the propeller hit some trash
and this mattress cut off the leg of a soldier
he carried. When we read Romeo and Juliet

I kept thinking, sometimes it’s the Montagues
and the Capulets, sometimes it’s a man against
a mattress. You’re the guy who read

my story, right? You know how it opens
with a father watching this shooting star

from a living room window? In my head

it’s not a star. In my head it’s his kid hid
in a tin can, cannonballing through space.

ZZ Packer, Raymond Carver, Zadie Smith.
Barry Hannah, Larry Brown, may I look
at my notes? Junot Diaz, Jhumpa Lahiri,
    I saw on the website you don’t want kids
who read sci fi, fantasy, old stuff. But
    Nat Geo just reported a lake on Mars.

Tell me that doesn’t make you want
to write some story about a pregnant

Mars-lady who recycles, yells to her
other kids, *stop playing Fortnite*, falls

in love with the wrong guy across a lake.
    There’s a way to live on another planet

    and y’all aren’t into it?

My friend Patrick says *no poems*  
*with cicadas in them*, but also he’s

one of those guys who only reads tomes.
So it’s like: dude, you’re fifteen. Try no

poems with the big words you use
to hide from everybody. He likes jazz

and he likes jazz for real, so I’m always
telling him, *just write jazz poems, Jesus.*

I say no poems with adjectives in them.
My third grade teacher called them sparkle

words, but all I ever care about are verbs.
*Eccentric* is easy. Try writing about
your bipolar aunt they found hitching
just south of Salem, carrying one ice skate,

trying to find her way into the Enchanted Forest.

When I grow up I’m living alone
on the Damariscotta River with a black dog—
friends say that’s weird but think of the Polish chemist
Clara Immerwahr—first lady PhD in her field, married in Breslau.

It’s hard to know what way to order
a story. Dad says you only got so long
to get in the boat. But you can’t give it all away
up front either. Tricky business. The husband became

famous for swinging gas into warfare.
No stopping him. Money, recognition, she stayed
home with a baby. The soul has moments of escape but
only if you let it. Let me finish: When people ask why I don’t

want kids I can’t exactly say
because of some stupid Dickinson line—
because of some Polish chemist who shot herself in the heart.

You probably think of Mary Oliver
as a poet, but she’s maybe best at journaling,

which Patrick says isn’t really an art form
but my mom calls the guy who details her car
an artist, so it’s like: perspective.
Field journals are my favorite thing.

Sometimes the notes you take far exceed what you could ever create from them.

Sometimes as a kid I can only go as far as the road, but even there

are riches: late morning when the sun and moon stay out together, the metal

praying mantis Mr. Miller glued to his mailbox, the photographer taking

engagement photos of a couple walking straight down the middle of two yellow lines.

MAMIE MORGAN teaches poetry at The South Carolina Governor’s School for the Arts and Humanities. Her poems have appeared or are forthcoming in Muzzle, Four Way Review, The Oxford American, Inkwell, Smartish Pace, Carolina Quarterly, The Greensboro Review, Cimarron, Yemassee, and elsewhere. She lives in the woods with her husband and two pitbulls, Henrietta Modine and Wednesday Stewart.