

The Laugh

The moment I'd parked, a boy rushed toward me: no more than nineteen, bent with concern, bunching his fingers like an orator. I rolled the window down. He said, "Can I help you?" His eyes were gray and fussy. His knees clung to each other. I began to laugh, and the architecture of his world began to crumble. "This is private property." His voice held a brittle note of faux civility. "You cannot park here. This property, as I told you, is private." Later, choosing pomegranates at the supermarket, I understood that the laugh had escaped from an ugly, subterranean part of me, a place where the boy's earnest regard for order had kindled a bonfire of malevolent joy. I imagined my personae hand-in-hand, kicking their feet in the air as they churned around the fire. The captious lover, the failed shortstop, and the drowsy editor: each of them in hysterics, frothing from the eyes. When I left the supermarket, people were staring above my head. I turned. A storm-cloud heaved its belly over the world. Closing in on the horizon, the sun was the throat of a god, and boulevards vanished down it. Rain arrived; oaks rolled up their sleeves.