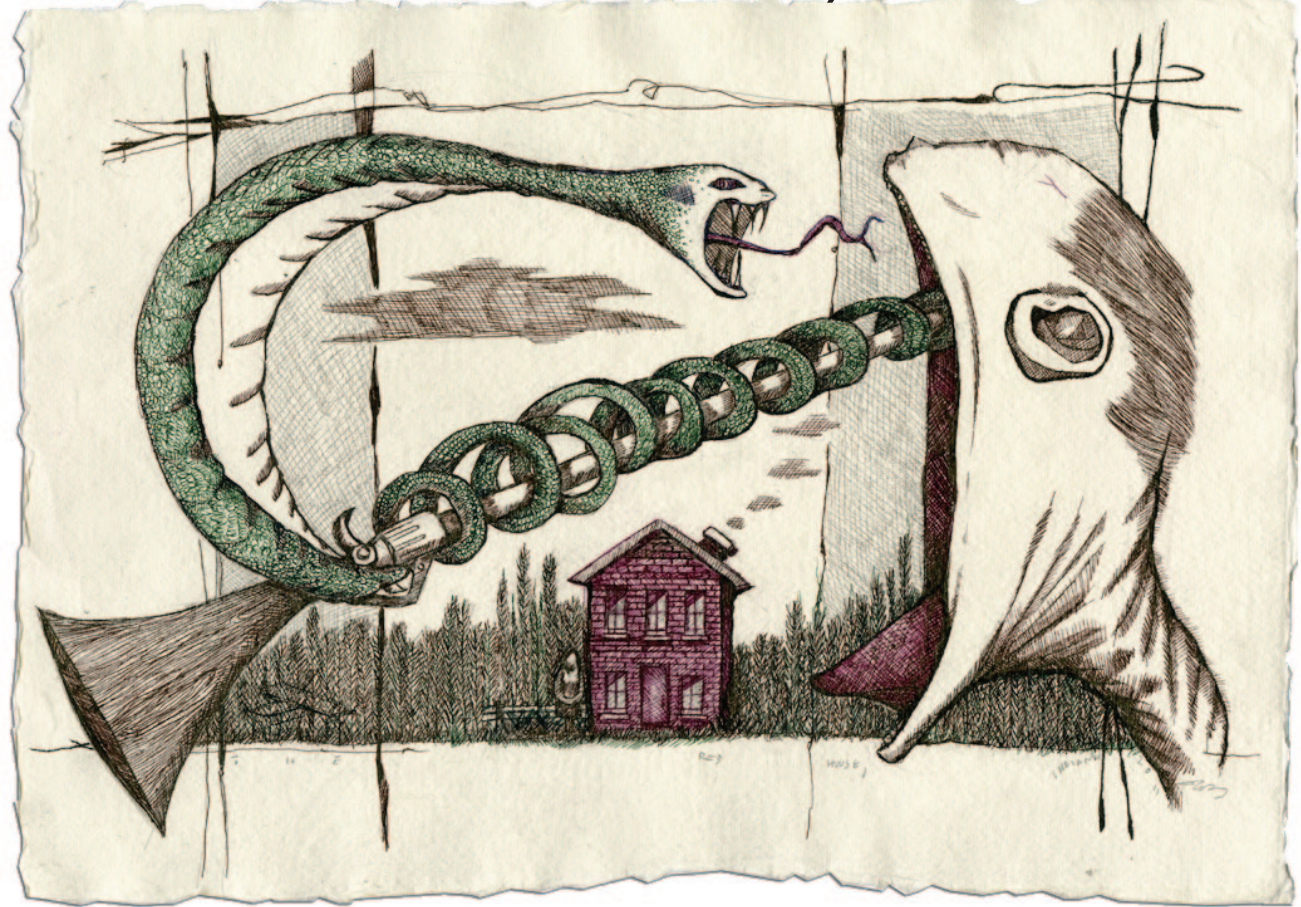


THE RED HOUSE, INDIANA



Aunt Gladys leads me to the house at the far end of the property, next to the radish garden. Bright red bricks of the tall two story house, the corn and soy beans bend in the rapid summer storms threatening to tantrum. Did I mention the air as thick as flannel sheets? Aunt Gladys educates me on why the window sills are as low as my knees. The narrow doorways—4 leading to the kitchen alone—remind me of an awkward teen I once met who didn't care if he survived the apocalypse. Later, I will be shown a pile of wood hiding in the grass which used to be a shack they lived in 60 years ago. When grandma's not around, I will be told of a shot gun barrel placed into a husband's mouth, the trigger pulled in front of his wife. In the morning, Gladys shows me how the horses bow their necks to her, lift hooves off the ground for her. I am introduced to 'Barn Cat,' the cat that lives in the barn. Were you aware Grandmothers squirm when their sisters tell their granddaughter stories about them that involve shotguns and snakes? In the kitchen, I am accused of being a vegetarian. Did you know, lettuce screams when you pour bacon grease over it? At night, I am handed a ledger her father brought home from work one day; I could tell one of the sisters—her cursive precise, tense, embossed—wrote songs to get her way, crooning about who she wanted to marry. I am told about the half naked girl running through their property in the middle of the night to escape boys in a blue pick-up. I notice the gun with a long barrel leaning on the bathroom doorway. After lunch, I'm given some white lightning from a mason jar in a locked cabinet. After a week, I begin to liken the house to an air conditioned coffin. I look forward to the bugs that light up at night, a temporary immolation. In the back of the red house, I find a room with floorboards missing. Aunt Gladys pulls open a small, square door on the side of the wall, revealing a crawl space that emits the smell of mold. *It leads to a tunnel that opens to the road*, she says.

