

The Second Fallacy

You despise it, the bougainvillea, so you plant it on either side of your front door. You call this luxury. It is a very specific type of luxury. The bougainvillea asks for nothing. It methodically climbs beside your front door. You have charted this. You

cannot help yourself. You have watched this plant so many times that it comforts you. My mother planted them at the edge of her yard so many years ago because the eye trains itself without training on the hot-pink petals—leaves, really—seen

more clearly against the dark and rotting fence. And you find that no matter how far you push backward, no matter how hard you pressure memory, that you cannot remember any image earlier than this one in your life. Not her warm hands or the early pleasure of milk.

Not the first time she read to you. What you return to are the terrible wings rising from your own back, the heart like a panicked bird beating within the slick pericardium. As far back as you go, nothing before those petals. You think you have learned something about tenderness,

but what have you really learned? Memory refuses to yield. Memory will not be tortured into submission. Not tenderness in the eye but the brute need to see accurately. You know this is a terrible thing to admit. You know this now.

The Second Fallacy appeared originally on The Chronicle of Higher Education website.

C. DALE YOUNG

Poet C. Dale Young is author of three collections of poetry, the most recent being *Torn*, and poetry editor for *New England Review*. He lives and practices medicine in San Francisco.

AMY MEISSNER

Artist Amy Meissner is a writer and children's book illustrator living in Anchorage, Alaska.

