Fall
Olivia is known by her affliction of continuous menstruation. She is said to have originated in Bethlehem, and is known also as the official heir to the Knox factory therein. But here, she attends the University of Pennsylvania, a freshman. The figure of Olivia, bleeding, as described by the ancients, has a beautiful face, delicate and terraqueous, and a nimble red uterus, binarious, in her bleeding—continuous.

She was once a trembling adolescent in her yard prone to moon-worshipping. She was not close with anyone, not even the Knoxes.

At the University of Pennsylvania, in Philadelphia, Olivia Knox lies on her slim dorm room bed, and worries—over having to share the large bathroom down the hall. In Bethlehem, she’d had an entire bathroom to herself, and this bathroom a lock and a large tub, too, where she could bleed forever if needed into the all-accepting drain. There is a drain’s holy acceptance.

She cried out for her mother when the bleeding began. Fourteen. Sunday. She ran from the factory where she was helping her father, past his Benz and toward their mansion, up to the bedroom, her pants brown and clinging, and the two of them—mother, daughter—had been for hours unable to stop the bleeding. Helped to climb over a kitchen mitt, Olivia, bleeding, was driven down to Philadelphia, and there a doctor had to remove the mitt. He lowered the sopping girl over a basin, where then stomach lubricant was applied, and this doctor, unforgivably a man, would not even look at her but watched a screen with the black and white abomination of her binarious uterus wincing and bouncing in reaction to being seen—the two of them—at last. They did not look very real. They looked like Iceland.
On the drive down, looking out the Benz window, Olivia saw a cloud had turned dense outside, and she felt the moon was a prisoner above it. To see the moon is its freedom!

The doctor told her mother of her having two wombs and these beginning to bleed. Simultaneous. Mrs. Knox told her daughter—

“You are a woman now.”

Inaccurate and apparent!

There was nothing that could be done about the blood, the doctor said. They had fit her into a diaper, ordered from the Obstetrics aisle of the hospital at the University of Pennsylvania. It was midnight by the time they could leave—Mrs. Knox slumped, her sickness now oozing out, effuse, alien person outside of pajama, too far off the map of her bedroom—and it rained wetting the roads as Olivia's blood filled the diaper, which fit fine, a good fit, over how slim her form, fourteen, and then it was on their Benz's immaculate leather, all over, and God bless the moon, Olivia now thought, looking right at it again, beyond this everything, perfection.

“We’ll get you some tampons,” Mrs. Knox said at last.

Olivia looked up at her moon, and imagined it killed, and she, a Lenape Indian, indigenous to this region—she would have to hunt it apart, to use all of its parts, my whitebison, its skin, bone and organ, I would dissect into everything! I will use the moon, slain and kissed with my iris, to find padding, to line my underwear with the shaved tufts of whitehotrock, that heightrock, until I reach into my deadmoon deeper and, Pennsylvanian, use tampons.

They were parked outside of a desolate WaWa, the asphalt a moonbutterous blackbread. There were no stars. Her mother was too tired to go in, had been too frail for any of this. And Olivia could not bear to go in alone.

The thought of going in alone . . . the dripping diaper puffed inside her pants . . . bloodsoiled shoes somehow . . . she could not. She'd rather make her bed that night in the tub. The pipes, wherever they let out . . . the ground would understand, understood blood in Bethlehem. You can't buy pad or tampon at night, a fourteen year old alone wearing a diaper, a Benz panting for you outside, its
leather moistened and ruined. Everyone knew you. You were Olivia, bleeding, Knox.

“Just drive,” Olivia told her mother, and Mrs. Knox—who was usually too frail, sick, and tired, to drive, or love—drove.

Olivia had been beginning to read everything. A good book is a pamphlet on how to leave your parents. A great book is longer and tells you how to leave your town. A very long book helps you with the waiting you are enduring. You are waiting for your father to die. You can’t kill him. You don’t shoot him. You are waiting for him to fall down, to clear the fat off the ceiling.

That is your particular patience, but in the meantime you are scrupulous about your application materials. You are applying to the University of Pennsylvania to study English therein, in the fall. To live in a dorm. You imagine your life. But you cannot yet move. You wait. Crouched. Hunched in the kitchen cabinet behind the buckets of your father’s product—Knox Gelatin—the yield of his factory’s motions, murder’s powder. You want irreconcilability itself to part so you can leave the land, leave land. You read Sophocles. For an entire year, your junior, you only read plays. Shakespeare. You’ve read everything, so that you know. Everything. The king dies. He has to go!

By the time Olivia has entered college as an English major at the University of Pennsylvania, she is accustomed to using three or four tampons at a time. She changes them out frequently, as often as twice every hour. Seminars are a problem, as are long, mandatory group afternoons where a teaching assistant takes them to a room in the library and goes over the plots to several books at once, mostly British. The freshmen have to graph what happens, and all the while her tampons soaking, bulging with robinbreasts of blood, gore swirling onto her chair, and she cannot get her plots straight, or truly understand the language of irony, how iron might ping against what happens causing fractures, cleavage in which criticism is meant to seethe, all that happens confused with what is happening, the plots soaked in new blood, the marriages and quarrels and conflicts and wars mixing in her mind with the panic of utter embarrassment.