

Texas,” and wished it was summer again. A seahorse stared blankly over orange coral. A blue fish emerged from green seaweed, its mouth a small, silent *o*. I looked once more at my name on the card, the anthropomorphized “7.”

In three months, the buried “8” would be unearthed, embellished with the extra pressure of a pen. Worn away, the snap of the wallet would never make that pleasing sound again.

YVETTE BENAVIDES, SAN ANTONIO, TX

Searching the inventory. Looking for something, anything, to make good. No recipes, directions, or proper ingredients. Without the convenient steps, resources... so I adjust in the day.

Use this.

Mix that... smell first and add hesitantly...

the unknown,
remember you are not without hope,
here in cooking with what you have.

MATTHEW BERG, BEECH BLUFF, TN

In 1992, my family couldn't Google iguana care questions. We relied instead on the magazine *Reptiles* and well-meaning, often incorrect advice from pet store clerks. We knew about caudal

autotomy, though—a green iguana can sever its tail as a defense mechanism to escape predators and it will grow back.

Iggy was shy and skittish, but nothing had touched his tail. We never knew what frightened him enough to drop it one day, what he'd misinterpreted as a threat. Being warned, I was prepared for the tail wriggling by itself. But the sheer distance between Iggy and his detached appendage struck me. He crouched at the left side of the tank, in front of his heat rock. Far away, past the pale curved driftwood he enjoyed perching on, his tail quivered in the tank's right corner, a maroon speck of blood at the break.

When Iggy's tail regenerated, it didn't look the same. Before, it had been a bright, leafy green with brown stripes, longer than the rest of his body, tapering to a fine point. When it grew back, the new section was a dark grayish brown. It was shorter now, no longer whiplike. The end was thicker, rounded and stumpy. I'd assumed that regenerating amputated body parts was such miraculous magic, it couldn't appear any less than perfect, that I wouldn't be able to tell Iggy's tail had ever broken off. Instead, I could see where the trauma had occurred. There were signs of the extremes he'd gone to for self-protection, of the hard, stressful

readers' notes

ON REGENERATION

work necessary for recovery. Proof that something incredible, but not effortless, had taken place.

MARY KUNA, SAINT JOHN, NB

My husband's dark night of the soul concluded with a cocktail of prescriptions.

"And sleep," his therapist emphasized, "is the most preventative medicine."

Months later, baby growing inside me, I feared the way nighttime cries would impact my husband's recovery. I enrolled in a newborn sleep class.

"Your baby is not a robot," the blonde instructor began brightly. "Humans are messy."

Still, I hoped against humanity. Hoisting my heavy body onto the couch, I streamed a video with tips for getting baby back to bed.

"Open the blinds first thing," the cherubic coach continued. "Remember to let the light in."

ANNA ROLLINS, HUNTINGTON, WV

Mamaw passed away from Alzheimer's a few years ago. She always said she wished one of her kids had stuck with the piano.

My fingers long, not thick, but alone with that quiet figuring. No one to teach my hands, I'd sight-read the beginner piano book, there in the formal room, white carpet vacuumed in stripes, walnut

tables, chalk peppermints in crystal, the light from what she called window dressings. With "Michael, Row Your Boat Ashore," I was learning hallelujah comes from everything that makes sound, if I hear it right.

Later, my mother told me Johnny Cash had played that same piano. He was seeing her babysitter. She was quick to add, *That was before June.*

May we forgive our geniuses their trespasses. And if we believe that what is touched touches again, what of that? Regeneration? Virginal me touching Johnny Cash? That I'd have maker's hands, too, fear they'd be taken away. Could I trace my own rowing to more than one shore? The hallelujah of musk and mouth. A ring of fire consumes everything, everyone—indiscriminate in place. Before we fall, we let our feet leave the hallowed ground.

In "Walk the Line," Cash sings, *I keep the ends out for the tie that binds.* Because you're mine goes first. Maker's hands, the left in gold. Muscle is but the habit of reaching.

HEATHER DOBBINS, FORT SMITH, AR

The man lay on the table. I held the Richardson retractor as my partner shoved laparotomy pad after laparotomy pad above, then below the man's liver, his spleen, his pelvis, packing all four quadrants of his