1.

***J***ohnny remembers stars spinning in circles cutting bright slits in the black sky. *The class outing to the planetarium in Chicago. The lights down. I was kissing Louisa and I got so hard I couldn’t stand. She laughed as I moved my coat to cover up, “Why don’t you hang it on your woody, Johnny?”*

Hearing sounds of drumming he closes his eyes, grabs his bedroll, and sees himself six years old...Aunt Marrie wrapping a bath towel behind his back, pulling him closer as she dries behind his ears: “Can’t be wet behind your ears, you’ll catch a death of...and what will my sister say?” She turns him around and works the towel down to his private parts: “What a big boy you are; another ten years...my, my... you’ll be *just* like your ta!”

He overhears ta say of Marrie, “With her hot blood she’ll make a trunk of trouble. McCleuds had her late, named her Marrie.” Explaining in that holy tone of his, “Biblical word it is: *mar* –a bitter spice for the incense. No wonder she’s a hard girl.”

*Auntie Marr, her name sounds like the planet*.

Marrie tells him about the clouds: “In older Scot families there’d be one reading the clouds like Gypsies their tea leaves.” When he’s 15, on a windy day with the sky full of threat, she sneaks off with him to a secluded spot. She shows him. “Aye, Johnny, your ma won’t have any of this. Best no telling.” Johnny pulls away, runs home ahead of the black clouds.

“Ma, Aunt Marrie’s teasing me.”

His mother explains, “We need whatever help we can get, your ta being gone.”

*Ta fled to the war to avoid her*.

Marrie reads the clouds: “Those clouds be following you, Johnny. You’ll see. It’s not for a farthing your name’s McCleud.”

His mother gives her own history with surety: “Our families came all of us from the Isle of Lewis. MacLeod, the name’s in my bible if we believe what’s writ.” Later professes her family comes from Skye, ignores the change of island, and confuses the name. “Your father’s name is McCloud, no danger of inbreeding.”

Johnny feels threatened by his aunt, uncertain about matters of incest.

Echoes of Aunt Marrie’s whisper when he turns sixteen: “Some tried to shorten the name to ‘Cloud’ but the shortening did na to your johnny.” He runs outside; she calls from the window: “Look you up, Johnny, see what the clouds tell you!”

She mocks his timidity.

*I’ll run for San Francisco first chance. Let Marr help Ma.*

Clouds drive his fears across the August night sky.