

South of Eden

Small squirrels rush through the green grass. Small droplets of dew speckle the leaves. Golden dogs laugh and prance in the golden sunlight. An adorable little girl — round cheeks, a white toothy smile, culturally exotic — hits the burro-shaped pinata on the first try. Delicious candy gushes from the gaping wound in the side of the burro: twizzlers, cherry starburst, bright red Hershey's kisses. Ecstatic children rush to collect their share of the goods; small hands grasping against synthetic plastic wrap. Under the old Japanese cherry blossom, a beautiful man falls to one knee and proposes to an even more beautiful woman; she brings her hands to her face, holds them there in a second of shock, then puts them down, beams, nods vigorously. The two embrace, to the smiles and applause of the audience. The ring glistens under the soft light of the sunset. A young boy and girl watch from a distance, smile softly at each other. He knows that he'll ask her in a few years; he knows she'll say yes; she knows she'll say yes. Sirens wail in [—] shoot him. By the colorful playground, a woman hugs her husband excitedly and whispers in his ear that their first baby will be a beautiful little girl. He cries and kisses her. A young man in tattered clothes runs from [—]. An old woman with elderly white hair tied into a neat bun watches small arms and legs run cheerfully along miniature bridges, slides, steps. Her eyes are tired; her face is worn; but she is resting — she is at peace with herself. She reminisces about her life to her grandson, who eagerly listens to all of her stories, every time she tells them. [—] spills on the street, pistols dig [—] dead. She reaches into her breast pocket and pulls out a tattered black-and-white image of a handsome young man in smart Navy attire. That was my husband, she tells her grandson in a slow, frail drawl. He fought in all the wars. All of them. It begins to snow; hexagonally symmetrical glacial structures in the miniature. The little children whoop and build snowmen, each perfectly proportioned. A muffled [—], shouts. The teenagers have a snowball fight, but the snow is fluffy enough such that no one gets hurt or wet. They all wear pastel-colored mitts, which were knitted by their grandmas by the warm fireplace. Santa's sled hovers over the air; he waves his arm; presents wrapped in vivid holiday wrapping slowly fall to the ground. Little children rush over and find teddy bears, toy trains, candy canes, [—]guns. They jump up and down and run over to the fathers and

mothers, who wink at each other and say yes Santa is sure great isn't he with the smirk of social superiors who know something you don't. A flock of storks drop babies from the sky in small parachutes, and desperate single women rush to catch them. Children screaming. Children screaming. Children screaming. Children screaming. [—] ... Each of the women beams when they see how fulfilled they will be with the remainder of their maternal lifetimes. The small children are doted, breastfed, cared for; the soft hums of mothers reciting pieces from the children's lullaby canon ring through the Christmas evening. A large locomotive dressed in dark gray and red paint leading a line of thin smoke several miles long slows to a stop in front of the station. The doors open; out stumble dozens of men with sooty faces dressed in army tactical gear who have just come back from some war in some foreign land over some noble cause; their soon to be wives rush towards them in somber skirts and dresses; pale faces kiss under the snow. Blood. War. Clothes stained in [—] The oil tycoon who lives in the mansion on the peak of the distant mountain has come to celebrate Christmas for the first time: he walks across the small town, providing well-funded health and education subsidies for small chimney sweepers with Anglo-Saxon names and small soot caps. He is thanked excessively for his generosity, his charity. In the snow-covered town square, bodies gesture, speak, dance, sing, play, perform, cup hot chocolate in gloved hands. And no one saw when the sun fell into the ground and all the Earth lit on fire [—] ... and not a soul was stirring, not even a mouse.