

Cady Vishniac

ON MOUNT GILEAD

Do these people know
they have too many churches?
Lumpy-cheeked families file out Sunday afternoons.
When we pass on the sidewalk
they smile at me with their white teeth.
Not polite, but passive-aggressive. Girls in ugly white shifts
wave, hop into minivans.

And it's true, you can't get around without a car.
Bike lanes give out onto highways,
sidewalks onto mown fields. Football crowds
tramp through my muddy yard
on their way from the bar. The drunkest beam when they ask,
May we pee here?

I was heading back to any city, either coast,
as long as there are rats like plump black Chihuahuas
and a subway for the rats to sleep in.
Some nights I sit with a mug of coffee and repeat it to myself:
My neighbors throw Mary Kay parties,
smell like baby powder, can't talk without nodding,
or worse, squeezing my hand.
So I was going to leave,

but the Kroger sells milk flavored
like Marshmallow Peeps,
and somebody sets a box of free oranges by the registers.
In the prep kitchen, a teenager
stirs diced pickle into potato salad, and the other shoppers
bump my heels with their carts.
It's just rude enough, just like

home. And you've got to hand it to them: the men are so cornfed,
the toddlers leaking jam, the women's tits wide
as my feet are long.