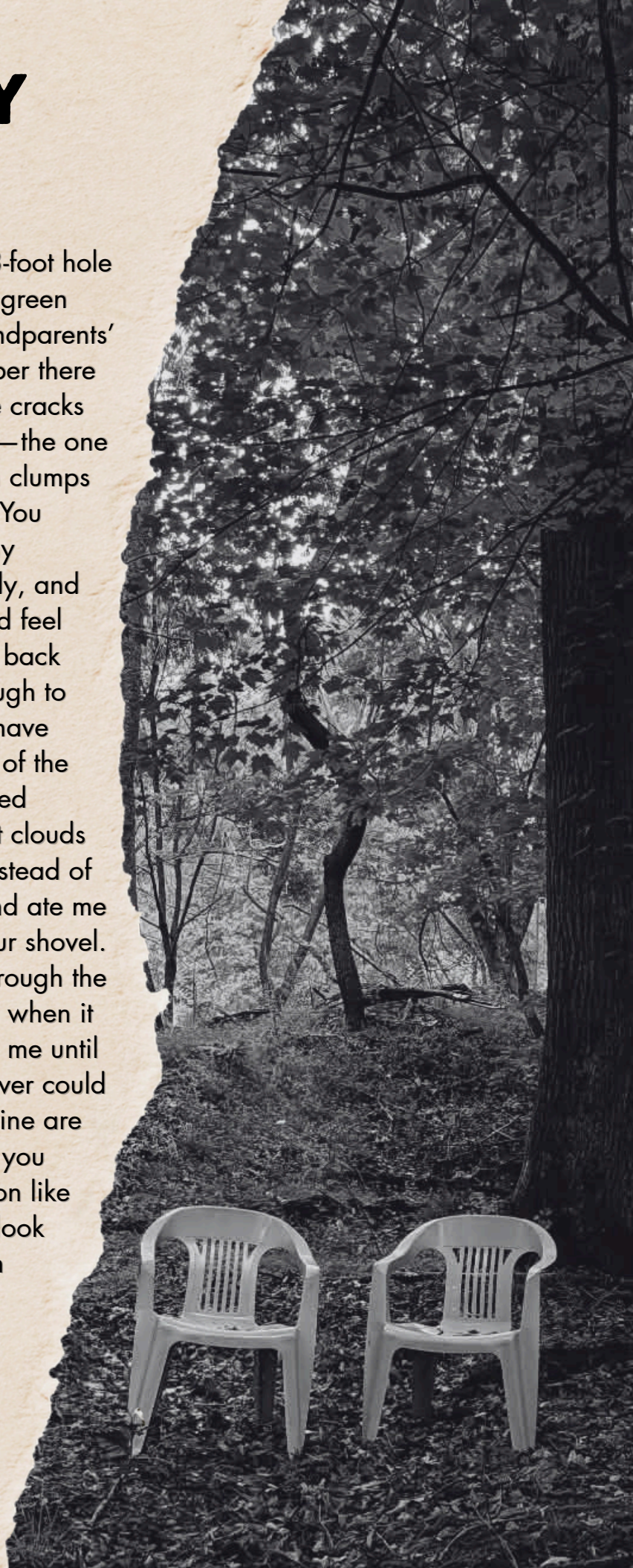
FROM CLAY

Michael C. Perkins

We buried me on a Tuesday, in a rough, 3-foot hole that would later grow summer squash and green beans, in the shotgun backyard of my grandparents' cabin, right up against the fence. I remember there were blackberry vines winding through the cracks of it from the wooded lot on the other side—the one with all those twiggy redwoods growing in clumps like fists of orange pencils. You remember. You were watching ants weave in and out of my third-hand sweater. It was spring, just barely, and parts of the ground were still frozen. I could feel one in particular, right in the middle of my back like a wet tongue seeping all the way through to creep between the knobs of my spine. I'd have arched like a cat if I could—peeled up out of the wet dark like a fleck of ash and disappeared right into that stratosphere blue; raced past clouds and felt their breath between my fingers instead of these worms. But the ground was eager and ate me up whole. Almost as eager as you with your shovel. Do you remember? We were screaming through the dark on that backwoods trail like fireworks when it happened, and all you could do was drag me until my arm came loose from its socket. You never could let go of things. But that's your problem. Mine are all smoke now. I'd ask if you missed me; If you propped me up in my old chair and went on like nothing happened. Until sometimes you'd look out the back window at that earthy lump in the garden. And you'd remember.