

A STATE OF EMERGENCY

Our neighbors cross the street to watch my father load up our car. Skis, boots, poles, suitcases scatter the driveway as he adjusts the ski rack and checks the chains on our tires. It's 1968 and we're driving to Vermont in a rear-wheel Pontiac the size of a Panzer. You know, our neighbors say, hesitant, afraid to interfere. "We heard Vermont is closed due to the storm. It's a state of emergency." My father knows, he's heard that too. We're going anyway. No one says no to my father. Not even the State of Vermont.

PORTRAIT OF BESSIE IN GREEN AND GOLD

My grandmother wove stories with needle and thread, pedaling her rocker on a porch with clustered plants, ferns and spiders trailing babies on pale stems. I rocked back and forth in the glider while Bessie recounted the yarn of her life while stitching emerald floss on milky white linen. An enormous ship crowded with strangers, a terrible rocking, sickness, the stench of fear. *What will happen we get to Amerikah? Are the streets paved with gold? A greenie, that's what I was. A greenhorn. Nu, what did I know?* Her golden cadences of Yiddish, a broth I drank and drank. *Tell me again, grandmom.* I could never get enough.