# THE LAST OF THE HAYES BOYS

a voiceHOUSE experience

**There is no love,**
**where there is no obstacle**
**- Bill Callahan**

It’s a hell of a lot of crows, and the crows are loud, raucous, up in the oaks and the pines, outside in the woods, on the yards, along porch balconies, they’re at my shack and my neighbors’, they’re across the way, I can’t see them but I can feel them, I can tell by the number of calls and the weight of each call dozens of crows are nearby and they’ve dug in, a number of them, for a kind of convocation, this murder of crows, so he shifts his attention over to the clock and his eyes read 5:28AM in an electric blue light, a burst from 5:27AM, he realizes the concentration of light has changed because the dashes which comprise the numbers on the clock have changed, as the minute turns over, a ‘7’ to an ‘8’, from three dashes to seven dashes, a difference of four dashes, four dashes gained as the half hour closes in, and only a faint grey purple has bled out from the skies into the darkness of the room, the cusp of twilight and the sound of crows cawing, he’s woken up to the cries of haw haw haw, it’s early, before the first ferry out of the harbor, across the sound, and he wonders in a glow of blue light as he scratches his nose if he’ll be able to make out the steam whistle from down the harbor because the crows are so frenzied, he’s never woken up like this with the crows so agitated, it might be a threat, maybe the crows have identified a kind of danger, so now the crows are talking it over, screaming, that may be what it is, they’re threatened by something, the crows are alarmed and he thinks the crows possess an intuition, they can sense something, something he doesn’t, because the crows are more in tune to the island, the tides, the cold fronts and the systems of weather, the Atlantic currents, the crows are part of the big thing which everything is a part of, except for us, except for people, modern people like me who stare at alarm clocks, who ignore the big thing, so he listens to the birds’ cries and he scratches his nose and pulls the sheets up over his body, shirtless, on a single mattress, a single mattress on the floor, without a boxspring, or a headboard, unadorned, he pulls the sheets up to his shoulders and closes his eyes and listens to the crows as his dreams from the night slowly fade, as he comes to, as his mind clears, as one world disappears and makes way for the next, and

before long he glances over at the clock because he hears a steam whistle, a faint blast, high pitched and floating, it cuts through the haw haw haw, since it's about time for the first boat out, according to the weekday schedule, and he checks the blue light and watches the numbers change from 5:30AM to 5:31AM, he feels the concentration of light fade, waning, from six dashes to two dashes, a difference of four, four dashes lost, deflated, a sense of wholeness lost and the next turn in front of us, so the whistle signifies a kind shift, as he considers the crows, despite them, I could still make out the whistle, and it's been a long while since I remember apprehending the whistle, because usually the steam whistle blends into the background of my perceptions, it doesn't stand out, but I heard the whistle, maybe it's the Nantucket or the Vineyard, because the whistle on any of the freighters, on the Governor or the Sankaty, it wouldn't be loud enough to break through this wall of sound, the cries of haw haw haw, so he imagines the folks up on the deck of the ferry with their cups of bitter coffee off to the continent on a morning full of purple grey skies, an overcast aubergine, an ominous sky, so the folks they're probably making guesses about the boat ride home, suppose there's too much chop, too much wind, a storm, maybe the Port Authority will have to cancel the ferry back to the island, maybe we'll be stuck at a friend's couch in Falmouth tonight, hunched over a counter at a barstool, that's what some of the day laborers must be thinking up on the balcony with their Styrofoam and their cigarettes and once the image of the island and the sound and the boat leave his mind he goes on thinking more about the crows, the crows around his shack, if they'll cool down, when their congress will end its session, if they'll ever take off, and what it is, what is it the crows are afraid of, because maybe I should be afraid too. SHE WAS THE ONLY PERSON I COULD SEE IN THE ENTIRE GYMNASIUM. MA was sensitive to the sound of crows, to any bird making a call, in the faintness of an early morning or at twilight, she knew the birds on the island and she could identify a bird by its call and even more incredible she could interpret what the birds were saying, what each song meant, if it was a word of caution, or a greeting, if it was a Cardinal desperate for a date, if it was a sparrow letting her babies know she was nearby, if there was a nighthawk showing off at dusk, if it was a goldfinch merely tipping its cap with pride, it was part of her magic, and before we knew MA was sick he can recall delicate signs of her

mind deteriorating, it was in the way MA would scrunch her face to look at something, in the way she'd put on her makeup, words she would mutter, because in the end something erased every aspect of her, and before she completely disappeared it was only the magic parts of her which were left to remain, there were no other parts of her, but the magic part of her held on, like if a crow came up onto the porch railing, the rusted iron, she'd tell me about it and she'd say 'The crows keep getting bolder, bolder by the day,' and her voice would trail off and you could tell there was something immense and out of control behind MA's eyes, taking over, and eventually it was a darkness, complete, towards the end a shadow covered everything inside of her, a chaos which wiped out her personality, so all it was for her at the end was confusion, a confused look, a scared look, terrified, not knowing anybody or anything, a look that wouldn't depart from her haggard face, wrinkling it, torturing it, and it remained there until she passed, until it was finished with her, and he remembers from grammar school he had memorized the Latin origin of the word 'auspices,' it means *looking at birds*, but I'm not looking at them, my eyes are closed and I'm only listening, he had blinked again and his eyes were closed and the bedsheet was up near his chin, and when he first woke up he noticed the sky's grey purple light leaking in through the blinds, and the two windows in the bedroom are open, behind the blinds, because it's August and there's nothing but heat from the day so at night with the cool ocean air he keeps the bedroom's windows open, he runs a small fan in the corner, opposite the doorway, and the cool ocean air blows in through the windows and it's comfortable enough, the blades of the fan keep the air moving, his eyes are closed and he thinks to himself I'm used to it, I grew up in this shack without any central air conditioning or heating, you opened windows or you piled logs up in the fireplace and you wore blankets or you took your shirt off, you adapted to the weather, to the environment, you didn't rely on some machine, that's how the OLD MAN looked at it, at least that's what my brothers explained, the OLD MAN never wanted to spend money, he pinched pennies and refused to submit to convenience, and MA never complained because it wasn't her nature, she wasn't a complainer, she had married a day laborer, a guy who laid asphalt on the continent, toiling for his bread, at least that's what OLDEST insisted, OLDEST insisted he laid asphalt, but OLDER said he was a man who did some carpentry, that's what OLDER always said,

though MA claimed he was a man who made his living as a roofer, that's what MA claimed, either way the OLD MAN was a man who worked with his hands and drank away his paychecks so his family could never afford central heating or air conditioning, so I'm sitting up in bed then I reach down to my feet to fix the bedsheet, to cover my feet, remembering my father, reaching back into the past, far back and reaching because it had been many years since he was a young boy, he was only a little boy when the OLD MAN died, but he never heard MA say a bad word about the OLD MAN as long as he could remember, in fact whenever she spoke of the OLD MAN she spoke in a tender way which indicated how much she missed him, MA missed the OLD MAN, and the few stories she told about the OLD MAN were amusing stories, they were full of melancholy and longing, like the story of how they met at a high school dance, how she had come with another date but left with him, and MA never remarried, she never once considered finding a replacement for the OLD MAN, she didn't want any help, though we could have used the money, we didn't have much with the four of us on her teacher's salary, it would have been more than reasonable for her to look for support but she never did and I think it had more to do with the fact that when the OLD MAN died, when the call came in on the yellow telephone in the kitchen, when she picked up the receiver and uncoiled the cord and MA listened for a couple of minutes then she went to sit in her place on the sofa in the living room, when she brought us together, the four of us on the sofa, when she plainly told us the OLD MAN was dead, after that, even then, for as young as I was, I noticed a lightness about her, and the lightness is what she must have relished, the buoyancy, she was free in some way, and MA was able to spend more of her time collecting stones and shells along the beach, combing her way through South Beach or State Beach on a Saturday afternoon, she'd describe to us a beautiful cormorant she had noticed fanning out its wings on a pile of rocks, on a reef, drying off in the sun, dancing almost, a celebration of a deep connection, and she'd smile when she told us, she'd come home with her bucket of shells and she'd set out to create her spiral designs, her art work, her projects out in the yard in the back, her rock garden, it was an easiness about her, and you could tell it was easier for her, now that the OLD MAN was gone, even though folks must have thought how difficult it would be to raise three boys on her own, how impossible it must have seemed, but I knew with the OLD MAN gone things became easier for her, even though I

was only six years old, even though I was only about to turn seven and I'd be in the second grade once the summer ended, once the tourists packed for home with their money and their cars and their pretty daughters, I knew even as a boy it was easier for MA that the OLD MAN was dead. I COULDN'T TAKE MY EYES OFF HER. There must be a threat, something threatening them, the crows, there must be something in pursuit of all of us, the birds, the people, the land, and the crows have huddled into the center of the island, away from any harm or danger, in this small forest of pine and oak, and they're deciding what to do, that must be it, the storm, there's a storm coming, a hurricane, and now he remembers how he had read about it in the Gazette the other day, a tropical storm, it was building up in the Atlantic, a wall of clouds, building and churning and twisting around a calm eye, and the newspaper said it was unlikely to have an impact, it said the island was too far north, the storm would make landfall somewhere south, down the coast, and if we caught anything it might be some choppy waters and a little bit of wind and rain but it wouldn't be out of the ordinary, as in extraordinary, and he had spoken about it with Ron because Ron was there at the Coffee Shop when he walked in for his afternoon cup of coffee and Ron invited him to a chair so he sat down for Ron to tell him about Hurricane Bob back in 1991, it was a real disaster, it caused millions of dollars in property damage, there was flooding and a storm surge and houses were full of broken glass and the docks were in shambles but the insurance men refused to pay up when push came to shove, because folks lost their boats, lost their roofs, Ron told him how folks had huddled into shelters, folks who had houses in low lying parts of the island, because the police had come to warn them to wait out the night in safety, but Ron wasn't one to leave his house behind so Ron stayed at home with his pooch, a black lab named Poseidon, and Ron boarded up a few windows and drank dark rum and proceeded to watch the storm rage, he watched the wind howl and the rain whip around and Ron said it was a hell of a show, and Ron was always proud that he knew better than most, knew more about fishing stripers, knew more about fixing cars, so Ron knew before the hurricane hit to extend his mooring lines on his boat so he told me he wasn't even relieved to find his boat still in the harbor because Ron knew for a fact it would be there, even though hundreds of other boats had been dragged and strewn and cast like toys about the island, boats crashed into jetties, sloops wound up on the beaches and in the

streets even, but Ron knew he had secured his boat properly and no storm could damage it or sink it but how could anybody know anything like that for certain, that's how he felt as he shook Ron's hand and walked away, how could anyone be so certain, and now what is coming to his mind is I bet a hurricane is going to blow through here and it'll be worse than the papers said, and I bet there's folks who won't feel too certain about anything once it's through, and as he thinks it his eyes are closed as he scratches the stubble on his neck, tuned back to 1991, when Hurricane Bob crashed land ho, making landfall, he would have been in college, on the continent, art history and sculpting classes, cassette tapes, eating hamburgers at the dining hall with a girlfriend, it could have been Jen, or Rose, because he always had a girlfriend in college, like how he had always had a girlfriend in high school, and he lays back down on the bed and thinks to himself with his eyes closed and the blanket pulled up above the loose sheets up to his chin, with the first ferry launched from the harbor and with the crows louder than he's ever heard them, he's thinking I'm alone, I've become a lonely person since I've returned back here to the island, since MA got sick, with no one else to take care of her, I'm by myself and I can hear these mad, wild crows and wouldn't it be nice to have someone waking up next to me, someone I cared for, I miss having a woman nearby, I miss having lips to kiss, hips to dig my hands against, I miss it, I miss her, and the crows are louder than all hell so if this storm is going to be as bad as I think it is, as the crows say it is, it would be nice to have somebody here to ride it out with, here on the island, in this rundown shack I grew up in, where MA used to construct her maps of the galaxy with rocks she found while walking along the shoreline, with the stones and the shells, stars and nebulae, without central air conditioning or heating, it would be nice to have somebody to die with, to lie alongside, he's thinking how nice it would be, because I'm alone and it's early in the morning I'd like to have someone to share this with, someone to share the morning light in a struggle to make its way through the purple grey clouds, to share the alarm of the birds outside up in the oaks and the pines, someone to read the Gazette to, the tide charts, the moon charts, Last Quarter and First Quarter, New Moon and Full Moon, the ink fading in the afternoon sun if you'd left the paper out on a chair in the yard, the woodblock prints in the top corners of the frontpage of a seagull or a plover on the shore

line, a sailboat on the horizon, a quarter for a copy, a quarter for an ink stain on your thumb, someone to share it with, though it wasn't much, it isn't much, it's something though, this life of mine, this shack without air conditioning or heating, it would be nice to share some warmth, to pull someone close to me, wouldn't it be nice, and his eyes are closed while his thoughts revolve around graveyards and islands, how he was born onto an island, and how he never intended to wind up forever on an island, though now he wouldn't even have the chance to, because the family plot is filled up, the plot has no more room, no vacancy, the last of his brothers is dead and buried, next to MA, next to the OLD MAN, OLDEST and OLDER and MA and the OLD MAN, there were only four spots in total, and the crows are outside with their calls and the grey purple light inches like smoke in through the slats of the brown window blinds in the bedroom, maybe they'll have me ferried onshore, to the mainland, nailed shut into a coffin to be buried in the earth, the smell of dirt, of nostalgia and decay, the smell of dusk, of rain in the next county over, whoever is left to do it, to assign my remains to a final resting place, whatever friend might claim me, maybe a Pastor, if I grow old and resign myself to a church out of simple desperation, who knows, maybe I'll have a last will and testament drawn up so an attorney will be in charge of my bones, deputized, who knows, maybe the state will cremate me, a pauper's ashes with nothing else to show for himself, though who cares where you're buried or how you're disposed of because once you're gone it's for a long time, and it doesn't matter to you, because the lights are off and nobody's home, because what matters is the living, then he opens his eyes and he can see signs of water damage on the ceiling, from a leak in the roof, it's a yellow splotch glaring amidst the white paint, it's been there since he moved in, for almost three years he's been affectionately looking up at this yellow splotch, and he thinks what his brother would say, OLDEST, OLDEST would tell him to patch it, to seal it, then repaint the whole ceiling, if OLDEST weren't stuck in a graveyard, next to MA, next to the OLDER, nearly ten years gone by, before Hurricane Bob, before I left for school and moved to New York, it was another phone call, the same yellow phone in the kitchen with the rotary dial and the cord, that same phone, and it was unexpected, I was shocked to find out OLDEST had died and I would never see my brother again, I was shocked, though when I found out OLDER was gone, when OLDER passed, I lost my breath when

I found out and I couldn't find it, it took me a few months to find my breath, my breathing stopped, I gulped and my breath was gone and I couldn't believe it, even though it made sense, as I've had time to reflect on it over the last six months, since it happened, it makes sense, it makes even more sense than OLDEST dying, though when I found out OLDER died I lost my breath and couldn't find it, and he's in bed with his hands folded across his chest and with his eyelids drawn together he makes a space in the silence of the darkness to work out a kind of prayer for his brothers, his mother, his father, he makes a kind of silent prayer in his heart, he takes a deep breath and remembers them though after a few moments he knows it doesn't matter because what is left for any of us is the sleep of forever and goodbye, a common blackness we are all swept away into, cast out into the void, surrounded by an ocean, but it doesn't hurt so why worry, why be afraid, there's no pain, there's nothing, but he prays anyways thinking to himself I can't believe six months have gone by since OLDER died, since a neighbor of OLDER called the police and the police showed up in their squad cars and had to break open the front door and turn on their flashlights, tentative and walking into a dark house, a hallway, they called out 'Hello! Hello!' and nobody answered, nobody responded, so they checked the rooms on the first floor, then they made their way upstairs, the bedrooms, and they found my brother, his body, they shined their flashlights upon a hole through the back of OLDER's head, it had tore through the bone and the sinews where his head attached to his spine, in the dark night under the flashlights blood and brain matter splattered on the floor, OLDER had shot himself in the head, so the police called an ambulance, the ambulance parked in front of the house behind the squad cars and nobody was in a rush, there was no reason to turn on the sirens, the technicians spoke with the police officers and they wheeled a gurney up into the house and came out with OLDER's body, and the next day, after it was determined I was next of kin, a kinsman to a dead man, a police officer from the town called me to let me know, so I booked a ticket for a ferry off the island, I brought the car onboard and parked in the hull, freight, waiting for landfall, to drive the four hours to where my brother was living, his home, I walked past the yellow tape, I opened the door and I walked upstairs to where the police had found OLDER, and I found it there, on the bed, the letter, addressed to me, the flashlights had not shined on it and

I didn’t expect to find it but a letter with my name was waiting for me in the empty room, I tried to ignore the blood stains on the floor, opening the envelope, and inside the letter said it had been too much, everything had been too much, between his son’s accident, then MA passing away, death, it had been too much death, bleak shadows, the last three years had been too dark, and no matter how much life OLDER might have had in front of him, no matter if there was a chance to rebuild or reassemble some form of an existence for himself, it was too much, too dark, OLDER couldn’t imagine it, cobbling something together in the dark, he lost the hope in his heart, without the light, he couldn’t find a reason, he couldn’t convince himself to keep going on, but OLDER was sorry to do it to me, he was so sorry to leave me behind, he was so damned sorry to add to my burdens, my sadness, my pain, he was sorry and he wished he could have made a different choice, OLDER had written pages and pages explaining it to me, OLDER in his handwriting explained how whenever he saw his own lonesome shadow against the sidewalk he would catch flashes of his boy’s shadow, twin shadows, his little boy’s and his, it would be a mirage, it would be a smaller shadow next to his, the shadows holding hands, two shadows next to each other and touching, OLDER could still see his little boy’s shadow even after the boy had died, then OLDER explained how he would find fingerprint smudges on one of the windows and after he found the smudges he’d look at them for hours because his son had left the prints there, the dirty finger smudges on the window, and these little things added up into a big thing, a grim truth, his son was gone, when he had left the hospital that Tuesday afternoon in April without his baby boy, without his darling child, without his heart, it had been building and building until it all collapsed onto OLDER, after MA had died, after the shadows and the smudges, and once the grim truth took hold of OLDER there wasn’t any choice to it, there wasn’t any decision, and his only regret, OLDER wrote it in the letter, he wrote how he regretted leaving me with the burden of having to take care of his loose ends, but after I read everything I knew a man couldn’t go on without his heart, without his spirit, and that’s all OLDER had ever been, spirit, so it made sense to me, I couldn’t lift up the burdens of my brother, nobody could have helped it, so after I caught my breath, after a few weeks, a couple of months, I realized what OLDER did had made sense, and I had only lost my breath because it hurt so much, it’s not that it didn’t make sense, it’s

because it hurt so much, how much I loved OLDER, how much, how, but for now I'm done thinking about last rites and my brothers' wakes and heartbroken windowpanes, smudges and shadows, because it's enough lonely feelings inside of me so he opens his eyes and pushes the sheets off of his body with the blanket, his feet hit the floor, I've said my prayer for them in my own way because I suspect an honest prayer is done in the living, the way you live, not in the murmuring or the recitations, he decides it while his bare feet step across the hardwood floor and he pulls up the blinds in front of the window and shuts the window and the sound of the crows is dampened, dull, but they're outside, the haw haw haw, the birds are outside in numbers and the purple grey clouds are layered between him and the sun. I HAD TO TALK TO HER. He walks to the open door of the room and before he leaves he clicks off the fan, the blades wind down to a halt, lugubrious, and he walks into the bathroom, he looks over himself in the mirror, he turns on the faucet at the sink and reaches for a bar of soap on the counter, he lathers the soap in his hands then he puts his hands against his cheeks, his neck, he splashes some water onto his face and lathers more suds into his palm before he reaches for his razor and begins to shave, and he acknowledges the scar on his eyebrow, his right eye, and he examines it while he's shaving his neck, and he remembers the afternoon with OLDEST, the afternoon in high school fishing with OLDEST at Lambert's Cove, they had decided to go fishing because somebody had told OLDEST blues had been running in Lake Tashmoo so OLDEST had asked him to come along, because it was the time of year for the Fishing Derby, and OLDEST was fishing for blues, it was the twenty second day of the Derby and the Derby was thirty five days long, a Derby with daily weigh-ins at the Edgartown docks, with a leaderboard and a prize and a title to defend, OLDEST had won the shore division the previous year, quiet walks on the beach scanning for breaking fish, the wind blowing off the ocean, but this afternoon OLDEST had asked him to come along, to tie up rigs, chunks of bait on an extra wide gap hook, about four feet of mono leader, 15 lb test, a bullet style weight, a palomar knot on the swivel, he knew how to tie the knots and how to set the hook into the bait, OLDEST asked him for a hand, to help cover more ground, to have fresh lines ready, to adjust presentations, and he was happy to help his brother because he loved to watch OLDEST read the water, how OLDEST would pick spots and intuit where to cast, how OLDEST would glare out like mad Ahab

and make a split-second decision how far and wide to cast out, how OLDEST would feel the line, how OLDEST would glance up and say I can feel a cow a'comin! and then whisper It's a good goddamned wind for fishing today, boy! and how OLDEST would smile, it was only while fishing that OLDEST would smile, his brother would smile and cast out his line and he'd be a thing of precision and power once the hook was set and the fish was on, and a fish got on that afternoon, a mean old blue with sharp teeth and a chewed up tail, the fish was hefty, and angry, the old blue hit a chunk of squid on a Carolina rig and OLDEST had worked the porker on the line, with one good hand, the one-handed fisherman, that's who OLDEST was, my brother was notorious on the island, he fished with one arm because OLDEST only had one arm, he'd cast out then set the rod between his chest and his bad arm, he'd squeeze with his shoulder and bicep and fix the rod next to him like a vice clamp, then he'd reel in, he'd reel and reel, he'd touch and feel and reel and fight so to watch OLDEST was to watch something magnificent, OLDEST was an artist of a fisherman, and the afternoon at Lambert's Cove OLDEST had worked a mean old blue up to the surface, at the jetty, and I'd moved myself from next to him and crouched down with a net so as I dipped the net into the water and pulled up the fish I could feel my brother smiling, I could feel the smile on OLDEST's face because it was a salty fish, a mean old blue, and OLDEST loved grizzly old fish, they were the best, the savvy dogs who hadn't been caught, who had fooled every other angler, who had spit the bait, who hadn't been tricked by the twitches or the jabs, who had chewed through lines, who had brought frustration and ruin on so many before, these old blues, OLDEST relished in catching a savvy old dog, so my brother the one-armed fisherman came over to the net and OLDEST deftly slipped the hook out from the blue's upper lip and he held the fish out in front of him and quietly remarked it was a good hit, 'Good hit,' that's what he said, and OLDEST handed the fish to me and told me to take it to the cooler so I grabbed the fish by the gills but then something happened, the fish kicked, it kicked its fin and I spooked, I don't know what happened but the fish jumped and I lost my grip on the fish's gills and the mean old blue bounced off of one of the rocks on the jetty and fell into the water and it swam away, it's dead eyes came back to life and it darted off into the boiling green water, beneath the foam and the churning surf and what had once been only moments before was gone, the blue had

disappeared, and I turned to OLDEST and before I could apologize the smile on his face was gone, his face had darkened and I didn't have a chance to say anything before I was knocked over, it was his fist, I fell down to where the fish had swam off and one of the rocks caught my face, my head struck against one of the rocks and I was left with a gash above my right eye, blood mixed with the salt water and I squinted up agonized and shocked at OLDEST but he only walked away, OLDEST had walked away, he left me, he took off with his gear in his beat up El Camino, a car he had bought for cheap because of the mileage, because one of the windows was smashed and in its place a black trash bag had been taped against the frame, a plastic bag in place of a window, OLDEST left with his truck back down the sand trail without me, so I pulled myself onto the rocks out of the water on top of the jetty and I knew better than to run after OLDEST, and the blood kept flowing down my face, into my eye, the blood was cold and I could feel it against my skin so I took off my shirt and tied it around my head and I walked into town, I walked the three miles into town, to a doctor's office, and a nurse stitched me up, and even though OLDEST lost the division that year in the Derby we never spoke a word about the mean old blue that got away, so by the following spring, we were fishing together again, his last Derby, that's the way things went with my oldest brother, so he glances again at the scar above his eye as he finishes shaving, he swishes the razor under the stream of water then shuts off the faucet and arranges the razor in its holder, next to his toothbrush, on the bathroom counter, and he takes the cotton towel from off the hook and dries his face, he pats his face dry and folds the towel back up into thirds and loops it onto the hook before he walks out of the bathroom, down the hall, back into the smaller of the two bedrooms, his childhood bedroom, the boys' room, where he reaches into the closet and removes a shirt from off a nail in the wall, a coat hanger, nailed into the door frame, it is a button up shirt, a denim shortsleeve shirt with pockets on both breasts, and he pulls the shirt over his head then he takes a pair of sunfaded linen pants from off the floor and slips them over his waist and guides a leather belt around the pants, so he's dressed, he's ready to walk out of the front door because the crows aren't finished with their haw haw haws and he doesn't have any desire to linger, to be around their caustic doom any longer, I've heard enough, so he walks out the bedroom door and down the hall and out the front

door of the shack and down the porch steps and along the stone walkway over the small front yard and onto the dirt road, down the dirt road with thick brush on one side of it, oak trees and pines and poison ivy, weeds and vines and overgrowth, a cool breeze runs up along the road and the purple grey of the sky, the aubergine, has dissipated and given way to a darker shade, a kind of soot, like charcoal smeared on top of a grey stone, so he looks up between the trees confounded, because as the sun has risen the sky has darkened, it's a soot tinged gray pushing aside any trace of purple, then he looks down, and somehow even the dirt road is dark, darkening, it's a dark damp road and he sets his feet towards the end of the road, or the beginning, towards the paved street which runs perpendicular to the dirt road, the dead end road where only a clot of locals live, where the tourists don't wander, and the paved street runs south, towards the West Chop lighthouse, and it runs north, towards the lake, towards the boat launch and the lagoon harbor, so he turns north because he has decided to make his way to the lagoon harbor, to find himself a view at the horizon, to uncover what the crows are fussing about, because a threat looms out there, and they know about it, the crows, so he intends to assess how bad it is, even though he already has a sense, a premonition, and his footsteps hit the street and the sky is dark and the air is cool and his forearms are suntanned, bronze, and so are his ankles, above his worn gym shoes, he's walking in his old worn gym shoes without any socks and the linen pants don't cover his ankles, so he walks on, up the street, towards the water, and he looks up into the dark clouds, the soot tinted clouds, and it's incredible to think somewhere beyond that is an infinity of stars, beyond the heavy feel to the air above him sparkles an infinity of universes as he bends himself up the street towards the boat launch, because every street on the island leads to water, all roads lead to the Atlantic, whether it be Herring Run or Wakeman Road or Attaquin Way, even the alleged dead ends, Squibnocket and Cygnet Trail, Quinsigamond, all are watery terminals, and he realizes now, like a periscope up from the deep, it has become quiet, silent, even though there's a chill and a breeze on the sidewalk he can't hear the wind, the beech leaves or the scrub brush, not in his ears or in the trees along the street, and the birds are gone, the sound of the crows, even his footsteps are invisible, a silence is present with a kind of openness and into the openness comes a man, on his left side, on the opposite side of the street, an older man

in a Terminal Station uniform opens up a door from a humble cottage and walks out and clinks a key into the lock though he can't hear the sound of the keys, the silence is perfect and there aren't any crows, there's no rustling of leaves, there's no cars, there's only an older man in a high visibility jacket, a passerby, and his mind is clear, his feet are pointed towards the water, he can see the hill up ahead and he's past the Terminal Station worker who has locked up a house, who has opened up the door to a car, he walks into the openness of the silence past more houses with their cedar shake siding, the Cape Cod style houses which go for rent in June and July and August, which will empty themselves exhausted come September, he's past more houses and gardens and picket fences and he's up the hill then past the tennis courts, past the dune trail and the powerlines, and finally when he makes it down the hill at the docks with their faded white planks, their buoys and clots of seaweed, worn fishing lines, when he's standing out on the main pier the silence breaks, he is met with the sound of waves, the waves break the openness of the silence, waves rolling up onto an island, an island of shimmers and rivulets and endless waters, where every street brings you towards the Atlantic, of tides lulling in, then out, like morning cicadas with their high-pitched waves heightening then receding in sweeps from the canopies overhead, an island of oaks, of low hung clouds like sail yards out above the horizon, an island surrounded by an ocean which will swallow us, an island under a sun which will melt us, an island under a sky which will disappear and leave no trace or memory of constellations or meteor showers or infinity, so at the docks he sees a few commercial fisherman down at the end of the pier talking, their trucks parked in the small lot next to the boat ramp, but they aren't prepping gear, they're tying off lines, they're securing their boats, so he stands there on the docks not sure how he might explain the reason for his visit, adrift, until he recognizes Clark, Clark on the *Next Best Thing*, Clark with his lobster pots, he recognizes Clark and walks over towards a small landing, the spot where Clark parks the *Next Best Thing*, off the main pier, so Clark glances up with a cigarette fixed between his lips, dangling off the bottom lip, the perpetual fisherman's cigarette, Clark is smoking and tying knots and working lengths of rope, so Clark looks up with a greeting, 'Morning,' and he greets Clark, he replies 'Morning' to Clark and Clark asks for the time, so he responds it's nearly half past six, and Clark shrugs and

curses the time, there's never enough time, and he wonders out loud what's the rush, what's Clark up against now, because it doesn't appear Clark is making to put off, and Clark explains he's already been out, Clark had to retrieve all his pots before the sun broke, my sets, and now the gear is stored away below deck, some of the grear is in the hull of the boat and some of it is in Clark's truck bed, the more expensive gear, Clark is hauling it back home with him to lay it out in his shed and lock up the shed with a padlock and wait out the storm, didn't you hear, a bad storm is turning itself north towards the island, a hurricane, and after a break in their dialogue he asks Clark if it might be an overreaction, because I had read in the Gazette the storm would hit further south, if it made landfall at all, if it even picked up enough steam to cause a fuss, built enough energy, but then Clark tells him the Gazette is printed on Thursday night, and comes out on a Friday morning, and now it's Tuesday so where have you been all weekend, don't you listen to anything on the radio, or watch any television, because the report has changed, the meteorologists have adjusted the forecasts, the storm is pointed towards the island, and it's built itself up, it's gained enough steam alright, it's gained plenty of energy to make a fuss, and folks who know are saying it could be bad, Category 3, the winds could kick up to over a hundred knots, a hundred and ten knots even, so Clark asks again, vexed, didn't you watch the news, didn't you hear, and he explains that he doesn't watch the television or listen to the news, he doesn't entertain any of that, he only reads the Gazette, he only cares to read the Gazette every Friday morning when he buys it at the Coffee Shop for a quarter because it's more of a habit than anything and he enjoys the woodblock prints on the front page, he amuses himself reading the advertisements, because what's the news anyways, it's depressing, it's mindless, and besides if you want a weather report or an opinion on last night's ballgame or some local gossip then who better to talk to than a fisherman, because fishermen are more reliable, aren't they, and Clark chuckles and agrees on the one hand any fisherman worth his salt has a sense of things like that but on the other Clark explains how any fella who makes his living on the water better have a damned good idea of what the weather is going to be like, and so accurate weather reports are important to a fisherman, the rest of the news, sure, Clark could take it or leave it, it was nice to read through a box score and catch some highlights of the Sox, but

sure, the rest of it didn't amount to much of a difference, because who had the stomach for politics or celebrities, but Clark needed weather reports, Clark made it his business to know about hurricanes making landfall, Clark needed to be able to make decisions about his boat and his gear because Clark's livelihood depended on those things, didn't it, Clark needed his boat and his gear so he could bring his haul over to John at the fishmarket, where Clark would see the poor girl with the sad eyes, John's wife barking orders at her behind the counter, John's wife and her cigarette rasp, barking, dread eyes ready to cry, the poor girl who was overmatched, Clark had to make a living selling his fish so of course I agreed with Clark, I understood Clark's perspective, and Clark said 'Here give me a hand with this rope' so I caught the rope Clark tossed over from the deck of the *Next Best Thing* while Clark's cigarette dangled, the cigarette which seemed inexhaustible, which hung from the bottom of Clark's lip and never seemed to extinguish, then Clark took a step from off the boat onto the docks and waited, arms crossed, looking at me for a moment, then urging me to go ahead, let's see you tie it, so I shrug my shoulders and tie a common bowline to the wooden piling, and Clark says not bad, but there's a better way, you know, there's a way to fix it so it doesn't slip, so it can't slip with the waves crashing and the wind howling, it'll need to be secure with the winds at a hundred knots, so Clark undid my work and Clark tied another bowline but left a little more at the tag end and tucked that working end back behind the gap of the last loop of the knot before he tightened it, he pulled it tight, and Clark asked did you see that, did you catch that extra tuck, and I nodded, and Clark said well you learn something new every day, don't you, and they stood there in mutual admiration of the knot, and Clark glanced up at him and asked if he didn't notice how quiet the island had become, how folks had been leaving the island in droves over the weekend, how folks were packing up, how there weren't hardly any tourists around, because even the tourists had been scared away, cancelled their vacations, how windows had been boarded up, and he told Clark he hadn't noticed, he had been working all weekend on a project and he hadn't noticed a thing, not until this morning at least, not until the crows woke him up before the first ferry whistle blew out across the harbor, the crows were kicking up a racket, this morning with the crows is when he thought something might be happening, it was the crows, all the crows that flooded into the

woods around his shack, that's when he noticed it, and Clark said birds knew the weather better than any meteorologist, and the rain will start by nightfall, and it could get dicey, it could get scary tonight, it could be twelve or sixteen hours in the heart of the storm depending on how much it slowed down as it hit the continent, and an emergency town commission had designated shelters on the island, at the Fire Station, and at Grace Church, folks were pitching together with food and water and blankets and medical supplies, Clark said it like that, a bunch of folks were pitching together, getting ready for whatever was to come, and he nodded at Clark as Clark lurched back onto the *Next Best Thing* and gathered another rope from the deck and tossed it to him, Clark tosses the rope to me and orders me to tie it off to the other spile, that one there, you need practice don't you, so I maneuver the rope and tie the knot how Clark had taught me then Clark hops back onto the dock from off the gunwale of the *Next Best Thing* and inspects the knot and Clark is satisfied, so Clark rubs his hands together and blows into a hole between his palms and then he glares at me with a serious grimace and through his teeth implores me not to take it lightly, it's going to be rough, things could get rough, so he nodded at Clark and told the scruffy fisherman about the conversation with Ron at the Coffee Shop and Clark said Ron didn't know a damn thing about fishing stripers or fixing cars or waiting out storms because Ron had drank himself dim on account of all that dark rum, so they both chuckled, and once their laughter puttered out they could hear the waves underfoot underneath the faded white planks of the dock, so he thanks Clark for the information and the conversation and with a grunt it's enough of a goodbye for both of them, so he walks away from the *Next Best Thing* and from Clark and before he turns for home he squints down to the end of the dock, out towards the mouth of the cove, towards the narrow opening between the shorelines where the ocean breaks into the sky, where the boats pass through from safety into the unknown, from one world to another, and as he works his eyes from the narrow opening along the eastern cut of the cove along the reeds and grasses up near the shoreline where the waves are pushing, pressing the water up and down against the stalks of the reeds, with the churning sea breaking over the small networks of beaches, patches of sand between the rocks and between the shoreline grasses, the marshes, as he works his eyes along the cove he remembers a view in New York, Roosevelt Island, in the East River, he remembers

the sky scrapers pointed heavenwards and the city out in front of him towering up with steel and concrete, the city was out in front of him and he was outside of it, he could see it for what it was, how massive, sprawling, it was a summer afternoon and he should have been pleased by the view but instead he became rattled because it felt like had completely lost home, any connection to home or being rooted, he felt like he had gone from one world into another, despite this feat of engineering and architecture and progress, we had left something behind, something important, even as the skyscrapers pointed upwards to heaven, as his eyes work along the pockets of beaches, on the beaches where the waves run up into the rocks and the land, the sand and the water, the narrow opening marked by the jetties, an avenue between safety and chaos, his thoughts flicker, his thoughts are flickering, with MA and her eyes, searching for stones, for shells, eyes that flickered light blue like the spark of a candle flame, he has a vision of her eyes, the skyscrapers disappear and now it's MA and her eyes, eyes preserved in photo albums on the bookshelf in MA's bedroom, the room with its door forever shut, her eyes are like a noonday sky, rich and sparkling like a field of glinting sunlight off the water, her eyes which darkened, that would flash green in the twilight, reading a book on an October night next to the lamp on the porch, deep and churning, with bits of foam almost, a brackish blue green, eyes that ultimately condensed gray with a kind of deep wisdom as the years passed, into her later phases, and he was thinking about MA and her eyes when he realized no cranes could be spotted in the marshes, there weren't any gulls with red spots on their beaks hanging around the docks, there weren't any plovers or terns, the skies were grey, a soot tinted gray, and empty, he thinks to himself the skies are empty, full of clouds, but empty, lifeless, ominous, there aren't any faces in the cumulus to make out, no shapes or animals, it's only a wall of grey emptiness, soot tinged, and the word auspices means *looking at birds* but there are no birds to look at, there aren't any birds along the shore or in the marshes or out at the jetty at the opening of the cove, Lake Tashmoo is on the verge of a ruin, though Clark continues tying rope as a cigarette stubbornly dangles off the fisherman's bottom lip, and waves ripple across the lagoon, so he walks along the bleached planks of the dock back to the asphalt and faces the sharp incline of the hill, he looks up and the wind blows through the oak trees and the pine, the leaves rustle and hum but the silence

returns, a silence even with the rustling of the wind, it’s like the narrow channel out to the sea, opening up, quiet, and in the silence there is a loneliness, he's lonely, up the hill to walk, alone, grieving because it should be a woman or a wife waiting for him, or even with him up the hill, hand in hand, but there’s nothing, there’s nobody, there’s been three years alone on the island, a year of reticence since MA’s funeral, six months hidden away since OLDER’s funeral, he’s left to himself and his loneliness and a mourning, even though sure plenty of girls make landfall in the summer, girls would flood into town on summer vacation, and not all of the girls were accounted for, sure some of the girls were available, who were bubbly, who were cute enough, sporting, opportunity existed, sure, but he didn’t take it, he hadn’t taken any chances, he wouldn’t move himself to make a move, he was more dreaming than awake because of the mourning and he didn’t have the focus necessary for summer girls, lost between worlds, he wouldn’t have had anything to give, in a dream, wandering around in a kind of dream, he possessed nothing he could offer, so the hill is in front of him and his feet are motionless, he’s standing alone, looking up, dreaming and alone, between worlds almost, so he glances up in the silence between the rustling trees surprised to find a cloud in the cloudless, soot grey sky, suddenly a cloud that has taken shape and emerged from the overcast sky, the cloudy sky without clouds, its edges contoured in plums, in blacks, the top is kissed in just enough light so you can almost imagine the white whipped peaks, intimated, on another day with more sun, with the storm past, the peaks of the cloud would have been whipped in white tops and he can imagine them, while the bottom of the cloud grows heavy, darker, and he notices so much color now, despite the soot gray sky, he can see the color in the cloud which has emerged, he can see life inside of the cloud, it is a resolute life in the sky above him, so between the trees on each side of the road, pointed up the hill, the cloud is framed in a scene, precisely, so it strikes him, he makes a note of the image of the cloud in front of his eyes and he decides well, something is here, something he can take, he can pull from it, from how he feels, surrounded by water, isolated, an island, an island of summer girls scented in lavender, sweet and rich, scented like a rocking chair on a porch in the afternoon sunlight, like the saltwater crust of a shoeless guitar player in the alley behind the convenience mart in Vineyard Haven, a styrofoam cup next to the empty case, on a concrete ledge,

his feet dangling, and what he’s seeing, heavenwards, he can pull something out the vision in front of him with the hill and the silence and the cloud from a cloudless sky and put it into his work, as inspiration, he's inspired to translate something which cannot be said into a word, to translate that which cannot be felt into a feeling, struck motionless, because he’s stopped his walking and is fixed now with his eyes on the cloud, so even with the feeling of being alone, looking up at the sky, of not having made anything of himself available to anyone else, his isolation, his exile at his childhood home, the shack as he calls it, even though he hasn’t gone out into the world much or met anyone or touched anyone else’s skin or lips, he hasn’t smelled perfume, it’s been so long away from a woman’s perfume, and his most cherished pastime from living in the city was riding the subway and closing his eyes to meet the variety of women and their perfumes, various sensations of sweetness, clouds of citrus, tangerines, exotic spices like cinnamon and saffron, hints of honey, violet, perfumes like specters left in the wake of women walking with their vicious handbags and their sunglasses, memories so far away, and even though he’s hardly awake anymore because of the mourning, dreaming, still a kind of belief resides inside of him, an ember, a sense of work to be done, he is still inspired so with inspiration he works and the motion of his hands during the day while he works is a kind of prayer, a kind of affirmation of his life, of all life, an openness to the possibility of something beautiful happening to him, no matter how small, so he exhales and begins his way up the hill. I ASKED HER WHAT WAS HER NAME. The air grows colder, a breeze, a shift has occurred since he opened the front door and walked across the stones of the lawn, yes, there is more bite to the wind he’s thinking to himself up the hill so he puts his mind on a wool sweater, a wool sweater hung on a wooden hanger in the coat closet by the door and he’ll put it on when he gets home, the sweater was a gift, OLDER had gifted it to him, it had been from when OLDER first met Ellie, she worked at Allen Farm at the south end of the island, Ellie had been working in the farm shop coordinating with local artisans, knitters and weavers, and Ellie served as an art director and a marketer and a shop manager for the farm, she decided on the patterns and the colors for the sweaters and knit caps and scarves and shawls, made from Corriedale wool, she decided which items went up on display in the little shop windows, and she wore green eyes a lightning green, like stardust in her eyes,

that’s how OLDER had described it to him, when OLDER first made mention of her, ‘She came in o’er me like a wave, and I never saw it coming,’ so OLDER was in love with Ellie at first sight, the moment of his first glimpse, rain soaked, a spry young woman dashing to her car in a pair of Wellington boots covered in mud, in her orange khaki pants and her cotton shirt opened with the buttons undone, gossamer white so you could make out her tight green tank top underneath, Ellie had been in town leaving the grocery store with a watermelon under each of her arms when the sky burst open and a summer thunderstorm poured down on Main Street, when OLDER had first seen her, his first glimpse of Ellie, running through the puddles with the watermelons, so he couldn’t help but follow her, and OLDER wasn’t the kind to make a pass at a girl out of the blue, he wasn’t the kind to fall in love with strangers on first glimpses but like OLDER explained Ellie washed over him in a blindsided torrent so with a flood she drowned him in a feeling which couldn’t be ignored so my brother ran up over to Ellie while she was letting go of the watermelons into the passenger seat of her car, OLDER knocked on her window as the engine turned over and introduced himself and Ellie looked at him with a kind of suspicion because she wasn’t the kind of girl to talk to strangers who tapped on windows but she rolled down the window and OLDER asked her what she was going to do with so much watermelon and she smiled then he told her who he was and then he asked about her, OLDER asked what she did, where did she come from, and finally after a minute or so standing in the rain as the questions mounted Ellie told OLDER to jump in the car so OLDER ran around into the passenger side and sat down, they spoke a little while longer until Ellie explained she had to get back to work at Allen Farm, a picnic had been planned at the farm, food and music and some vendors, but maybe later if the weather changed for the better, if it became more clement, maybe OLDER could stop by and say hello to her at the picnic, and OLDER smiled then Ellie smiled with her sunburned cheeks so OLDER said he would stop by, he would do that, and he opened the door back out into the rainstorm and waved at her as she pulled away, he stood in the rain soaking wet and smiling and waving as she drove away because it was a story of two people falling in love, that’s how it started for them, OLDER called me and he told me about Ellie and he told me how he had driven down to Allen Farm before dusk that night when the sun had burnt through the rainclouds with a golden sparkle because of the soaked grasses

and the dampness in the mud and in the wooden posts of the old barns so he saw her with her hips at her sides across a pasture behind the farmhouse and the brightness of the day shimmered around her and Ellie's hair was like a fine silk and her skin was radiant, OLDER saw how beautiful Ellie was, breathtaking, OLDER lost his breath and he explained she was the one for him, and I remember her eyes when I first met her, her blonde hair in waves, and her green eyes, her energy was set in a way to match OLDER's spirit, she wore turquoise earrings and a stud in her nose, she was pregnant with their son not long after they met, things moved so fast for them, and I was away from the island but OLDER had called me and told me how he had met the woman he was going to spend the rest of his life with, because my brother and I were close, we spoke on the phone and would express our fears and excitements and we never discussed trite pleasantries or made nonsense of our conversation, we spoke from the heart, and he called me when Ellie left him, and he called me when his son died, but his news about meeting Ellie in the rain and then visiting her at Allen Farm was happy news and OLDER was excited to share it with me and I was excited for him, OLDER was like that, he was different than my other brother because OLDER always wanted to share himself with me, he always wanted to join forces, he would invite me to play with him and put on music for me and lend me his clothes or shoes, OLDER wanted to bring me into something that was bigger than whatever he or I could have been individually, he was like that with me and with the people who knew him, he built things with other people, so OLDER wanted to share in his excitement with how he met Ellie, it was who OLDER was, if there was a fire to be lit well OLDER would make sure any lost boats off the shore would be able to see the smoke, though on a day like today with a cold front scudding in, the cloudy sky without any clouds, the overcast wall tinged with charcoal, none of the island fishermen had put their boats out, a quiet harbor, a quiet island, silent, so he turns around at the top of the hill and acknowledges the lagoon, silent, a silence like an atmosphere amplified by the weight of the clouds above, compressed by the pall of an overcast sky, the sky like a ceiling, compressing, he cannot hear boats or motors, birds, silence despite the wind rustling the trees, silence despite the waves breaking, so he keeps his way up the street, he shuffles his eyes back to his feet and the road in front of him, walking past the tennis courts, the dune trails, where the houses start, the

cottages, walking, and in the gutter, next to a drain, a rusted drain cover, a grate with a painted marking next to it which reads NO DUMPING-DRAINS TO OCEAN in white paint, a silhouette of a sunfish alongside the words, a faded white image, he notices a crushed nip of vodka, a small plastic nip of vodka by the rusted grates so his mind wanders to OLDEST, OLDEST hauls a pull of vodka from off the bottle and shouts with his red eyes, wild, I'm headed out! and MA doesn't say anything, MA doesn't plead with him or beg him to reconsider, there's no protest in MA, no entreaties, because she knows it's of no use, and I was only a kid, but I was old enough to understand what booze could to a person so I decided at a young age never to drink, because I had seen what it did to OLDEST, I could see how angry it made my brother, how it controlled him, and OLDEST would rip big throttles off a bottle of cheap vodka and glare out like an animal wild with his red eyes towards the horizon or a string of lights across the night sky and OLDEST would go after something to conquer, looking for a fight, for a war to wage, OLDEST would swell up angry, tense, and sometimes he would come after me because I never once caught a beating from the OLD MAN, I never had to suffer under the OLD MAN's hand, I had it easy, OLDEST explained to me why I didn't understand how bad it had been living under the authority of the OLD MAN, and I wouldn't say a word back to him because I was scared of OLDEST, I would stay away from him whenever he drank his vodka, and it was easy to keep track of OLDEST because he was like a comet falling through the sky, he blazed up everything around him, MA couldn't handle him, she was tired of trying to protect him, I remember MA turning her back to OLDEST and slowly walking into the kitchen on her bare feet because nobody could stop OLDEST when he was drunk and determined to head out and pick a fight then end up in a cop car, and the car would bring him home to MA instead of the jail because Sgt. Hanover knew MA and felt sorry for her having to raise up three boys on her own so Sgt. Hanover would bring home OLDEST to sleep it off, and OLDEST would sleep it off and wake up and head to work in the morning as an apprentice plumber, that was his trade he had taken up, OLDEST would be a plumber because the work was steady and the money was alright and it was as good a trade as any, OLDEST would be someone who worked with his hands, who would earn a living because of the strength of his wrists, the bulk of his knuckles, he would be a man who belonged to an old way of things, an old world where men drank after long days in factories or in fields, who sent logs of

impossible magnitudes down rivers and into saw mills, who fixed impossible rivets on steel beams hundreds of feet in the sky, OLDEST would be a plumber because the plumbers OLDEST knew liked to drink and pick fights so OLDEST figured he would fit right in, and it was something to watch him work his tools with his one good arm, OLDEST would use his teeth if he had to, or even his toes, OLDEST was determined to make it despite only having his one good arm, he did more with one arm than, I think it all had something to do with why OLDEST had inked the words **Si Vis Pacem Para Bellum** on his forearm, on his good arm, I'd asked him once about the tattoo, MA had invited OLDEST over for dinner one Sunday night as a kind of peace offering after she had kicked him out of the house, she invited him every Sunday night, and sometimes OLDEST came, and the first time he showed up with his tattoo I asked OLDEST what the words meant because I only knew a little bit of Latin and OLDEST said If you want peace get ready for war and I didn't ask anything else of OLDEST once he'd explained what the words meant, it spoke for itself, and if there was a fire to be lit, OLDEST would make sure the fire would destroy something or somebody who deserved to be destroyed, and then in the silence for a moment I thought of the OLD MAN, and MA had insisted the OLD MAN died from a stomach ulcer, internal bleeding, and OLDER always said the OLD MAN got punched in the stomach like Charlie Chaplain and was dead a few days later, and OLDEST claimed our father had been killed in a barroom fight, though it didn't matter whatever it was it was because the OLD MAN had died, dead, then an acorn falls down from the sky onto the street, it falls and crashes against the asphalt and rolls before it rests, stranded on a barren land, the silver acorn rolls then it settles against the curb and my attention is back to the trees, and the silence has dissipated, the acorn crashed into the lonely silence onto the asphalt and now the wind is howling, the branches of the oaks and pines shake, the leaves flutter and growl in the gusts off the Atlantic, the silence has vanished and the sun is climbing somewhere up in the sky behind the clouds but the day is hardly brightening, the brightness of the day is muted, halted, and as he continues down the street to the dirt path he notices the path has continued to darken, the darkened and damp dirt road, so he hastens his way back up the path of stones along the front walkway of the shack, up the steps, and the front door is opened and shut and the closing of the door coaxes the silence back, inside the shack, he's inside a new

silence as he stares into his workspace, the living room, standing, alone, so the crows are gone, he thinks to himself, the crows have finally evacuated, the birds have made their decision, an inauspicious sign with no birds to sing or see, *looking at birds,* whether they would hunker down somewhere else and wait out the storm or fly off island, across the sound, to the mainland, their decision has been made, left with little choice, so, he thinks, I'll start to work, I'll work on something related to that cloud, a new piece, his eyes dart across the silence of the room, the workspace, and I have enough gray and white and dark stones to start, to make a beginning, I have plenty of inventory, my own personal department store, so I can profile some of those fluffy peaks, the intimations of white fluffy peaks whipped up into curls like tongues hungry for sunlight, and those smooth underbellies, well it will have to be a larger piece, maybe three feet by three feet by five feet, I'll start sorting through the boxes, I'll arrange the stones by color, a catalog, I'll lay them out on the black bedsheet with my headlamp and my handheld flashlight, I'll test the stones for their luster, their feel, and I'll designate them, positioning them in my mind, and I'll have the notebook, weighing the stones, making calculations along the way, then I'll decide on the number of arms, wires, I'll know where to drill the hooks into the rocks, I'll have my drill and then I'll fix wires to the hooks in the rocks and then fix the other ends of the wires to the arms, and it will all start from a single point, I'll hang the central arm from the ceiling, from the fixture I have rigged up, I'll start at the place each of my pieces starts from, a familiar beginning, with the main peak, the promontory, like a lookout, so it will be the cloud above the hill emerging out of a cloudless sky, it will be the storm, and it will also be the sea, and the sun, because the light will be implied, it will be implied by the coloring, by the shades of stone, juxtaposed, it will have something light in it, something dark in it, menacing, but hopeful, something like the relief which comes after an intense pain, it will be something new, this will be my first piece regarding a cloud, a cumulus formation, a cloud from a cloudless sky, then the idea springs to mind maybe this storm will wash up a bevy of new stones onto the beach and I'll go a'combing over the beach, after the storm passes over the island, some unique elements and configurations and colors might wash up from the depths and I'll be inspired for something else, another piece, another idea,

because whenever I'm inspired to create I have the secret fear well up inside me it may be my last, I'm so amazed each time I'm inspired to work, surprised, I begin to worry it might be the last so I'm already hopeful and wishing another bit of inspiration might come to me once I'm done, it's how it goes for me when I'm inspired, and the storm is coming, I'll have to finish the cloud in one go, I'll finish this piece today, the cloud from the hill, in one morning then afternoon and evening, with the hurricane blowing, and tomorrow I'll be ready to start fresh, once the storm has passed, so he's full of energy, working through his process, with a vision inside of his head, but first he needs coffee, so he paces through his workspace to stop in the kitchen and he fills up the carafe with water from the sink, he turns the faucet and feels the weight of the carafe in his hand and then shuts the water off, he empties the carafe into the coffee machine with the water from the sink, he'll need the essential pot of coffee before he begins, so he opens the pantry for a filter, and sets the paper filter in the top of the machine, then he adds a scoop of ground beans inside of the filter and closes the top lid, he flips the switch, and afterwards he notices the white lace curtain, a humble curtain, a curtain hung by MA long ago, blowing at him from the outside, from the window, only an inch or two from off the screen, subtle, and the curtain flutters and his mind is clear until he grins intensely to think of Ron explaining how to prepare cowboy coffee with the grounds directly in the water and how once he tried Ron's recipe out of curiosity and bits of coffee grit stuck in his teeth for days, he grins wide for a moment, he thinks of Ron and the cowboy coffee recipe now each time he turns the switch of the machine, Ron, dim from rum, he's grinning and he'll need coffee as he sorts through the cardboard boxes, he has fifteen or twenty boxes strewn around the living room because he disconnected the television and hauled it out with the couch and the two chairs, he brought it to the Salvation Army, he donated the television set and the couch so he could open up a workspace, so he could utilize the living room as a place for his work, because the first winter he moved back to the island from the city he couldn't work outside, where he had been working in the summer and the fall, and MA kept mostly to her bedroom, so during the winter when the island went into a kind of dormancy, when the holidaymaking ended and the pace of life slowed down, a quiescence, when Theresa at the Coffee Shop who complained about the tourists started to wish for June and July, that first

winter he cleared open the living room and converted it to a workspace, and for those first pieces he was inspired by butterflies, he was inspired by caterpillars and moths, by dormancy and resurrection, and he worked in the living room and MA would watch him quietly, and MA wouldn't say much, a confusion had set in around her and she was beginning to lose any sense of herself, of who she was, of who he was, she would drift in and out of the room not sure of what was happening but for stretches of time she calmed down and watched, he was taking care of MA in the house, and because of her, by accident, she had inspired him to switch mediums, he gave up the draft paper and the architectural magazines, he gave up on the idea of designing buildings, when he bought the ferry ticket and moved his belongings back onto the island it was an easy decision, it dawned on him those first few days, sitting in the house, what was the next move, what would he do, he remembered MA, her walks on the beach when he was a child, her projects out on the back lawn, constellations and cosmos in the patches of brown summer grass, his first winter back he would leave her in the house with the doors locked and turn up his coat collar to walk down to the beach for stones, along the cold grey shores, he would be inside of his gloves and his hat, the waves would belch out from the sea like mud up onto the sand, it was so cold, so cold along the water, but it was important to be working, to keep up at the work, he kept working through her illness, until she died, he kept at the work, and after MA died, once he realized he wasn't leaving the island, after he realized he preferred the island to the city, he preferred the silence to the chaos, when he knew he could make a living for himself, after her funeral, when he called OLDER and asked his brother for advice, he thought to consult OLDER, what if I stay here, what if I live here, if I buy you out, and OLDER told me not to worry about the money, to forget about the money, stay in the house if you like, where we grew up, where we were boys together, brothers, if it makes you happy and you have your work, stay put, so even though he figured there was always a possibility to return to New York and the friends he had said goodbye to, the choice was made, he knew it was the right choice, he felt it, despite MA being gone, then OLDER, he felt good about being at home, on the island, it was the right decision even if he was alone and caught between worlds, in this kind of dream, nothing was left for him amidst the skyscrapers or subways, so he kept working, he realized something was here for him on the

island, despite the isolation and the loneliness, he was inspired to work, and he was selling pieces, so there was a hopefulness despite the darkness, and he had talked to OLDER about it though OLDER didn't talk much anymore, their conversations over the phone were dominated by silence, it was a shared silence with OLDER, an empty silence that bled out in all directions so that not even a faint echo could find traction to occupy the space of it, deafened, and I'll never forget those phone calls, the two of us would breathe together on the phone, I would listen to my brother inhaling and exhaling, while he was alive, even though OLDER knew I was available for him, I told him time and again, I was there for OLDER, even if it wasn't enough in the end, I had asked OLDER to move back in with me, I told OLDER he could find some work on the island, like me, he could start over, we could both start over, I didn't put it like that exactly but we both knew what I meant, after what had happened to his boy, the poor boy, after the accident, but OLDER wouldn't commit, OLDER wouldn't commit one way or another, OLDER made excuses about how he didn't want to intrude, but it wouldn't have been an intrusion, to be with somebody, somebody to eat dinner with, somebody to share a joke with, to share the Gazette, a pot of coffee, but OLDER stayed put on the continent and we were both lonely, archipelagos, stranded by distance, by time, as the white lace curtain flutters, so instead of letting the emptiness eat me from the inside out I kept at the work, MA inspired me, her ceremonies of stone in the backyard, her spiral galaxies, we hadn't been brought up with religion, kneeling in a church pew or memorizing a prayer, we never thought to confess our sins, yet we shared a sense of wonder, a sense of awe and fear and gratitude, because of MA, from her, so I felt her spirit inside of me, even as MA deteriorated, even as MA receded away, ebbing, and I'll never forget Louisa, the gallery owner, when she saw my entry at the Agriculture Fair, she was holding a clipboard in the Artisans' Tent with the other artists, their work, and she stopped to talk to me, she had spent most of the morning mesmerized by the Guernsey and the Jersey steers in the larger pens on the other side of the fairgrounds, Fred Fischer's infamous Yorkshire sows, unbeaten in their division and gold ribboned year after year, gilts and barrows, bay dun ponies with their jet black manes and snouts, childlike and amazed amongst the animals and the shepherds and the cowpokes, then she had listened to a Bluegrass band at the landing while she sampled a local vendor's lemonade, to gather herself, to

remind herself of her purpose as a judge at the Artisans' Tent, and she had walked back into the Artisans' Tent, past the carnival barkers and the hucksters, and she noticed my work, she ended up buying the piece from me, then she asked if I had more and I told her I didn't so she told me to keep going, she had a gallery in town and she wanted to show my work, so I was able to hang my designs in her gallery, she showed my work, exclusively, and the work sold, my pieces sold, fast, tourists came over on day trips and weeklong vacations and bought the pieces, at a price, so it was a way for me to stitch ends together, to scamper by, and Louisa offered me some good advice on those first pieces, she suggested I name my work after locations on the island, she told me to use the original Native American names, translated into English, so there was Resting Place Near the Water, which was Achushnet, Where the Narrows Open, which was Pocasset, Faraway Land, which was Nantucket, Land Under the Hill, which was Aquinnah, Setting Sun, which was Menemsha, Louisa advised me, she told me to use the translated names of the original places, People of the First Light, because the names were beautiful, and they were hidden in plain sight around us, they were still alive, and I appreciated Louisa for it, because I was never one for naming my work, I was never much of a marketer, but Louisa helped me sell those first pieces and now everything I finish I can sell, and I'm lucky for it, because it's hard to sell, it's nearly impossible to put ends together as an artist, hardly any of the kids I went to school with had the luxury of doing work they were interested in, or wanted to do, mostly they became teachers, they didn't have galleries to show in, they weren't selling, so there was something good that came from me being on the island, I know it is something good in being here, almost three years now, back from the city, back home, and it's been so long now I hardly recognize the steam whistle, the shrill pitch isn't conspicuous any longer, it doesn't stand out, as if the frequency has been erased from my brain, like folks who take residence near busy airports hardly notice the trails of planes overhead, but I heard the whistle come through the crows today, I woke up in a dawn haze to the crows and the whistle and even though I'm alone, even though, I have work to do, so he walked back from the kitchen into his workspace and went about rummaging through old cardboard boxes scouring for certain colors, certain textures, so he reached in and plucked out stones and turned on a small flashlight and shined the clear white light

on the stones, then he found his headlamp and set it onto his head and clicked it, the headlamp with the faint yellow light, and his eyes dwelled on the stones for a bit longer, he tested them, because he was looking to see how the rocks behaved under different conditions of light, he was assessing them, deliberate, then the coffee machine in the kitchen beeped so after he finished with the rocks in his hand he walked back into the kitchen and poured himself a cup of coffee and put the mug to his lips and internalized the experience with a deep inhalation, as the white lace curtain floats from off the screen of the window, he inhales deeply and enjoys the smell of the roast of the beans and the heat from the water and it comforts him, he is an artist, pleased with a cup of coffee, he knows who he is and where he is and he thinks to himself maybe that's why OLDER had to let go, that's why, OLDER no longer possessed a sense of himself, of who OLDER was, OLDER had lost it when his boy died, OLDER had been a father, it was a role OLDER loved, OLDER lived for it, and it fulfilled OLDER until it was stolen away from him, dispossessed, and I'm lucky because I'll be able to sell this piece and I have a person to be, and a place to be it, because the island has long been a home to plenty of artists, anarchist artists, hippy artists, rich artists and poor artists, artists who blossomed in later years of renaissance like reformed Christians like old men clean for decades from heroin who wore large silver crucifixes with a guitar case strapped to their back, eyes which peered through the world and not at it, vagabonds who came to island because Jesus commanded them to, who dawned sunhats with wide, straw brims and the chin cords pulled taut, artists who scavenged cigarette butts off worn sidewalks and to pickle away in furtive pockets, saved for later, an island full of eccentrics and painters who left the continent in search of new colors, because of the sunsets and cliffs and seabirds, with their watercolors and oils, there is a place here for me to be something, a place for me to be it, in it, even though it's surrounded by water, and I'm alone, it's a place. SHE TOLD ME SHE KNEW WHO I WAS. With the coffee in my hand, but before I take a sip, my thoughts will shift to OLDER, as the wind blows outside the kitchen window, as MA's lace curtain floats and dances from off the screen, I will think about OLDER, before he met Ellie, the afternoon OLDER picked up windsurfing, it was a blustery afternoon and while OLDER was at the beach he recognized the owner of Island Surf, a local named John Jay out on the water on the glint of the sunshine, the shop

back in town with a GONE SURFING sign posted in the front window, John Jay had been out windsurfing so OLDER waited around for him to finish, studying the wind, the sail, the board, OLDER waited for John Jay to paddle in and once John Jay walked up onto the beach in a wetsuit OLDER asked John Jay if he might give it a try, and John Jay sort of laughed at OLDER but the sandy haired surf bum must have been curious so he complied with OLDER's request and let him try out the gear, though John Jay warned OLDER if he broke anything he'd have to pay for it, so OLDER said alright that's fine and off OLDER went, John Jay asked if OLDER wanted any tips or training and OLDER said no he would manage fine, so OLDER ventured out into the water and before long OLDER was wind surfing, doing twirls and huge cuts on the board, launching himself into the air, that's the way OLDER was, looking to push the boundaries of things, excited, OLDER would climb the cliffs of sea walls and he'd scurry up trees because he relished the chemical signature of adrenaline, the thrill, he thrived in such environments, I remember once OLDER grasped me by the hand and we walked into town, into the harbor, a family was on the docks fishing for crabs with a handline, using chicken wings for bait, but OLDER paid them no attention and found a spile at the end of the pier and sort of waltzed up to it then OLDER winked at me before he launched his body, pulling off a double backflip into the inky surf below, and I marveled at him, glowing, he was incredible to watch, but now there is my work, there is work to be done, so he tips the mug into a tentative firstsip of coffee, it is an image of the cloud breaking open out from the cloudless sky, distinguishing itself, from a sky of grey, in his workspace is the scale, the calculator, the wires, the notebooks, the boxes of stones and rocks from the beach divided up into different colors and textures, different shades of earth and sun and water, he slides one final glance at the window, the white lace curtain, and he can taste the salt in the air, the salt of the sea in the wind blowing and he can hear white oaks dancing in a strong breeze, and out in the back of the shack rust eats away at an old car, an El Camino, a trash bag taped over the window, in place of a window, the salt slowly corrodes the metal, the hubcaps, the floorboards, the muffler, caked in rust, he can taste it, because the truck belonged to OLDEST, it hasn't moved in years, not since the dusk when he was fishing for scup with OLDEST, before OLDEST was killed, before OLDEST pulled a switchblade knife out from inside his boot and caught a bullet

in his chest, they had already nabbed a few scup and had attached the fish to a stringer, scups as big as dinner plates, and the pink twilight was fading to a purple night when OLDEST declared plenty of sonsavbitches are out there, it was a nasty world, OLDEST figured the only way to get by was to be nasty back to it, to be nasty as hell, it was our last evening fishing together, and OLDEST paused then he muttered to me I wouldn't understand, I'd been protected from the meanness, insulated, so I laughed, I chuckled, and OLDEST quit working the line, OLDEST quit fishing the spoon or the worm or whatever gear he was fishing, OLDEST clicked the reel and turned his attention over at me with his chiseled features, the point of his chin and his cheekbones, OLDEST asked what was so funny, why had I chuckled, and I summoned up the courage inside of myself because in truth I was scared of OLDEST, as much as I loved him I was scared of him like I had once been scared of the OLD MAN, I didn't understand OLDEST like how I didn't understand the OLD MAN and it scared me to know that the world was full of people who looked at things so different than how I did, it scared me to think of a world full of people who saw things in such stark contrast, but after a deep breath I told OLDEST about the cord to the busted vacuum, about hiding under my bed, about finding MA crying with a bloody lip, I told OLDEST I wasn't spared a goddamned thing, not a goddamned thing, I was only four or five years old but I remember it like it was yesterday and I told OLDEST nobody spared me a goddamned thing, not the OLD MAN, nobody, I took a beating after I saw MA crying and I ran up to the OLD MAN punching and kicking, the OLD MAN held me down, I witnessed the violence and I was as scared and as confused as anybody would be, adult or child, so whatever you might think to yourself you go ahead and think it but it's wrong, it's wrong, because I wasn't spared a goddamned thing, and I said it to OLDEST, I declared it and I reeled in my line and I checked the weight and the hook and the bait and I cast back out, OLDEST didn't say a word, OLDEST stood beside me with his line clicked, so it must have been the last time we went fishing together, we were on the beach casting into the surf and there had been osprey nests up on posts, big posts sticking out from the beach the Conservation Society had stuck into the ground, for the birds to nest on, huge and shaggy nests of branches and dune grass, for the ospreys to call home, for the babies to hatch in July, to hunt herring and blues, the ospreys competing with OLDEST and me for fish, competing against nature, our own natures, and when we

left the beach OLDEST mentioned it wasn't fair, he looked up at an osprey with a fish in its talons and OLDEST only said it wasn't fair and OLDEST might have been talking about the bird, about us having to compete against nature, out here in the surf, or he might have been talking about something else, so he swallows the coffee down in a gulp, a kind of reverential gulp, thoughtful, tasting the smoke and the leather and the cocoa and the velvet inside of the feel of the coffee, an acknowledgement of taste, the various flavors and elements, of life, maybe, and he pauses before he turns back into the living room, back to his workspace, since he hesitated to call it a studio, because wasn't there something pretentious about the word *studio*, something precious, a studio, no, it was too precious, at school in the city they called him *provincial*, that was the insult one of his classmates had used, they called him provincial but he knew deep down his classmates were threatened by him because he attacked everything he found to be precious, he attacked the norms, he attacked their theories and their tastes, after his second year in the program he had received a grant to travel to Italy over the summer, embarking on an airplane, and I hadn't slept on the flight over, I didn't drink red wine, not like my classmates snoring next to me and in front of me, their legs in the aisle, they slept over the ocean, crossing continents, and I remained drowsy but awake and bundled full of nerves and excitement because I had been building the trip up in my head, this moment, this trip, I had built it up in my mind to be a kind of pilgrimage where I would make contact with the masterpieces of the old world, where I'd touch greatness, and come to know art, what true art was, so I couldn't sleep, I could only anticipate, I could only close my eyes and breathe in dizzying apprehension until we crossed over England and France and finally into Italy as the sun rose, the cabin filling with light, and I watched the light pour in from the windows, ovoids shimmering and melting up onto the floors and the roof of the cabin, the ovoids gradually shifted along a spectrum from red to orange to clear white, onto seats and onto bodies with eyes covered by complimentary facemasks, and as the plane began to descend, as the wings pitched, a final cadenza capped off the display and I could only watch with wonder, it was a beautiful dance of light and shadow and the ovoid shapes and I seemed to be the only one noticing it, and honestly I would have been satisfied to have flown back home once we landed because what were the masterpieces, what was

Rome, what of it, nothing but preciousness, contrivances, cultural rules and beliefs and systems built to preserve a make-believe status quo, I learned more on our final descent about art and wonder and finding inspiration than I did in any of the museums, from any of the docents or experts or guidebooks, and that's why he referred to it as a workspace, because he was provincial, limited in outlook, lacking the polish of urban society, insular, of or relating to an island, isolated, having minimal contact or little in common with others, so he referred to it as a workspace because it was a space he worked in, a space where he confronted what was most hopeless and terrible about his life, our lives, what was most hopeful and beautiful, where he would start up, energized and excited, working, and everything seemed to be within reach, any moment he would be able to grasp it and touch it, and the anticipation would drive him on, he would inch closer and closer and there were even moments when he did touch it, when he found the source of connection, when he felt it, he would feel it inside of him, he would see it in the work in front of him, but the moments wouldn't last, he couldn't take hold of them with a firm grip, fleeting, and as he lost contact with the feeling, somewhere along the way a notion would come to him, and the notion was this, whatever hope we have to connect with something, with somebody, to form meaning, to find love, despite our efforts, our struggles, we'll only end up with lost, alone, cast into the void, the darkness, because eventually everything is erased to nothing, mountains are leveled, seas dry up, every person you ever meet will die into a grave in the ground speechless and breathless for eternity, and no matter the work done or the work to be done, no matter whatever it is you do or appear to achieve, when it's put to test against the ultimate, it is destroyed, it disappears forever, without recovery, this is the cold truth, the cold truth of death, the cold truth of time, and the cold truth is what waits for all of us, everything, so now what, and he'd confront the notion and the notion wouldn't budge upon inspection, it wouldn't back down, it would be upright, intimidating, a monolith, a burden hanging on his shoulders, pinned across his chest, yet he would continue, he would go on working in its presence because the cold truth was also a kind of justice, a kind of diamond, the cold truth erased platinum blonde girlfriends in their white sports cars, it unfurled their perfect skin, it cracked their manicured fingernails, pursed lips crumbled to dust, adorned then destroyed,

and simultaneously the cold truth could bring relief to a suffering cancer patient, a woman losing her memory, an injured animal, it brought clemency to those who needed it, who deserved it, because through its destructive powers the cold truth destroyed the unworthy, it brought justice to the unjust, so a sense of balance was contained in the cold truth, a kind of resolution, because suffering never went on forever, and power never lasted, any advantage was an illusion and the illusion never went on forever because the perfection of the cold truth reduced everything to silence, to stillness, like a diamond, so despite the terror and the fear and the dread which came with the perfect truth, the cold truth of our inexorable hour, it also guaranteed complete solace, a permanent safe harbor, tranquil waters, eventually, and he imagines his head buried in his mother's midsection, pressed against her belly, close to home, his first home, his cheek pressed tight, and the warmth, glowing, he could feel MA and it is a word like *grace* which he associates with MA, and it's the same word he uses in conjunction with the cold truth, it is his response to the cold truth, to the notions which confronts him, which stops him from his work then prompts him to resume, asks what of it, then answers, because even though we can never hold it, we can never keep it, there are moments when we do touch it, then he opens up to a new piece of looseleaf paper, inside of his notebook, and begins calculating, he weighs ten rocks on a laboratory scale, he hits the TARE button with a plastic container on the scale and then he adds a handful of rocks into the container, six or seven of them, and he marks the weight, he has a system, with columns and rows, because math is one of his strengths, an engineer is hidden inside of him, the engineer inside the artist, an orderly creature, it is his approach, he maintains an orderly approach to his work yet simultaneously he doesn't try to control his impulses, he didn't have any rules or restrictions on how he went about his pieces, and when he looked up from the notebook with a black ballpoint pen in his mouth, with a handful of violet colored and lavender tinged rocks in a plastic container, rocks which will be featured in the belly of the cloud, the region closest the ground, nearest the earth, he remembers the sweater, a chill lingers in the old shack, so he stands up and walks to the closet, the wool sweater, it's half past seven and he pulls the sweater over his shirt, it's a striped sweater with fuzzy bands of terracotta and navy blue, and the sweater brings to mind boxes of stones he has

collected which line the walls of the workspace, a box for blue stones, for navy stones, and a box for amber stones, for terracotta, for shades of yellow, opal, and even though none of the stones are the same color it doesn't prevent him from drawing out themes on shade and tone and luster so he has the boxes organized in themes, and he adjusts his denim collar underneath the sweater and pulls the collar up close to his neck then he opens up a small box, a small cardboard box next to a larger one, and inside are white stones, bleached white, with smooth stones eroded and grooved into different shapes, various phases of alien moons, so he selects a dozen or so from the box, he weighs them, and then he sets them on the floor, he's laid out a black bedsheet on the floor, because the blackness will help create a contrast, the contrast between the black and the color of the stones will help bring out the light from the stones, it will help him to evaluate which stones will work and which will not, then he reaches for the headlamp, the small camping headlamp he had bought at an outdoor store several years ago, and he positions the headlamp back on his head and kneels closer to the stones and clicks a button so the light of the headlamp turns on and he begins arranging the stones, he begins to move them around, and the bedsheet is laid flat and would appear flat to anyone else watching but he can account for the depth of the piece, he's setting the stones out on the black bedsheet but it isn't flat, the way he's looking at it, the way he's arranging the stones, his brain can account for the depth and he knows which rocks will be positioned in front, which ones will go behind, what height the stones will hang from, he's calculating the length of the arms and the wires and configuring the dimensions of the piece, even though the perspective is dynamic, the nature of his work is dynamic because the finished product will be a kind of mobile, the stones will possess a kind of motion, an activity of stone, and the figure will occasionally rotate into new positions, configurations, so he picks one static perspective to work from even though he knows the perspective he's working from will never be attained, it will never be fixed, the stasis will be destroyed by the nature of the piece, which is something he's learned to appreciate about his work, because initially he worked on stabiles, which are fixed mobiles, but he's since abandoned trying to fix his work in place, and it's only logical to embrace a kind of dynamism since he's designing a cloud, made of molecules in motion, air and water droplets, wind and vibrations of heat, it will be a

mobile, it will contain a motion in it, a silent kind of motion that's present in clouds when you look up to them in the sky, there's a quiet motion to a cloud, an unseen motion that you can only make out if you afford the cloud enough time, enough attention, so the work will never be fixed and the design in his head will never be achieved, be realized, it will never hold firm, but it doesn't bother him any, in fact it does the opposite, it relieves him, so he's arranging the stones, the top of the cumulus in light carefree whites and the belly in low melancholy violets, so after the top and the bottom layers are worked out he flicks the headlamp off, then he stands up, he walks to the front wall of the shack with the door at the far end, and underneath the front windows sits a large box, larger than most of the other boxes, and he opens the lid and he reaches in, he scoops out two handfuls of stones which are various shades of grey, various shapes, and he drops them into a pile on the corner of the bedsheet and begins to separate them, he finds the handheld flashlight and he clicks the flashlight on and shines the bright fluorescent light onto the stones, individually, one by one, and as he segregates the grey stones he creates a gradient of color, of lighter shades and darker shades, so he works his way through each of the stones then he turns the flashlight off and he flicks the headlamp on to inspect the colors again, and he arranges the stones to his liking, he moves the position of one, he flicks the headlamp off, then moves the position of another, and then he stands up on his feet and stretches himself, he pulls one arm behind his head, then the other, he bends down to touch his toes, he reaches down, he holds his breath, then he breathes, he lifts himself back up out of the bend then he notices the coffee mug on the kitchen counter, so he wades over to the mug and finishes his coffee and then drifts back into his workspace, he finds another box, more greys, more speckled grays, more cracked greys, chipped, jagged, he reaches in with one hand then the other, and he sits back down, where he had been arranging the first set of stones, and he begins to incorporate the new stones into the gradient, repeating the process, he repeats this several times, a handful of stones, another handful, the headlamp flicking on and off, the handheld flashlight, and soon enough the gradient is comprised of a couple hundred stones, various shades of grey, various shapes, laid out on the black bedsheet, and then he repeats the process with blue stones, he opens other boxes, he inspects the rocks in his hand, between his

fingers, he turns on his headlamp, then he turns off his headlamp, he licks one of the stones because he has a habit of licking the stones he works with, he'll compare the color of the wet part of the stone with the dry part of the stone, he'll wait for the wet part of the stone where he licked it to dry, and he isn't sure what happens when he licks the stones but some additional information is gathered, and he also records precise mental notes on where he might drill for the small hook, how the rock might look as it's hung up, suspended in space, he is focused, he is present with each rock, absorbing information, questioning the material, asking it where it wants to go, what it wants to be, and soon he has built up two piles, two gradients of color, one grey and one blue, then he begins to select stones from the piles, he picks one up and arranges it between the purples and the whites, the top and bottom layers of the cloud he has set up at the opposite ends of the black bedsheet, he begins to fill out the picture of the cloud, maybe it is a cloud that will bring rain, maybe it is a cloud that will vanish peacefully, it could unfold either way, which of course will be part of the magic of the cloud, of the work, the potential embedded within, and he goes on selecting one stone at a time to find its position, a place for the stone, designating a kind of final purpose for the stone, even though the image he's working towards will never be achieved, he can see it in his head, in three dimensions, even though the arrangement of stones is flat it's actually suspended in three dimensions, inside of his imagination, he can envision the swelling cumulus hung out in front of him, like the cloud from earlier in the morning, up from the street, framed by the forest, by the trees on both sides of the road, gazing up, and the feeling is present, inside of him, as he's looking up at the cloud, as he's arranging the stones, heavenwards, surrounded by water, alone, but connected, and he works with the feeling and the stones, with his hands and his fingers, and he finds sadness and hope, he finds purples and whites, blues and greys, he notices intricate lines, ghostly fractures, striations of color, bands slightly lighter and slightly darker, oblong shapes like teeth, like hillsides, like gelatinous polyhedrons, cracks in the rocks like the crack in the wall that runs underneath the far windows, inching along month by month, a jagged line slowly elongating, and he stops the work to take stock of the fissure and where it has progressed to, he thinks what OLDEST might tell him, how it might be diagnosed, how some kind of

putty might be applied, how the drywall needs to be replaced, until he sighs, and he returns his focus to the work, he touches a blue stone with his fingers and feels the weight of it in his palm, then he changes the orientation, he balances it on a point, then he lays it flat to its natural conformation, he waits and waits until a revelation erupts, inspired, then he moves to the next, he handles each stone with the same level of care, consideration, nothing is rushed, everything is considered, the stones are inserted one by one into a matrix within his imagination, and his work is a kind of prayer, a kind of affirmation of his own life, the lives around him, before him and after him, it's a response to the cold truth, an embrace of the cold truth, so without any effort an openness comes out in the work because no decisions are made, no direction is taken, the work is simple, a flow towards an idea which already existed, a point on a continuum which has existed forever, and the textbooks in school are full of words like unconscious and creative process and cultural influence, the textbooks are structured with essays and theoretical frameworks about where inspiration comes from, but for him it doesn't matter, the strangeness, the otherness, it doesn't require a name or a theory, he knows it exists somewhere else beyond him, and for him all that matters is he approaches it with an openness, a faith and an openness to the possibility of something beautiful behind everything, waiting for us, something benevolent which accounts for everything, behind it all, that wants to be found, touched, because aren't we all lost and hungry for a way home, so he flows and the work flows and the stones arrange themselves inside of his mind, a shape establishes itself, inspecting the stones and positioning them and sometimes licking the surfaces of the stones, because he has a habit of tasting the material, until he stops, he stops and uprights himself and stretches, he reaches back behind his head with each arm, then he twists his torso, he pulls his legs behind his thighs, he holds his breath then he breathes, and he looks down, he inspects the arrangement, it makes sense to me, where the flow is pointed, where the water runs, he understands it somehow, there's a faith in it, an acceptance, like how he has begun to accept why OLDER had to go on, why OLDER drowned, an island surrounded, the water rushing up from all sides, drowning OLDER, drowning out the sky, so I hear MA as I look into the kitchen, a mineral taste sizzles in my mouth and the white lace curtain is floating, I see MA with that uneasy look on her face

and I can hear the *peent* of a nighthawk then she whispers, she mutters 'Run away, run away, run away', and it occurs to me I like to imbue my work with meaning, with symbolic resonance, like my work could be an answer to a kind of ultimate riddle, like I can explain the suffering heart of mankind, the cold kiss of death, but such thoughts are nothing but pride, my work is no answer, to think of it as an answer is foolishness, because what do I have but a useless pile of stones, a bunch of rocks washed up onto the beach, drilled into and hooked onto wires, what do I possess but a blind optimism which boils down to personal luck and random chance and little else, and if I would've been in his shoes, OLDER, if I would have lost a child, if I would have been forced to play witness to a miniature casket lowered into the dirt, into a rectangular hole cut out of the cemetery grass, if I would have seen my darling son laid out in the street, with bloodshot eyes and broken bones jutting out of place and torn flesh and a crater in the back of the little boy's skull covered in auburn hair, if I would have been confronted by such a horror, my own flesh and blood, my heart, if it would have been my heart undone, I wouldn't be here collecting rocks, taking measurements, cutting wires, fastening hooks, I wouldn't be doing any of this, I wouldn't have any convictions, I would have drowned like OLDER drowned, breathless, so don't swell up with pride, don't pretend like you have anything figured out, because you don't, you don't understand anything, nothing, nobody does, nobody has and nobody ever will, no poet or philosopher or priest, no textbook, no professor, nobody, at best all you can do is point to the questions with a shrug, and he can feel the texture of the wool against the skin of his arms as he shakes his head, he shakes his head back and forth and sighs, underneath him at his feet are the boxes and the rocks, the notebook and the calculator, and he sighs again, the crows are gone and the house is silent, the yard is quiet, the island is quiet because it's already been swallowed up in water, drowned, and OLDER can't even look at her, a minister is presiding over a grave with boney fingers on a black book of prayers, surrounded by flowers, there's a cousin from Haverhill, there's some family from upstate New York, the Berkshires, and there's Ellie's sister, Ellie's mother, and Ellie wears a blankness on her face, there's a blankness, a remoteness, as if we were all pictures, as if it were a film she were watching, that's how OLDER later described it to me, after the funeral, after we sat down in his apartment at

the kitchen table, a partition between her and everything else, a buffer, OLDER assumes it must have been the depression, the clinical depression, the medication, she had swung between bipolar extremes ever since Albert was born, who OLDER called 'Buddy' and took care of when the boy cried at night or needed a diaper changed, who OLDER prepared bottles for because Ellie was depressed, who OLDER loved and cooked for and provided for because Ellie was in a rut, though initially the doctors assured OLDER it was normal, it was a post-partum depression and it occurs with many mothers, it would pass, but one day the mania erupted and Ellie had moved off the island, Ellie and OLDER had fallen into an argument over some trifle, and suddenly she thumbed it, Ellie took off and hauled down the street and stuck out her thumb, hitchhiking, disappearing for two weeks, then reappearing with an apartment off the island, on the continent, a new job, a new beginning, and so OLDER joined her, with Buddy, they packed up and followed Ellie until another depression struck, then another mania, and the next manic episode had Ellie convinced she had to go about 'soul recycling,' like how a body is recycled back to the earth, that's how Ellie explained it to OLDER, it would be my job to recycle lost souls back to heaven, so as the preacher spoke OLDER thought about 'soul recycling' even though OLDER couldn't bring himself to speak to Ellie during the funeral, they had been separated now, three years, it hadn't been a divorce because OLDER was stubborn and a romantic and held out for hope, OLDER hoped one day the parts of Ellie which had been lost would return, would come back to him, washed up in a changing tide, because Ellie had vanished, without a trace, without warning, no lastchance missyouforever goodbye, there was no closure for OLDER, and the funeral might as well have been for Ellie too, as much as it was for Buddy, because OLDER had lost her too, OLDER would file for divorce the next day and break free from Ellie for good, he told me at the kitchen table that's what he would do, after the funeral, and he would stop holding out hope for the tides to change, because he had lost Ellie too, but without the decency of a wake, without any of the frozen meals his friends brought over, but what I remember most while I stood in the cemetery next to OLDER, my eyes drawn to the cut of the ground, was the rectangle, the cut in the grass, and the small coffin positioned above it, without a headstone, without a marker, the unmarked rectangle in the ground, so he stares at the work, he stares at the black bedsheet and the rocks on top of the sheet and

he clicks his headlamp off, he takes it from off of his head and drops it on the ground next to the stones, and he feels a feeling like granite, the letters etched into a headstone, headstones, four of them, and OLDEST is indignant, barking at him, OLDEST can't believe his favorite player has been traded, OLDEST read it in the Gazette so now OLDEST is shouting at him about how cheap the ownership was, how the sonavabitch owner was a cheapskate, and the team is ruined, we'll never reach the playoffs, could you believe it, OLDEST couldn't believe it, so OLDEST was done with the Sox, I'm done with them, the cheapskates, they'll do anything to keep from winning, all they care about is money, all they care about is selling beer and hotdogs, I won't support them anymore, nobody should, so take that hat off, take that ballcap off your head, we don't support the Sox anymore in this house, the sonsavbitches, I won't look at the logo, and no brother of mine will support them, so he takes the hat off from his head and balls it up in hist fist and OLDEST demands he hand it over, give it to me, I'm burning our hats, our shirts, and he looks at OLDEST and tells him no, it's my hat, it's not your hat, so he puts it back on his head, because the hat once belonged to the OLD MAN and it was the only thing the OLD MAN had left behind, it represented whatever was left of the OLD MAN, the ballcap with the Sox logo, so he says you don't have any right to burn it, then OLDEST glares at him, OLDEST exhales through his nostrils because an anger stirs inside OLDEST which will soon need to escape, but not at first, so OLDEST commands quietly, but sternly, hand it over, then I say no, I'm not handing it over, it's my hat, and I turn and walk away from the kitchen into the living room and OLDEST lunges for me with his good arm, his strong arm, his one arm which is stronger than what strength most people have combined in both their arms, OLDEST goes after me and as he does I step sideways and avoid him and I bolt off running through the front door and over the stone walkway and onto the dirt road, I set out in a full sprint and OLDEST chases after me and finally he catches me before the street, and I'm on the ground and his good arm has taken hold of the hat, I'm pinned below OLDEST and the hat is out of my reach, and then the anger floods inside of me, a hatred, so I can't think clearly but something inside of me has to break out so it causes me to bite OLDEST, I bite OLDEST as hard as I can and he drops the hat and rolls off of me, writhing, screaming, he lets go of my hat so I snatch it up and I run for my life down into the street and a car is driving and it honks at me

but I'm running, I don't look back, I run and I run and I turn into town and head down to the ferry, to the docks, and I don't have any money or any way of going across but I'll make the boat, I'll find a passage, that's what I'm telling myself, I can hear the faint ping of buoy bells out in the harbor convinced I'll stow away on the boat and head across the sound into Falmouth and I'll begin anew, I'll wend my way to New York City, I'll become an artist, I'll leave OLDEST behind and I'll write letters to MA and OLDER and they will understand everything when I explain it to them, my eyes prayerful and focused on the boat, the sight of families on their way up the gang plank with their suitcases and suntans, children are laughing and some of them have made it to the railings up top, they're carefree and happy up there and they don't pay any notice to me, down here, so why can't it be me, I'll make it onto the boat and I'll be one of them because why can't I be one of them, why can't I be happy, why not, and the wind outside blows like a menace against the walls, it rushes through the open windows and a sheet of torn up paper on the dusty floor drifts across the faded planks of hardwood, the wind is picking up, the shack is drafty, so he turns and moves to one of the windows in the living room, in his workspace, and he shuts the bottom rail closed against the sill, and he looks outside to the trees blowing in the wind, the rustling leaves, and the bright green of the leaves has been darkened, as if the sunlight has been drained out of the chloroplasts, the trees are full of the darkness from the sky, everything is dark outside and blowing, the leaves don't flutter or sparkle like in a breeze, whole trees are swaying, pushed about, and the stones are laid out on the black bedsheet behind him, the idea is in his head, he has a faith something will emerge, he's found something in the cloud, in the feeling he had earlier, in that moment looking up from the hill towards the sky, and it's coming together, he has a kind of faith in, but he wonders at the same time what does it matter, what does any of it matter, and this feeling like granite is inside of him, a tightness pulls across his neck into his chest, he is rigid, compressed, so after he shuts the window closed he walks back into the kitchen, surveying things, and the pot of coffee is empty, he had drank the coffee, finished it, so now he needs to decide, because the clock on the microwave reads half past eleven and he needs to decide what to do next, if he'll stand in the kitchen, if he'll start feeling sorry for himself, if the mourning will overcome his

ability to work, if the afternoon will be spent ruminating in the past, if he'll see MA on the chair in her bedroom, a look of terror on her face as he tries to feed her a spoonful of macaroni and cheese, and he brings the spoon up to her lips and her eyes pinch and MA snarls who in the hell are you, who in the goddamn hell do you think you are, I don't know you, get your goddamn hands off of me, you're poisoning me, because he knows a storm is coming, a hurricane builds off the coast and its rotating walls of clouds are pointed towards the island so he can stand in the kitchen with his empty mug of coffee, the ceramic mug that matches three others exactly like it in the cabinet, he could spend the rest of the afternoon weighed down with feelings and memories and defeated questions like why things hadn't gone his way, why did so many other people have it better off than he did, why did MA have to die, and OLDER, and OLDEST, the OLD MAN, if only the OLD MAN hadn't have gotten himself killed, why had things gone the way they did, he could spend his afternoon in the company of such questions, full of pity, defeated, questions which have no answers, questions which are useless to voice, caught between worlds, or he can clear his mind before he plugs in the power drill to the wall socket in the workspace and gently pushes the bit into each of the stones, deep enough to plug the hole with a small hook, then goes about inserting hooks into the stones, he can have another cup of coffee and reset himself so his work is in front of him, or he can fumble through questions, pitiful, it can go one of two ways, so he makes a decision, I'll walk into town for a cup at the Coffee Shop and clear my head on the walk, he says it to himself, I have to finish this piece before the storm hits, he says the words clearly to himself in his own voice but somehow the words hadn't come from inside of him, the place inside of him which listened to the words, which responded to the words, the words came from somewhere else, the voice is familiar and so is the sensation of words forming, in his mouth and from his throat, but the words come from somewhere else, from a different place than where I am, the place I am in, the place I am, because people are more like places than things, because a person is more like a village than an object, we accumulate experiences, we exchange bits and pieces of the world around us and build up structures, and if fate has it a fire might break out, or a flood, and some of the buildings may be lost, so we retain what is and what isn't, what is absent, our memory, perhaps this is what we retain most, even in the present moment,

the place I am, taking note of the words and the thoughts about the words, there's a place underneath everything else, where the words have come from, so there are two places, an overlay, one is the place where he is, and the other is a place where the words come from, an other place, and he realizes he often confuses these two places for one place, but a clear distinction needs to be made, because the other place, where the words come from, it dominates the place he is in, it overshadows the distance between the two places and confuses him into recognizing one place instead of two, it overshadows the present moment, the place that listens to the words, the place which is empty, it is silent, it is shining and alive and I knows it's not a place only for me, it's not my place, it's a place for everything, somehow, it's a place unchanging, it's vaster than the other place but somehow it's overshadowed, maybe because it never changes, it never leaves, so now the feeling like granite melts away, it fades and in its wake comes an affirmation, like my life was her life, was his life, was their lives, my brothers, my father, my mother, my nephew, so whatever I have it isn't mine in the way I tend to understand, in a way like it belongs to me, as if it were mine to do with as I wanted, independent, mine to lose or gain from, it wasn't like that, it isn't like that, because the life inside you, and the life outside you, here, as you work, it was theirs, it belonged to them, belongs to them, as their lives belonged to me in some way, their lives were mine and mine was theirs and whatever I do with my life somehow is important because of them, because they are gone, though in a way they aren't really gone, they are here, they're here with me, and I'll finish the piece because it will be them finishing the piece, it will be for them, the cloud with the white tops and the purple belly, it's their piece, everything is theirs, and the front door shuts closed and he's on the dirt road pointed towards the street into town. SHE TOLD ME SHE KNEW I WAS TROUBLE. His footsteps beat against the sidewalk and the street is empty, the street is dark and empty, the island is quieter even than an offseason week day, like it's January, there ought to be a few snowflakes in the air because of how quiet it is, a glacial sky of nighttime winter crystalline and sparkling up above and snowflakes in the air and a sense of departure, of repose, but that isn't how it is, he passes by a house on his left with a full garden and an empty driveway and a flag blowing from off the garage, the flag is fitted into a bracket next to the garage door and the flag has a

logo printed on it, a white gull set against an orange sun, with a backdrop of royal blue, and the gull and the sun and the flag are blowing horizontally but he can't hear any birds, there's no pigeons on the wires running along the road, there's no sparrows in any of the lawns, the crows are long gone, the island is silence, silent and foreboding and he continues down the street, he walks east for a couple of blocks and then north towards town and the first store on Main Street, the convenience store with the souvenirs and the bubble gum, he turns at the window of the store and the lights are off because the store is closed, he slows down and notices the flowerbox outside the store, underneath the window, the flowerbox has a handmade sign hung across the front of it, a loop of twine and two nails with one on each end of the flowerbox, and the sign reads PLEASE DON'T TOUCH-THE BUTTERFLIES NEED THESE, so he walks past the marigolds and the tulips past more shops, Island Music and Rainy Days and The Island Creamery and each of the shops is empty, a few even have boards of plywood up against the glass so you can't make out the displays in the windows, the clothes or the boardgames, the menus, the placards you can buy to hang in your kitchen back on the mainland, only a few cars are parked in between the white lines on the south end of Main Street and nobody else is out on the sidewalk, he's alone with a silence and a space within the silence which confuses him, because it feels like January, a dissonance, it feels dark and cold and empty, and he can't hear his gym shoes on the sidewalk, or his breath, and then he's seated inside of a waiting room, the wallpaper is sterile and the chairs match the wallpaper and a woman on a phone behind a check-in desk is talking in a muted and professional tone, but I can't hear her, I can't hear anything, the vents overhead, the papers in the manilla folders, MA has been sequestered back behind the main door with its digital entry scanner, she's in an evaluation room, she's sitting on a doctor's table, on top of that sterile paper they pull off and throw away after each patient, she's with a doctor, a specialist, and I had been awake since early in the morning because we had to leave the island and head into Boston for an appointment, it had been months and months of waiting, scheduling, but we had bought tickets and a car pass on the first ferry out and we had driven up from the Cape to the city and MA was in a room with a specialist being examined, subject to tests, a battery of exams, and before the tests they had brought her to a machine for imaging, they had settled her into a machine to scan

her brain, to measure neuron activity, blood flow, and I was waiting for the doctor, I was waiting for a report, I was nervous and uncomfortable because MA was declining, rapidly, her mind was darkening, as if it were blotted out, consumed by something, something chaotic and awful and MA was having trouble finding the right words for simple objects like a telephone or a pencil or a ring of keys, or a banana, her famous banana bread recipe, she struggled to communicate to me what she needed from the grocery store, that was the moment I couldn't deny the progression, or regression, she wanted to bake her banana bread but somehow she couldn't find the words, she grasped for them but came up empty handed and I knew then it was necessary to make an appointment with a specialist because whatever it was she had MA was only getting worse, and we came to learn it was a rare form of dementia, hyperaggressive, that was the word the specialist found, he had no trouble describing it to me, to us, I was scared and upset because she was declining quickly, I could see changes from week to week, month to month, so I waited for a doctor to confirm my suspicions, after the tests and the imaging, and I waited for confirmation of my deepest fear, my fear of losing her, my fear of having already lost part of her, and a fear resides in the silence as he walks down Main Street and the views open up at the intersection with Union Street and the Steamship Authority building is down near the water and the waves are running in towards the island, the wind is blowing, the silence is broken, acorns pile in the gutters of the street and his eyes search out towards the docks, the sky is opaque, singular, boiling with blacks and angry blues, the day is darkened so the silver acorns are conspicuous to his eyes as he glances up from the street out towards the water, the acorns glisten, and then it's the smell he notices, the clean smell off the breeze, sterile almost, the decay of seaweed has been blown out from the typical smell of the ocean, the sting of diesel fuel, the rot of wood, the bones of fish, although the masts of the Shenandoah pierce up from the water and the pier extends out into the water the smell of the harbor is somehow unfamiliar to him, it's strange, as if it's been sanitized, winds blown in from far away places, so he turns away from the waters and looks down the street further to the storefront of the Coffee Shop and none of the lights are on in the shop windows and nobody sits outside on the patio chairs because the chairs and the tables have been stored away, the patio is empty, so he walks up to the window and stares inside at the

empty café, Theresa is nowhere to be found, no steam hisses from off the espresso machine, the glass case is vacant, it doesn't house any pastries or muffins or bagels, he presses his nose up to the glass and scans the inside and looks and looks until he turns around at the sound of a car, a squad car, and the car belongs to Sgt. Charles Hanover, well renowned in town, a civil servant, a man who dedicated himself with longstanding service to the public, long past the conventional retirement age, but a widower, and a man who loathed golfing and gardening, someone who could only be a cop, who only wanted to be a cop, whose friends called him Chuck growing up through boyhood sagas and the nickname 'Chuck' suited him well despite his mother always calling him 'Charles' so that's what everyone knew him as, how the community knew him, that's how I knew him, as Officer Chuck, and I say 'Afternoon' as the door opens and Officer Chuck steps out then a gruff voice responds, never one for niceties, asking what the hell was I doing outdoors, didn't you hear about the hurricane, his voice is gruff and offended and I chuckle to myself though my smile is hidden and my eyes are serious under a heavy brow watching Officer Chuck approach, efficient and up from the street over the curb to the sidewalk, Officer Chuck removes his sunglasses and adjusts his waist, his disposition is sharp and concerned so I flatten my features because Officer Chuck means business, son to a State Trooper out of the Cape barracks who had been groomed for the title of Sergeant since birth, pride of the family, I am rigid and stolid when I tell him yes, I had heard about the hurricane, but the wrinkled brow of the police officer furrows at me and he isn't interested in any kind of discussion so Officer Chuck interrupts me abruptly and orders me to jump in the car, I'll take you home, you can't be outside now, there's a storm surge that could get dangerous, very dangerous, hell, everyone along the coast has been evacuated, didn't you watch the television, so if you want I can take you to Grace Church, folks are there pitching together to ride it out, haven't you heard, and I can't hold back a furtive smile, a hidden smile, as I follow the motion of Officer Chuck back to his squad car, so I open the passenger door, and the two of us men are in the car, and I begin to explain how I wanted a cup of coffee, so I walked into town, and Officer Chuck asks what's wrong with your coffee machine, Officer Chuck's fingers work the keys into the ignition and the engine kicks and we're headed down Main Street back towards the intersection with Union, where you can make out the Steamship

Authority and the water, but before we reach the intersection he glances over at one of the shop windows and notices another sign hung on a string that reads *STARS ARE OPENINGS IN THE NIGHT WHERE OUR LOVED ONES SHINE DOWN FROM TO LET US KNOW THEY ARE WATCHING*, he notices the sign in the display then turns his eyes forward as Officer Chuck slows down at the intersection and winces towards the horizons and affirms it looks like hell out there, look how dark it is, it's gonna be the worst storm we've ever seen, and that's why we've spent the last few days busy with preparations, we're gonna be prepared, we've stocked the basement of Grace Church arranged with cots and blankets and food because we've evacuated everyone who might be impacted by the storm surge, the sea walls might not hold up, in case of flooding, hell, you'll probably need a skiff if you want to pass through five corners after tonight, but we'll be prepared, it's gonna be hell for the businesses, I'll tell you what, economically it's gonna be devastating, but we're not gonna lose anybody senselessly, especially not you, and Officer Chuck cuts himself off at his last comment, he notices how Officer Chuck mutes himself, drawing inward, Officer Chuck regrets saying it the way it came out, how Officer Chuck said it, because of what it might imply, how it might come off, since Officer Chuck knows he's only six months ago buried a brother, and before that he'd buried a mother, and he's already lost another brother and a father, it's been nothing but death in the Hayes family, and Officer Chuck had considered his mother to be a most lovely woman, a teacher at the school, she had taught Officer Chuck's son and his two daughters, MA had taught the kids how to read and write, so Officer Chuck bites the inside of his cheek between his teeth and knows some kind of a statement needs to be made, Chuck will say something about his mother, MA, so Chuck clears his throat, and in a voice which has shifted, isn't as gruff, a voice which reveals an unmistakable tenderness, how are you holding up, and I turn my view away from Officer Chuck, I face the windshield and I remember Officer Chuck at her funeral, how Officer Chuck admired MA, Officer Chuck was fond of her, he had lost his own wife and knew something about mourning, how life could slip into a kind of dream where you never quite woke up, how one day it could seem unreal, and impossible, so even though it was unexpected I knew Officer Chuck was asking from a place where he knew, where he understood, where he cared, then I focus down at the fingers of my hands, my hands are folded in my lap and the squad car is loping down the street

and the silence is back, so I sit inside of the silence for a moment and I realize I'm not holding up, I'm consumed by sadness, longing, I'm lonely and I've been trapped in the sadness and the loneliness, the losses have piled up one by one and I haven't become accustomed to it, I haven't become inured to the heartbreak, it was quite the opposite, each loss had been amplified by the previous, each was harder, lonelier, sadder, I miss OLDEST, I miss MA, I miss OLDER, and even though I don't miss the OLD MAN there's something about losing him which hurts me the most, it makes me more upset than any of the others, and the sadness inside of the silence has been there with me, it isn't new, it hasn't just arrived here on the drive back to the shack, as the dirt road approaches, so I take a deep breath and with it the silence is broken and I turn my view out the passenger window and assure Chuck I'm alright, I'm doing alright, even though I wish I could tell him the truth, I wish I could tell somebody, but I've slid out of touch with people, with myself, I'm orphaned on an island of loneliness and the mourning has made it more like a dream than like being awake, stuck in one world, unable to transition to the next, asleep, I'm caught between worlds, two places, I'm overwhelmed, I'm trapped, and I don't see any way out of it other than my work, because the work holds me together, it anchors me with a sense of purpose, but I'm afraid one day the sense of purpose won't be there any longer, I won't be excited by it, I won't be inspired, the illusion will drop, and if such a day of reckoning dawns upon me then I won't have anything, what I'll be reduced to, then, who knows, and OLDER asks me if he can have a look at it, he had been standing behind me as I worked the charcoal against a page in the sketchbook on my lap, I had been drawing dunes, kildeers, cormorants, a scene at Felix Neck, I had gone on an excursion with the Boy Scouts to learn about native plants and wildlife ecology so I had been drawing an impression the excursion had left on me, an impression from the trip to Felix Neck, and OLDER asked to see it, could he have a look, so I handed the sketchbook to him, and OLDER admired my work, he said it was pretty good, that's pretty good, how you did that, with the reeds, and the heron, and the sun off the water, without any color, you would think because charcoal is black you wouldn't be able to make out the sunlight, or the glint off the water, but you managed to do it, you did all of this, this is pretty good, and I listen to OLDER and I can hear his words and somehow these are the most important

words anyone has ever said to me, and I feel fuller than I ever have in my entire life, because MA is at teacher conference night at the school and OLDEST has moved out, he's bought a house with a few of his friends who work in the trades and they are living in it as they fix it up, it's only OLDER and me at home, and OLDER hands the notebook back to me and OLDER affirms I'm talented, he says you have talent, do you know that, did you ever show this to anyone else, and I tell him I haven't, I only started working on it recently, sketching in charcoal, and OLDER suggests I talk to the owner of the Art Supply in town, I should show her, because there are techniques you can learn, you can become even better at the craft, and you should, you have a talent, and I nod at him and I don't say anything because his words are the most important words anyone has ever spoken to me, and I can feel it, his words, I'm more full, as full as I've been, and I can feel how what he's said to me is going to be something I can hold onto in the future, a future is out beyond where I can envision, beyond what I can even imagine, and I'll be a different person and OLDER will be a different person and everything will be different but this moment between us will be there too, the words will, somehow, it will be, and Officer Chuck nods as he turns a firm grip over the steering wheel and Chuck says to me it's hard, it's damn hard, you've been dealt a tough hand, your mother was a good lady, a damn good lady, and your brother, everything, well it's a shame, but you're a young man, so you keep going, and if you ever need anything, well, you let me know, alright, and I turn to tell Officer Chuck I appreciate it, his round face with its grey mustache, I appreciate him saying that about MA, about OLDER, and I'll keep going, as the squad car rolls slowly down the dirt road, the potholes, the sand and the dirt, Officer Chuck slows up and stops at the shack and pulls into the narrow driveway and Officer Chuck lets the engine idle, sitting there, and I make out the figure of OLDEST, I know it's him in the crowd because of his empty shirt sleeve, his bad arm ends at the elbow and a few stubby fingers are attached to it but the sleeve hangs over the end of his arm and it is empty underneath, where his forearm and his hand should be, OLDEST is in a crowd of people at the Ag Fair near the main row of booths and MA and I are walking in past the entrance and OLDEST has a corn dog in his good arm and he's smiling at us, he's noticed us walking in because he's been waiting for us to arrive and he's smiling, OLDEST runs over to us and hands me tickets, OLDEST hands me a roll of blue tickets and

says Isn't it great, what a great day, and the arm wrestling competition starts at half past one so we have an hour or so, and we can eat some food and check out some of the rides, he points to a tilt-a-whirl, a drop slide, OLDEST points to the spinning saucers and says you should line up for the rides before you eat, you don't want to puke all over yourself, and he's my brother, OLDEST is my brother, OLDEST is tough, he's loyal, he's hard working, OLDEST doesn't take anything from anyone, and no matter what people from the neighborhood might gossip about him, no matter if he can be a holy terror, or a yellow jacket, no matter what they've said or might say, OLDEST loves me, my brother loves me, OLDEST is my brother and he loves me and I love him, my brother, then Officer Chuck grunts, you sure you don't want to wait it out over at Grace Church, there's plenty of folks there, you don't have to gut it out alone, it's gonna be rough, and they'll have supplies, the building is sturdy, we're prepared for what's coming, but he assures Chuck it's no problem, he'll be alright, and Chuck warns him the power will likely kick out, so if things are in bad shape for a few days there will be food and water at the Fire Station, they will have blankets and beds, a generator, so once the storm clears I'll come by to check on you, I'll make sure you're alright, you're up here far enough from the shoreline where the surge shouldn't hit you, but I'll check on you once it's over, and he tells Chuck he appreciates it, thank you, and there's a firm handshake between the men and the squad car door opens then closes and he's back on the stones on the walkway up to the front door of the shack, he walks up the door with the paint chipped off of it, the naked grey door, but before he opens the door, as the squad car reverses out of the humble driveway back onto the dirt road, as the engine's chatter disappears, he stops, before he enters the shack, he looks over at the garage, the handle on the garage slider, the manual lift, and if it comes down to it then it wouldn't be a terrible place to hide out, a kind of bunker, to weather the storm in, because now the sky has shifted, the tint of charcoal has darkened, he notices layers of darkness, the lavenders and faint bands of smoke have conceded to ballooning runs of fierce black, he follows the valleys of shadow, layers of baleful sky, a band of blackened blue and another of gunmetal, he looks up from the clearing of where the shack is into the sky and it is a feeling of night, the comfort of the sun has completely disappeared, extinguished, the sky is compacted so low to the earth it seems

ridiculous now for the sun to be out there, this afternoon like an evening, like a day which never pulled up its pants and walked out of the bedroom, a day of shadow, of weight, a day without a sun above the clouds, as dread and woe and pain groan in the clouds, the atmospheres have accumulated themselves together into one massive wall, spinning about a quiet center, and a horrible pent up energy is revealed in the sky which is preparing to reign down, to fall over the island, to drown it, down to hoary Neptune n'er to return, so he finishes his appraisal of the heavens with his eyes pointed heavenwards to then open the naked door and walk into the kitchen and tinker with the coffee maker, because he still needs another cup of coffee, he'll need coffee, because it's a rush now, he'll need to hurry, he fills up the carafe with water from his sink and pulls another paper filter from out of the box in the pantry and adds several scoops of grounds into the filter then he flips the button, and once the button is flipped he notices the lace curtain blowing out away from the window, it's much further out from the screen so he pushes it aside and shuts the window, he shuts the window and methodical he moves through the kitchen and the workspace closing the open windows, he shuts the locks on the windows, the latch, which he usually doesn't touch, he never locks up the windows or the doors, but now he shuts the window latches because he is concerned about the storm, he figures if he needed a reason to lock the window latches an approaching hurricane would be as good a reason as any, and he works his way from window to window, locking the windows, because whatever is boiling up in the heavens is coming down onto the island and the shack, it's coming for him, so he walks down the hallway from the workspace to the bathroom, the bedroom, locking the windows, until he finds himself in front of a closed door, MA's room, the door is closed and he can't remember when he last opened the door, he hasn't been inside her room for months and months, so he stands frozen in front of the door, like a dream, it's like a dream, until I opened the door and walked in, and the room is mostly empty, a dresser, a bookshelf, the bed and the bedframe with the brass knobs has been cleared out, MA's clothes, I cleared out what I could after the funeral, but I left the dresser and the bookshelf, so I pulled back the blinds and locked the pair of windows and a smell like mildew permeates the room, a smell of decay, a smell like the room is being lost to the past, it's being claimed by a strange force that works alongside the passing of time, the force which

buries us, pulls skin off bones, erosive, a feeling takes hold like I don't belong in the room because it belongs to something else, this force, it's converting the uselessness of the past into something that will become useful for the future, like a mushroom eating away at the rot of a dead tree stump, but I'm in the room, I'm standing here with the windows locked, my old worn sneakers on top of the floorboards where MA's bed used to be, and the floorboards are stained in a way where you can tell where the bed had been, where it had long rested, because of the sunlight and shadows and all those years MA kept her bed in the same position, its darker, the floorboards under where she had slept in her bed, and I'm standing here, and though I don't feel her presence, I don't sense MA is here with me, in the room, I don't feel a direct connection with her, but I feel like it might happen, I'm open to the possibility, so something like a prayer forms itself inside of me wishing for a connection to MA to happen and I think about MA at the Chappawok Theater, we had gone to see a movie, I had taken her one evening, a distraction, both for her and for me, I had bought the tickets and picked out our seats, we had popcorn, we had sodas in the cupholders attached to the seats, then MA pushed herself up to go to the bathroom and when she came back she went to the wrong seat, it had been five or ten minutes and I turned away from the projection of the movie on the screen because I sensed her, I sensed she was behind me, and MA had found a different seat, she was sitting behind me, a few rows, she must have hesitated, walking back into the theater, she must have forgotten I had bought the tickets and walked in with her as the previews glowed on the screen, she lost track of me, she lost track of why she was at the movies, so I stood up with our sodas and the popcorn and I went to sit down next to her, where she ended up, strayed, and MA smiled, overjoyed, MA was so relieved to see me, she must have forgotten why she was at the movies, or who she came with, MA put her hand on my wrist and squeezed it after I sat down and I felt her hand on my wrist and the pressure of her fingers squeezed against my wrist, I felt MA, I felt what was left of her, what hadn't been destroyed by the sickness in her brain, even though I was losing her, I had lost parts of her already, hidden, lost in a terrible blackness, a blankness, but whatever was left of her she reached out from beyond the wilderness and squeezed my wrist to let me know she wasn't gone, she was still here with me, no matter what, and as I turn to leave I notice three stones on MA's

bookshelf and the stones are incongruous, each is different from the others, a white stone and a pink stone and an orange stone, the white stone is smooth and shaped like a moon, a flattened moon, like a pancake, and the pink stone is jagged and hasn't been worked clean in the pocket of the tides, rattling against other rocks in a tumbled vortex near where the water breaks at the shoreline, no, it has edges and peaks, it isn't a stone you would leave in your pocket for long, and the orange stone is oddly shaped and larger than the other two, it seems to glow, a kind of amber incandescence, though I've noticed the stones before, I remember them, MA must have collected them and decided to keep them in her room for whatever reason, they weren't set out in the lawn with the other stones as part of her designs, or perhaps MA was saving them, maybe she had plans to use the stones for a project she never got around to, either way I consider it and I impart some kind of meaning onto the stones before I pick each of the three stones from off the dusty shelf and I hold onto them, I squeeze the rocks, but then I hear something, the coffee machine beeps so he shoves the three stones into his pocket and walks down the hall to the kitchen, he refills his mug, the clock reads half past twelve and he doesn't wait for the coffee to cool down any, he doesn't have the luxury of complacency to enjoy the scent of the coffee or the warmth of the cup against his palms so he rushes down a gulp and it burns his throat so his face contorts then he carries the mug into the workspace, he sets the mug down on the floor, and he reaches for the drill in the corner of the room and he plugs the orange cord of the drill into the wall socket and what was that, did the lights flicker, he swears the lights flickered on and off, or it was his imagination, but he's almost certain, the lights in the kitchen, and he stops, he swivels around, then swivels back, he takes a deep breath and he begins working through the stones, he clicks the trigger on the drill to test it and the drill fires, it hums, he has a bit securely fit into the end of the drill and the size of the bit is a perfect fit because it allows for barely enough of an opening to wiggle a small hook into the stone after the hole has been drilled, he fits the hook in snugly with the force of his forearms and wrists, so he begins to drill into each of the stones, he has the two dimensional arrangement laid out on the black bedsheet and the three dimensional image is locked in his imagination, even though the image in his mind will never be realized, it will never come to fruition, he drills into the stones

one by one then inserts a small hook into the space he opens with the drill, dusty, then he lays the stones back into position as he works through them, from the top down, one by one, from the whites into the greys and the blues and then the purples, the speckled purples and the jagged white stones and the smooth, flat greys, he figures it must be more than three hundred stones in total, and he picks each one up and remembers the orientation in his mind, he knows how the stone will appear once it is hung up from the wire to an arm, incorporated into the mobile, within the fabric of the system, suspended in mid-air, he works quickly as bits of dust eject from the rocks and fall onto the black bedsheet, like chalk from a chalkboard, there's dust on the bedsheet and he'll shake the bedsheet out once he's done, once he's finished he'll fold up the bedsheet and walk it out into the yard and shake the dust from off of it, that's what he does, with each piece, once it's finished he gathers up the dust from the bedsheet by folding in the corners and carries the bedsheet into the yard and shakes the dust out into the crabgrass and weeds, a tradition of sorts, so the drill hummed and he fit holes into each of the stones, drilling, inserting the hooks, then he took the three stones from MA's bookshelf and drilled holes into them and found a place for the stones in the configuration, each one had a place for itself, the cloud would have been incomplete without them, the piece, it wouldn't have worked, and as he finishes his way towards the bottom of the arrangement he thinks of his cup of coffee against the wall, he would be finished with the drilling and the hooks then he would stand up and retrieve the cup of coffee and finish it off in a single pull, it will have cooled down by then, by now, and the coffee goes into his stomach and the drill is unplugged and retired back to the corner of the room, the stones are prepared, the next step, and the coffee mug is empty, but then he is surprised by a knock on the door, a knock vibrates from on the door but the door is open so it's a knock upon the screen door, the silence of his work and concentration is broken by the knock, it's the wood frame of the screen door that makes the sound against the impact of knuckles, the door is loose and the knock is faint but he hears it and startled turns to the screen and is that a woman in the doorway, the black curly hair of a woman, the delicate nose of a woman, the olive skin of a woman's neck and arms, a woman with a pair of gold hoop earrings, her flowing skirt down to her ankles with an embroidered pattern woven into it, her sandals and her painted

white toenails and a smiling woman is outside his screen door saying hello, hi, I feel silly now, I wanted to come by because I saw a police car down the road and I watched it pull into your driveway, I know a bad storm is headed our way, I wanted to make sure everything was alright, but now I realize I'm only being nosey, I'm intruding, I'm not minding my own business, I'm sorry, this is so silly, and she smiles as she says it, the woman, she's smiling in through the screen and he is listening to her and watching her, and she says I'll go, I'm sorry, I'll go, and his voice breaks open from his throat, it escapes the silence of his workspace and the dust in the air and the shadowless walls and floors, his voice tells her not to go, no, it's fine, it's not nosey, here, come in, I'm just finishing up with this, this, would you like some coffee, I have some coffee, and she asks if he is sure, are you sure, I don't want to intrude, and he tells her it's no intrusion, don't worry about it, come on inside, I'm rude for keeping you standing at the door, and he walks over to the screen door and opens it and the woman is standing there, she's in the doorway, a strange woman is in the doorway and she's beautiful, there are grey strands that fall with the black strands of her hair, she's older than him, but she's beautiful, her eyes are like twin crystals and radiate with blues and hazels, a glowing corona, and her smile is genuine and her teeth sparkle and her voice is soft, like flower petals, her voice is not a gruff coastal voice, no part of New England originates in her voice, nothing of rocky coasts or white pine, there's no bitterness, no package stores or fights down the corner, she's never explained how her father took a heart attack or how her brother caught a bid because of a judge, her voice is sweet but it's not too sweet, it's genuine, her lips come together and he's imprinted by his initial impressions of her, impressed on him, watching her red lips part then come together, and he introduces himself, he says who he is, he says nice to meet you, and she says her name is Marie and her hand comes out to meet his, Marie introduces herself and he asks her to come in, come on in, I have some coffee on in the kitchen, I'd love to have some company for a cup of coffee, actually I walked to the Coffee Shop earlier and it was closed up, and nobody was in town except for Officer Chuck, and that's why Marie had seen the squad car, it was Officer Chuck's patrol vehicle, and Marie follows him into the kitchen and thanks him because she would very much enjoy a cup of coffee, she'd like the company and a cup of coffee, she's only

been on the island a few days, she arrived in time for the storm, because she's staying down the road, she's a few houses down, at her brother's, Phil, and Phil had to leave for a couple of weeks so Marie volunteered to house sit, and to feed the dog, and since Marie had been meaning to take a vacation it was her excuse to come out to the island for a couple of weeks, but with her luck, can you believe my luck, now there's a hurricane she's brought with her, and as she's explaining her bad luck to him he notices a red image of the Blessed Mother, the Madonna, on her, Marie, with the infant Christ child in the icon's arms, and the tattoo has been finished in a red ink, a deep red ink, a kind of maroon, it's on her clavicle, on Marie's right side, and the other tattoo is of a snake, on her left forearm, it's a simple outline and the snake is configured like a kind of thunderbolt and you can only tell it's a snake from a forked tongue extending out from its anvil shaped head and by the point of its tail, and angled lines segment the body, lines and dots, as if they were etched onto a stone tablet or a cave wall, lines and dots across the shape of the figure like bands, in sporadic intervals, something like an aboriginal quality to the figure, pagan, and she's explaining her bad luck to him as he's noticing her tattoos, and Marie is in front of him in the kitchen, she's at the counter, standing over her mug, because the meager table in the kitchen only has one chair, the other chair broke, it fell out from under him one night and instead of trying to fix it he took the axe to it and dismembered it to feed it to the fireplace, so Marie is standing in front of him, hunched over, both hands on her cup of coffee, neither of them is at the small, circular table because Marie would have nowhere to sit, he has nothing to offer her, so she's leaning up to the counter and she blows on her cup of coffee, then he notices the cleavage of her breasts, Marie's shirt is tight and cut low and only covers the top portion of her torso, and it doesn't take much to imagine Marie with her hips swaying, wearing violet lipstick and a sweet perfume, her eyes closed on a dancefloor managing the hourglass slopes of her hips and her backside, she dances, rhythmic, and he imagines her winding herself around him and he realizes she's something to be had, something to be desired, he would lose himself in Marie, because the flesh isn't all evil, is it, isn't it something mystic and beautiful losing yourself in the flesh of another person, it's a kind of wonder to become lost in the flesh, so why feel bad about the sweat of bodies wound together in a dance

of desire, this desire like an untied knot inside of him so why hide under a monk's robes, why be ashamed, why make a fuss when the difference between the flesh and the spirit is a fiction, because everything alive is life and everything dead is death, for him what he can tell apart is what is alive and what is dead, only life and death, all the spirit is flesh and all the flesh is spirit because it's alive, so he feels no shame as he imagines Marie briefly in the moment then comes out of his imagination, his eyes lock with hers and he hopes Marie could understand why he might be imagining her that way, dancing, silver bracelets and a sweet perfume and the cleavage of her breasts, the slopes of her figure, if Marie could know the secrets of his thoughts, if he let Marie into his mind, why would she be angry, wouldn't she be flattered, so Marie explains her bad luck to him and he shakes his head and says to Marie her bad luck might be his good luck, and then he notices a shyness, not a word treads between them, at the kitchen counter, this man and this woman, two people, strangers, until the rain starts, raindrops begin to fall outside, and she looks up from her coffee and says see, I've brought some more of my bad luck with me, it's raining now, and I say it is raining, yes, a steady rain patters outside, but it's not your fault, aren't lots of other factors at play, you shouldn't take sole credit for the rain, and I ask her where is she from, because I know Marie's brother, her brother's name is Phil, and best I can tell Phil spends his time at garage sales and estate sales, he's a junker, and woodworking is his hobby, restoring old furniture, I've spoken to him on a few occasions but he's a quiet man, older than me, he's quiet and polite and I'll see him occasionally walk by the shack with his collie on the leash, I'll wave and say hello and that's about all that exists between us, Phil is a solitary man, he figures, and so is he, so that's all it is, then Marie explains how Phil and her grew up on the continent, down south, they're from Savannah, Georgia, she grew up in the south, blossoming, which explains the charm, the triangular shape to her face, she's charming to look at and listen to, explaining her childhood in the south, raised among Spanish moss and debutante balls, a regular Southern belle, how her brother moved out to the island about ten years ago, Phil, he had visited the island after a work trip in Boston and fallen in love with the place, so as soon as Phil could Phil moved out to the island, left everything behind, made a spontaneous decision and Phil could afford to do something

spontaneous like that because Phil didn't have a wife or children and followed an intuition to move out to the island, he had money and flexibility, Marie explained how Phil had been an introvert, how she was an extrovert, they were very different people to come from the same parents, but Marie had promised Phil for years and years how she would visit him, and now here she was, Marie was dog sitting the collie, Sadie, Sadie was the name of the collie and Marie was watching Phil's place, since Phil was due to come back home from a vacation then spend the rest of the summer with Marie at his house, down the dirt road, but it was her luck that brought the hurricane, she finally had come to visit her brother Phil but she had carried along a hurricane with her, and I said no, it wasn't bad luck, it was good luck for Phil, and for the dog, it's fortunate somebody was here to look after things, and now they'd had a chance to meet, too, and I took a sip from my cup of coffee and asked what she did, what did she do, and she finished blowing steam off the top of her mug and she told me she was in finance, she was an accountant by trade, she liked numbers, she loved math, and she had worked in finance for various banks and corporations, but she was tired of that, Marie was taking a leave from work and she was reconsidering things, Marie might not go back to work, who knows, and I said it's good to do that, take an inventory of things, life is too short, and Marie told me it was true, life is too short, life was short and it was only so much time to do the things you wanted to do so you might as well do the things you loved with the little time you had, and even though Marie loved math, she didn't enjoy being cinched behind a desk, she didn't enjoy the pantsuits and the formalities, the corporate politics, I nodded and told her I could only imagine, and Marie asked me what I did, how did you end up here, I've been doing all the talking, what about you, and so I hesitate, I hesitate to say anything, I don't know where to begin, I haven't introduced myself to anyone in so long, I hadn't assembled a story about myself which I could use to convey myself to other people, so I could do it in a way that made sense, so it wasn't embarrassing, so it wasn't uncomfortable, so it didn't appear too harsh, or too upsetting, because my story had been teeming with death, funerals, sadness, loneliness, I had been dreaming, in a dream, and when you told stories about yourself to other people, to people you meet, you recited it to them in a world which was awake, a world intent on doing something, a world where people were going places, they had lives and stories of their own,

stories they believed in, and I had been in a dream, so I held my breath to begin, because I didn't want Marie to know, I didn't want Marie to see into what, so I told her I had moved back home, I had been in New York since I finished school, I had been at an architecture firm, I was doing grunt work for a couple of years and I did some various installations on the side, I worked with a few different kinds of media, with former classmates, with collaborators I had met in the city, it was fun for a while, but it was very DIY, it was punk infused and guerilla and didn't pay the bills, but I had fun, which also meant I didn't take much seriously, I didn't take my job seriously, I didn't take myself seriously, everybody was on their way to Wall Street or Broadway, everyone was so serious in New York, and then I hesitated again, and I didn't know how to proceed with my story without incorporating what happened to MA, because Marie would wonder to herself how I ended up back home, back on the island, where was my family, what was my connection, and the pause went on for longer than Marie could stand, her cleavage and her painted toenails, I was content to wait with Marie, to be with her in the kitchen, her maroon tattoos and her long, curly hair, the way she hunched herself at the kitchen counter, she didn't sidle up to it, she didn't hesitate, it was as if it were a place where she belonged, and we were in a silence together until she asked me well what brought you back, so I told Marie I had moved back when my mother got sick, MA, my mother was diagnosed with an aggressive form of dementia and I decided with my brother, OLDER, that I would return home to help, we couldn't afford a live-in nurse, so I volunteered to come home to help take care of MA, back to the shack as I affectionately called it, I had come back to the place I was born to take care of my sick mother because she couldn't care for herself, she was sick, and she had passed away a little over a year ago, so then Marie interrupts me, she makes a noise like a bruise from deep inside of her chest and it's hurt, guttural, she's hurt on account of how I must be hurt, to lose a mother in a slow progression, lost in the wilderness, to an eclipse of darkness, Marie is sorry to hear about my mother, about MA, Marie says I'm so sorry you had to go through that, may God rest her soul, and I am quick to assure Marie it was alright, thank you, but it was alright, because MA had dementia, an aggressive form of dementia, it was more of a relief when MA died, a blessing, because even though her body was present, her mind, well, it was, well, her

mind, it, so here I was, I was at the house, I was trying to figure out what to do next, whatever that meant, whatever it meant to be a person aware of who they were, being a person who had stories about themselves, who made plans, and another pause invited us in, inward, because I was thinking about how I had watched MA slip away, if her soul escaped before he body shut down, I had watched the lights go out on MA but I sensed she was in there somewhere, and I hoped and believed sometimes that whatever was alive inside of me had taken a part of her, of MA, whatever remaining pieces of her which were left, hiding inside the shell of what she had become, and held onto them, then I looked up at Marie and pulled myself out of my circular ideas and spoke up, I had to say something, the silence between us, the pause widening, so I told her I wanted to continue to pursue art, and that's my excuse for the house being in such disorder, that's what all the mess is about, in the living room, the workspace, it's a kind of sculpture, it's a new media I'd been exploring, because I didn't know what to do next, so in a way I had been in a similar position as Marie, trying to figure things out, and Marie tilts her head and says isn't it funny that there's no such thing as being a grownup, at least not in the way you think of grownups when you are a kid, nobody grows up, do they, nobody really becomes an adult, because nobody has anything figured out, nobody has any answers, we all pretend like we do, but we don't, and I nod in agreement because I appreciate the way she explains it, I agree with her, that's very true, and the rain is pattering down on the roof of the house and it's blowing sideways against the windows, the rain is coming down and I imagine Marie's painted toenails in the dirt road, the puddles in the potholes, her toes and the mud and the white nail polish, she's running barefoot down the dirt road and she's naked, her breasts sway and her legs are toned, there are wrinkles around her hips and her buttocks isn't as firm as it once had been but she's stunning, her curves, she's out on the dirt road with her eyes closed galloping through the rain, the ground is saturated and boiling up from under her footprints, puddles, I can hear each splash, and I feel an excitement because I am meeting a woman, someone new, and I haven't met anyone new like this for years, someone who made me feel excited, who made me feel open to falling in love, though it was never a problem for me to fall in love because I fell in love with so many women, I fell in love with women all the time, but I could never remain in love, I could never move from being in love to

loving, from feeling to action, but I was young, I was a kid, I was in a city full of energy and selfish pursuit so it was nothing to fall in love with dozens of women and to fall out of love with them shortly after, I wasn't afraid of being alone, I wasn't for permanent companionship, I had no plans established to build a life with someone, to love them, I had no sense of the vast sea, of the need for a life raft, I had figured I could always swim back close to shore, so here is Marie, she's walked up to the front door of the shack as if from another world and she's brought with her an infinitude of possibilities, the way you meet someone for the first time and there's an attraction and part of the attraction is a due to the vast possibilities, of how they might be different, of how they might caress you under the sheets in the dark, of how they might fix an omelet, of how they might look at themselves bashful in a mirror, how they might not be like everybody else, how she might be someone to grow old with, to anchor myself to, because I've been lonely and pent up in this shack and if I'm not careful I'll end up isolated and withdrawn for good, me and my regrets, because as you go on, as years pass, as you grow up and pretend to know what's going on and what you're doing, the truth is the possibilities dwindle and collapse and what's left at the end is death, you work your way down to a single point, there's no more life to live, no more decisions to make, no more adventures, no more love, so it's been on my mind, I've been afraid of fixed points, of running out of options, life turning to death, but here she is, Marie, somebody to love, gliding across my imagination, Marie, then she asks me what about my father, and I tell her the OLD MAN died when I was only a boy, six years old, going on seven, and Marie explains her folks are both gone, too, they passed away within a couple years of each other, so we're both orphans, aren't we, and there must be something about my face or the way I reposition myself at the counter which reveals to her I don't want to talk any more about the OLD MAN of MA because Marie changes the subject, instead she asks about my brother, the one who I'd mentioned earlier, OLDER, and I tell her he's on the continent, he's got his own life to take care of, because I can't bear to tell her everything, I can't explain my entire story to her, I can't weave in each of their aspects, to tell her about OLDER, or OLDEST, OLDER's son, I can't finish my story because it would be too much pain for an introduction so I prevaricate and change the subject myself, I ask her about her stay on the island, what's she

done, and Marie tells me she's gone out on several walks, she's been down to the beach, and into town, but it's been quiet, except for this morning, and she tells me about the crows she heard this morning, how the crows woke her up before sunrise, it seemed the island was full of crows and the birds had surrounded her brother's house and were squawking to each other in frightening pitches of screech and when she woke up to the haw haw haw of crows she became anxious because she imbued an ominous quality to the birds' calls, as if they were portends of doom, which I know is dramatic but honestly I was startled, I tried to go back to sleep but I couldn't, it was like a Hitchcock film, and he grins and tells her believe it or not he rose out of bed to the sound of crows as well, he too was anxious, he sensed a tinge of doom in the birds' calls, and he didn't know what to make of it until he remembered an article about a storm in the Gazette, he was startled by the calls, he felt it, he understood it to be something looming, so he went down to the docks and spoke to an old fisherman pal of his and confirmed the storm had turned into a hurricane and now the hurricane was heading towards the island, so the birds must have been congregating together before heading out, or bunkering down, wherever they were, because the birds were gone, they had gathered and left, he hadn't heard them since the early morning, the crows had left, the wind howled outside and the rain poured down but the silence returned, the lace curtain rested on the screen of the kitchen window because the latch was turned into a locked position, so they looked into each other's eyes and then looked away quickly, the look between them, in the silence, so Marie wondered out loud how bad do you think it is going to be, and he said he didn't know, he hadn't been on the island for a hurricane before, he had never been anywhere near a hurricane before, so it was hard for him to guess, he'd seen his fair share of squalls but nothing like a hurricane, and he had spoken with another old fishermen pal who rode out a hurricane drinking dark rum and making a big party of it ten years ago, so who knows, you could make a party of anything with the right mindset, the storm would probably blow through over the course of a day, through the night, Officer Chuck had mentioned shelters and supplies, it seemed like folks were prepared, but who would know, who could know, until it happened, if it was severe enough to spook the crows then it probably would be more than a casual summer storm, but it was too late to do anything now, they'd have to face whatever it was, whatever it would be, the rain had

started and the ferries must be cancelled on account of the wind and the chop, so they were stranded, orphans, weren't we, on the island, and she looks at him with her molten eyes and he notices her looking up at him from her cup of coffee and she jokes that it must be an advantage to know plenty of old fishermen, and he agrees with Marie, he says he's acquainted himself with every old fisherman on the island, they provide the news and the gossip, so the two of them laugh, they laugh and the laughter echoes in the silence, resonating, vibrant, like the echoes of a hidden sea cove, echoing until Marie makes a suggestion, well if we have to ride the hurricane out, what if we ride it out together, it would be nice to have some company, and God forbid something happens, maybe it was meant to be, maybe it was a good thing I'm so nosey, so unlucky, and in that moment it is clear to him she was happy to have met him, happy to be here, a grin on her teeth with her eyes fixed on him, she said her brother Phil had amassed a nice collection of wine back at the house, unfortunately there was no dark rum but her brother had plenty of merlots and cabernets, so they could make a party of it, like his fisherman friend, and he nodded at Marie and said it had to be the best way to approach the matter, it was settled, but there was only one thing, I need to finish this piece, I told myself I would complete it before the storm hit, so I'll need a few more hours, who knows, it could be my last one, it could be worth millions, but after I finish up I'll walk over to you, down the road, he said he would come to find Marie, I'll come to your brother's house and knock on the door, and we'll make a party of it, and she asks him if the rain and the wind will have picked up too much by then, would it be dangerous to be outside traipsing between houses down the dirt road, and he imagines her painted toenails in puddles of rain, puddles in the potholes, her toes and the mud and the white nail polish, she's running barefoot down the dirt road and she's naked, her breasts sway and her legs, she's stunning, with her eyelids lightly pressed together galloping through the rain, so I insist to her it will be fine, it's only a short distance, I can manage, with some boots and a flashlight you can manage anything, and the storm surge won't reach us, we're up far enough away from the coastline, I'll be alright, so give me a couple of hours and I'll be there, and Marie nods and tells me she'll be looking forward to my arrival, she'll round up some flashlights and blankets, some food and water, and wine, plenty of wine, so they'll be more than

prepared, and it was perfect, they agreed it was perfect and Marie said I'll leave you to it then, and I'll be excited to see your work once it's finished, so he watched Marie straighten herself up from her full mug of coffee at the counter in the kitchen and they walked back through the workspace towards the door, but you'll need an umbrella, hold on, and he offers her an umbrella from the closet, take this, then Marie thanks him but declines, she said it would be fun to run back to her brother's house in the rain, she didn't mind to let her hair get wet, she was going to take a shower anyways so why not let the rain fall down on her and feel the raindrops and their coolness, anyways she said it would be bad luck if she opened an umbrella inside, and she had brought enough bad luck already, so he held open the screen door for her as she stepped forward, his arm was holding the door above her shoulder and she was underneath him and it was a warmth, in the moment, with her next to him, his arm behind her, and he could feel the warmth even though they hadn't touched, she skirted past him gently like a ghost then she thanked him and headed down the steps, down the stone path, Marie turned and waved as the rain fell on her bare skin and she kept on down the dirt road, out of sight, disappearing like a mirage with the rain rolling down in sheets washing the image of her from his eyes, like the only thing left of her was her teeth marks on his skin, as the rain soaked the grass, as the puddles filled in the dirt road, as the sky darkened, she disappeared and left him behind the screen, looking out beyond an empty stoop, dreaming, until the sound of the rain like crumpled balls of wrapping paper woke him up to the fact of how dark the sky had become, he felt overwhelmed by the sea of darkness above him, because it was hardly half past one, with the rain rolling down in sheets, because of the wind, like waves, and it reminded me of what OLDER had said, how he had seen Ellie coming like a wave, a wave he couldn't escape, OLDER had said that to me after she left him, she washed right over me, OLDER told me after Ellie had stopped the medication, she refused to comply, she complained it made her sleepy, it made her feel like she wasn't herself, when the waters rushed over OLDER, when Ellie veered off track, blown off course, OLDER had called me on the telephone told me Ellie had left, it was only Buddy and OLDER now, the two of them, because Ellie and OLDER had separated, OLDER called it a separation, and there was something about Ellie from the moment he met her, something dangerous, unstable, but there was also something

exciting about the danger, something of an adventure, in the unpredictability, and she had bore OLDER a son, from the instability Buddy appeared, good had come from bad, that's the way life was, OLDER said Ellie came over him like a wave and he was aware of the dangers but sometimes you had to take a risk, you had to risk drowning, and I felt the same way about Marie, as she moved out of sight, his nose pressed up against the screen door, as the branches sway, as the rain slides and rushes against the earth in vast rhythmic assaults, tidal surges of wind and motion, shadows, and OLDEST is in a bag, his body is zipped up in a black bag and the bag is on a mortician's table, the bag had been shipped from the hospital to the funeral home, an ambulance had carted his body from the street to the hospital but there was no heartbeat inside the chest or breath left inside the lungs so the hospital called MA at the house and arrangements were made, the voice on the other end of the line told MA the funeral home would take care of everything, we took down the name and the number and the voice told MA to relay the information to the funeral home director, it would be taken care of, the body would be taken care of, that's what MA explained when she called me, I was in school, and OLDER was on the island, so OLDER was at the house with MA when they called me, and MA decided she would use the same funeral home as she did for the OLD MAN, so the body must have come over via ferry, with the tourists, with the popcorn and the cold beers and the luggage cases, it must have come over zipped up and tucked away inside of a van or a truck, in the hull of the ship, hidden from sight, until the mortician took care of the embalming, they cleaned OLDEST up, they shaved him and gave him a haircut, OLDEST didn't own a suit so we sent over a Sox jersey and a pair of fishing waders, I was home by then, I came home as quick as I could, and I was on the boat wondering if OLDEST's body might be in the hull, cargo, if we were together, our last ride together on the ferry, so we sent over the waders and the Sox jersey because the three of us had decided if OLDEST had a choice it's what he would have wanted, even though OLDEST hated the Sox, he dearly loved them, and he loved fishing, even though he hated how it was the OLD MAN who had been the one to teach him to fish, OLDEST was like that, OLDEST hated the OLD MAN but had really loved him, while I claimed an ambivalence towards the OLD MAN, and I explained to people I didn't remember the OLD MAN, but I carried a sadness with me, because I wanted a father, I always wanted a father when I was

growing up, I wanted a father to teach me how to fish even though OLDEST taught me everything he had been taught by the OLD MAN, where the honey holes were in the harbors and the coastal ponds, and that's the way it was, I was like that, OLDEST was like his way and I was like mine, and the detective called MA a few weeks later and he told MA they hadn't uncovered any leads, they hadn't been able to track anyone down, the case had run cold, looking out through the screen door, as the sky and the sea have merged, the water above and the water surrounding, the sky wedded to the sea, and a terror stirs in his heart because the sky had never been a threat, the sky above had never been as menacing as the sea surrounding, the atmospheres of clouds and sunsets had been otherworldly, a place for ideas, angels, a distance uncomprehensible, heaven was as far away as your heart was close, but the sea was tangible, we knew how many miles it was across the ocean to the other side, we knew if you ventured beyond the Atlantic it was an Arctic and an Indian and a Pacific waiting for you, patient, we had given the oceans names and demarcated lines on globes, arbitrary and at our convenience, whoever won the war, whoever paid the bill, but there were not oceans, there was an ocean, an infinite ocean of depth and volume and force and power, channels of water from the North Sea that would migrate and disperse and tomorrow fill up the place of whatever might wash up on our shores today, the sea was a sickeningly real thing, nothing about it was idealistic or theoretical, it was brutal and unwavering, limitless, but somehow for days and weeks at a time, because of the tranquility of the sky, that wild running expanse of water, the desert surrounding us, confined by it, overmatched by it, nonetheless it would go unnoticed, ubiquitous, and so in its ubiquity old Neptune would become forgettable, forgotten, like the island's ferry whistles, its influence over us and its power would be rendered negligible as we grew accustomed to warm summer days, but not now, now the sea had swallowed up the heavens and the sun and the clouds, now the ground was a sodden wasteland, lashed by a downpour and by gales of wind, now the sea had climbed up out from the depths and rolled on top of us, on top of him, its fury was everywhere unmarshalled, and so our pleasant reveries ended, the trees would be stripped of their bark, homes would be uncapped of their roofs, any sense of balance or peace abandoned us as a roaring gale gurgled out from the miasma, it was only a horrible violence left to account for in front of his nose, beyond

the screen door, beyond escape. I ASKED HER TO DANCE, HOW MUCH TROUBLE COULD YOU GET INTO ON A DANCE FLOOR? Spiders busy themselves deeper into the corners of the living room and the bedroom and the kitchen, webs cluster like fruiting mushrooms within the shack at lines where the walls meet, and some of the arachnids burrow beneath the floor boards, where the wood has warped, and some creep back in from the yard or the gutters to check their traps for flies or grasshoppers or June bugs, and some are poisonous, others are large and innocuous, but he's never thought to bother them so why would he now, from the periphery of his vision, he makes out a spider darting back to its lair, he watches the insect, embarrassed because the shack is full of spiders, the workspace and the kitchen are littered with webs, fly carcasses, so Marie must have noticed, he's embarrassed by the shack and the cracks in the walls and the dust and the yellow spots on the ceiling, the chipped paint, the old curtains, though it was too late for anything to be done, so he would leave be the spiders and return to his work, since he's opened up a new cardboard box, the box with braided wire, and now he has a pair of plyers which he uses to crimp on the metal clamps, to secure the wires to the hooks, to connect the rock to the string of wire so the rock can be hung from one of the arms of the mobile, considering he usually works in reverse, he's working backwards because in truth it would be easier to set the arms of the mobile first, to work from the top-down, but for whatever reason he works from the bottom-up, element over structure, so he begins to cut different lengths of wire for different rocks, he knows the white cloud tops will have shorter wires and the purple underbellies will have longer wires, but he isn't precise or exacting with the process, his numbers in the notebook indicate he'll be able to balance the arms more or less, he has a feel for the number of stones which he'll fix onto each arm of the mobile, so intuition will dictate how he begins, which rocks he selects first, it will be a feeling from the inside he won't be able to put words to, it will emerge from a place he can't explain yet somehow he trusts and understands, and he'll work his way forward progressing towards an end point from these seminal intuitions, so the ends of the wire are crimped onto the hooks he has drilled into the rocks, and the work unfolds in front of him with his hands dexterous and free, and the images and the scenes are transported by as if pushed on a conveyor belt, because it feels like a dream, a world slowly disappearing, ushered out

with white lilies, then a thought occurs, outside of where the work is happening, outside of the freedom and the intuition, and he regrets not telling Marie about OLDEST, about OLDER, I might have expressed to Marie how OLDER's boy used to stop and wait patiently on an October walking trail with the trees overhead hopeful and giddy for good luck for a leaf to float down from the canopy so the little boy could break from his station to chase the leaf down to clutch in his hands to holler in excitement to catch the magic of the seasons in handfuls of fortune, how after the little boy died OLDER had been driving in his car alone with the radio clicked off and suddenly through the open driver's window a serried oak leaf blew in from the outside and onto his lap, how the leaf served as a terrible reminder to OLDER of his son, of the accident, of the darkness of death, how OLDER drove along with an aching heart and an interminable pit in his stomach over the fact his boy had gone into a darkness utterly alone, how OLDER had to accept his boy had gone on to face the awful darkness, how every parent must hide away the fact their children will die and face the inky shroud of death without daddy's hand on their shoulder, condemned, and it was a leaf through a car window, a leaf is what killed OLDER, what put the gun to his temple, OLDER was able to withstand shadows and smudges, but the leaf, I could have offered something more, the letter I found, the last of the cemetery plots, I should have told Marie about OLDER and the little boy, my nephew, I could have explained, she might have understood me better, why I cooped myself in a dilapidated old shack with cracks in the walls and the floorboards peeling up and yellow stains in the ceiling, why the shack creaks in the wind, because it's an old house creaking like how you might change positions in a chair, he can hear the creaking house as he works, as the wind and the rain lash against the walls and the roof of the shack, the rain has intensified, it's a field of static, buzzing and incoherent and eerie, as if humming from inside of him, it's so near, the rain, chaotic and deprived of rhythm or meaning, deprived of time or substance, so lacking any sense of depth, inside of him, a part of him, forces beyond logic or reason, a force unconcerned, then the room is dark, suddenly he notices the room is dark, the workspace, despite a light in the kitchen which melts partway into the workspace and touches a few of the cardboard boxes and the black bedsheet, but the light is faint, and the windows are dark, rain streaks down the panes as he notices how he is squinting at the

crimper, at the steel cutter, so he finds the headlamp and turns it on, it's been a day robbed of both dawn and dusk, a day that never quite crawled its way out from the gulf of night, and the headlamp is on and he's listening to the house creak and I can't help it, my thoughts cannot fight the gravity of Marie, what were the odds, of all the women on the island, of all the days, she walked up to my door, Marie pressed her feet on the stones up the walkway and climbed the steps onto the porch and peered through the screen, she found me, and the door is shut closed and she's floated back to her brother's house and I promised I would find her so we could ride out the storm together, the two of us, she found me, forlorn and lost in a dream of sadness and death marked by gravestones and faded memories, forgotten and forlorn, she found me, and somehow I had been the one to bring her out of her brother's house, though wasn't there something fragile about Marie, something fragile that had been broken, which hadn't quite been put back together, wasn't Marie, didn't I sense it, a knock at the door, she needed me as much as I needed her, she needs me, I can be something for her as much as she can be something for me, and now it's an excitement, a feeling is alive inside of me which hasn't been present for, for, we would drink red wine and whisper coyly and in the fury of the wind and rain, in the midst of the forest being split apart outside, as the boats in the harbor broke free from their moorings, we would exchange glances with eyelashes and then I would touch her hand with mine and then our lips would meet, we would make love and fall into each other, handfuls, in spite of the chaos and confusion engulfing us, an act of love amidst the madness, and it's been years since I've been with a woman, not since I returned to the island, I haven't known the touch of a woman in so long and she'll bring me back outside of myself, outside from the cold, she'll create a place for me to fall into and lose myself, she'll grant me an escape, safe passage through the maelstrom, and I might be wrong, maybe I'm wrong and her intentions are different than what she presented in the kitchen, but didn't her intentions seem clear enough, her invitation was bold, it wasn't liable to misinterpretation, for her to invite me over, for her to glance at me in the manner she did, her brokenness, fragility, I felt a loneliness in her heart, I convince myself of it, of an emptiness within her, of a man who treated her poorly, of a life of dissatisfaction, she's desperate, herself, for a place to escape to, a place to fall into and let go, and the work has

stopped and my mind is wandering and I am the image of Marie naked in the rain, the mud, the puddles breaking apart from her footsteps, her painted toenails, her buttocks and breasts, so I need to return to my work, I need to finish the piece, and it's important now to infuse this new feeling onto the arrangement of the stones which will signify the cloud, a kind of optimism, though I suppose it had been here all along, redemption, I felt it from before, from this morning when I first looked up with the trees of the forest along each side of the road setting a kind of foreground against the background of the sky, where two worlds collided, heaven and earth, heaven and hell, and I felt the hope in the hopelessness, when I saw the cloud break free from the cloudless grey sky, it broke free for a moment and established itself in a kind of defiance, a bridge between worlds, and now, with Marie, so much has been clarified, the piece resonates, it resonates within me, within my life, it has harmonized, the work outside of me and the feelings inside of me, the world around me and the secrets of my thoughts, so I'll uncoil the wire, here's the cutter, and the crimper, and he continues to segment various lengths of wire, fixing the wire onto the hooks which have been inserted into the stones, he's listening to the creaking groans of the shack, from the door frames, the window frames, he listens to the house bend and shift as the wind continues to rage outside, ominous, oppressive, it howls and it flushes in growls of waves, from above, crosswise, seeping in from underneath him, from every conceivable direction sheets of rain and blasts of wind volley onto the shack but he continues on with the wire and with the hooks, fixing a crimp, ensuring the look and the feel of the finish is clean, rain like the tumble of rocks in the tides, time's mysterious process of smoothened stones, a destructive force yet at the same time a creative one, the sound of the tides and the shore and the stones swirled up in the break of a wave, but then a silence emerges as he fits one end of a wire through a hook, he crimps it with a metal clamp, then he cuts the wire from the roll, the spiders have retreated in from the outdoors back to their webs in the corners of the room where the walls meet, the webs are full of spiders, the motion of his hands are rocks and wires and he holds one of the grey stones up from the wire and twists it, he rotates it and then he decides which angle of the stone should face forward, even though there won't be a forward position, because the mobile will be in motion, the image of the piece he retains in his mind will

never come to fruition, but he identifies an orientation which feels pleasing and he sets the rock down with the others, he's maintained a vague outline of the structure of the cloud laid out on the black bedsheet and now each rock has a strand of wire running from it, so the bedsheet appears as a mess, a tangled mess of stone and wire which needs to be undone, and the wind is pounding against the shack, the wind is relentless now, it's one continuous push of wind, the waves and swells of pressure have given way to one continuous blast of force, and suddenly, under the pressure of everything, with this mess in front of me, I hate the OLD MAN, I'm thinking about the OLD MAN and how his departure was the first event in a cascade of events which led to OLDEST and OLDER's son and MA and then OLDER, each loss is linked together and somehow the OLD MAN dying was the catalyst, it was the OLD MAN behind the sadness and the loneliness, so I close my eyes then open them to look down at the mess of wires and rocks and the OLD MAN is dead, he's been dead for over twenty years, but right now I hate him for dying, I hate him for having left us, I hate him for what he was and what he wasn't and the feeling inside of me has been repressed but now for whatever reason the subconscious energy I had spent in repressing my anger is no longer available, the energy I had mustered together to pretend like I didn't hate this godforsaken island, nearly three years, stuck here, confined in the wake of disaster, haunted by ghosts, haunted by curses, because OLDEST occasionally mentioned a feud the OLD MAN had with the DiCarolino family, the construction company, the silver trucks with the logo on the plastered on the side doors, but OLDER said it was only the OLD MAN had failed the test for the Fire Department three times, you could only take the exam three times, and that's why the OLD MAN wasn't accepted into the Fire Department, and MA never said anything about it, she didn't talk about the OLD MAN's work, she only said he worked hard, did his best, he didn't have the brains we had, so that's why school was so important, whether it was a curse or a ghost, whatever it was, it haunted me, three years, isled by oceans, isled by the past, isled by forces outside of my control, and the wind drones on and on, a drone from the underworld, a siren, it's a a high pitched siren with something terrible and mechanical about it, I'm reminded of Bosch's hellscapes filled with demented figures, collages of animal fang and knife blade and sulfur, the noise is a shrill kind of wailing, the gnashing of teeth, anguish, the high pitched drone pierces through the thin

walls of the shack and I think I hear a section of siding rip off from the house, I hated the OLD MAN and I hated the island, orphaned here, an orphan, I can't focus but I need, Marie, Marie is waiting for me down the road, she's an orphan too, so I'm not alone, I have to finish, to finish the piece, the cloud, maybe a cloud about to burst open with rain and thunder and wreckage, maybe a cloud about to dissipate in the light of the sun, the cloud full of anger, the cloud full of hope, it must be completed, I must finish hanging the wires on the metal arms of the mobile, so I set the fixture in place at the ceiling and begin the next step, I need my notebook open to check on the math, the digital scale and the pencil and the weight and distance from the fulcrum, the equation is simple, F1D1=F2D2, I memorized it from high school introductory physics, I wasn't an engineer by trade but you had to process like an engineer to do this kind of work, you had to have an intuition for how the weights would line up, how the primary arms of the mobile would have to sit and connect to one another, but I have to finish, I have to put an end to it, I need to be done, with the piece, with whatever it was which had broken open in me, levies and dams and the water rushing, so I draw in a deep breath and for whatever reason an image of the tree from across the road, the tree with seven or eight shoots from out of its base, the tree with multiple trunks, it was distinguished than the other white oaks around it, a coppice, the strange tree I had noticed even as a little boy, the tree fills my mind, a kind of witches' tree, I noticed it when Officer Chuck drove up to the shack with me in the passenger seat, I had noticed it with Marie running out of sight with my umbrella, I glanced at it this morning walking back from the docks, something about the tree, and the cloud, connected, and now my eyes are fixed on the clock glowing blue, 4:30PM, glowing from the microwave, and as the '0' changes to a '1', as the six dashes collapse into two, as the light dims, the power cuts out, so the clock goes blank, the melted light is shut off in the kitchen now, the microwave is blank, the telephone won't work, the refrigerator will slowly warm, the food will spoil, the cold cuts, the mustards and the ketchups, the macaroni salad, the slices of cheese, it wasn't much in the refrigerator so it's not much to worry about, I'm not concerned about the refrigerator, or the telephone, and if I need the radio it can run on batteries, so I position the headlamp on my head and click the headlamp on to combat the blanket of night which has covered the workspace then

I take the wire cutter and the crimps and I have one of the mobile's arms in my hand, and I begin to attach the rocks, the lengths of wire running from the hook I had inserted into the rocks, I began to cut and crimp and attach the wires to the arm, I hold the arrangement in my head, exacting, and the silence is back, the horrible screeching madness like industrial holocaust is outside, the hatred of the wind, it disappears, a thousand gulls on the shoreline of your final breath, and I work within the silence, in concentration, I'm focused on the stones and the wires, I'm filled by the stones and the wires and the image in three dimensions suspended from the ceilings of my imagination, so I don't have any space available for the OLD MAN or islands of desperation, no room for the Sox or the curse of the Bambino, for cold bedsheets or regret, I ensure the crimp is neat, none of the wire is sheared or cut unevenly, I want the finish of each wire and each clamp to be clean, because potential buyers will expect an exacting finish when it comes to the appearance of the wire, because if the wires and the clamps are uneven or done poorly they detract from the actual work, so the craftsmanship ensures the invitation, contained in the stones and the space between the stones, the arrangement of the piece, the motion of each element, the feeling of what is contained in the work, so if the wires or crimps or fixtures are done poorly, hastily, if the ends are frayed or the crimps are misaligned, if the arms don't balance properly, it will distract the viewer from what I'm attempting, in my own meager way, to provide them, so though I work from wire to wire efficiently I also take care with each step, exacting, I navigate a path through the arrangement in my head, I know which stone hangs in which position, and which arm of the mobile to attach the wire to, I don't know how to explain the knowledge and I could never explicitly state what the knowledge is because it is almost a secret but I have access to the secret because the knowledge is somehow inside me, accessible, as I plot my work in sections, one arm at a time, one stone at a time, fixing a stone to an arm with a pinch of the crimper, and soon I'll hang the center point, the central fulcrum as I like to call it, the wire from which the entire work will hang, I'll hook the main wire onto the fixture I have rigged up in the ceiling, a metal hanger I drilled up into the top of the ceiling, there's a two by four and a metal hanger drilled into the wood and from the hanger I can begin to work top-down, I've been working from the bottom-up but it's nearly the

moment to transition from bottom-up to top-down, don't ask why, but it's nearly the moment, because you can't transition too early or too late, you can't rush it, but you can't miss it either, so he stands up, he has been working on one knee, knelt down on the black bedsheet, adjusting the wires, making the cuts, measuring, checking the finish of each crimp, ensuring the ends of the wires aren't splayed out, numbers added then multiplied in his notebook, and now it's time to reorient himself, so he's back on his two feet and he stretches by pulling one hand behind his back, one hand interlocked with the other, pulling back, he repeats the stretch and interlocks his fingers and straightens out his right arm with his left hand, so finished with his stretch he exhales then he glances out from the workspace into the kitchen, a blank clock on the microwave, nothing is left of electricity, nothing left of the sun, and outside the grating and metallic drone continues, resumes, he's exited the silence and the quiet of his work and his concentration, his distraction, his compulsion, he's returned to the storm, exiled, and the day has faded into night, the ocean above has swallowed the world below, the ocean surrounding has begun its march up the coastline, over the sand crests and the colonies of dune grasses and the shore birds' nests, over the spiles in the harbor, the boat launches, it would march and climb and run up over the lands and we are all but drowned, because what can hold fast the sea, its intentions to join with the sky, an invasion, so now whatever boats hadn't been properly moored would be lost, Paul Needham's *The Rip* or his cousin Frank Needham's *The Rig*, whatever windows hadn't been shuttered would be broken, and OLDEST pulled up into the driveway with his El Camino, with dried blood on his good hand, on his fist, and his shirt was ripped and I had never seen MA so upset, the sight had put her over the edge, the fights, the drinking, OLDEST would have to move out, MA was crying and explaining to OLDEST why he couldn't stay, MA had two other boys to raise, she had work, she had a mortgage to pay, she had meals to fix, and OLDEST only brought his trouble, so OLDEST would have to find his own place to call home, and OLDEST could fight and drink and come and go as he pleased, but it would be his responsibility, it would be his life, if OLDEST wanted to behave like an adult then he would have to take on the burdens of adulthood, full on, and MA waivers on her decision the next day, MA regrets it and she is crying but she has no other choice, and after it is decided OLDEST will move out to face his destiny I

sort of linger around MA with little to provide, I watched OLDEST pack up his clothes and the OLD MAN's tools and toss the gear into the bed of the El Camino, I watched OLDEST silently pack himself out of our home, the shack, OLDEST had strapped his mattress to the roof, he didn't ask for help, he didn't utter a word, his quiet acceptance, I watched OLDEST from the living room while I was pretending to finish homework and I can remember when OLDEST shut the door and didn't walk back inside, but MA regretted it, MA blamed herself for OLDEST, for what happened to him, MA said she should have never thrown him out, it was a mistake, I was in the midst of a terrible mistake doing simple addition and subtraction in a workbook a teacher assigned to me and I had no appreciation for the gravity of the moment, here was a tragedy in the making, so a terror lurks outside the shack and he thinks to himself he must be crazy to be here, with the advent of a hurricane, of all the hours and minutes, of all the days in the year, of all the seasons on the island, the blossoms of May, the windowpanes of February with their icy frosts creeping along stitch by stitch, a sweet taste of salt in the air, if it were any other time of year, any other combination of minutes and hours, any other season, like darling October, majestic with her pink dusks, her chilly autumn mornings, her golden afternoons of rockabye shadow thanks to her low hung westering sun, OLDER had decided on Greylock, my brother had been reading Melville and was inspired to summit the white mountain, the white whale of the Berkshires, so I was to be his company, a kind of Hawthorne, OLDER called me to tell me he had decided to hike up Greylock one Friday morning in October and I agreed because I hadn't been out of New York for a couple of years, I had transformed into an urban creature of midnights and cigarette filters, of fire escape wrought iron, so OLDER called me up, OLDER said he wanted to go hiking, he had some time away from his son, Buddy, his boy was spending the weekend with Ellie and it would be good for OLDER to clear his head, so OLDER invited me to come along, it would be good for me too, so we met at the Visitors Center, I pulled up in a borrowed car, a friend's car, and OLDER pulled up in his pickup truck, we hugged and compared supplies, I hadn't brought much, OLDER had a backpack full of peanuts and water, it would be enough to share between the two of us as we bent our will along the ridgelines, past the berries of mountain ash, past the half-naked maples, there were dead leaves blowing across the asphalt as OLDER told me it would take seven hours at

least, a sixteen mile round trip, OLDER folded up a map after he finished explaining the route because he had been careful to conceive the route, OLDER mapped out routes and planned ahead when his spirit was full to go after something, like the summit of a mountain, so after the summit we went, up the trail, a trail to heaven, to the sky, and I remembered hearing about mountains as a child, mountains were considered sacred places by indigenous cultures, mountains were places where your ancestors dwelt, up in the sky, and as we pressed on, as OLDER and I reached the sub alpine forest, crossing the invisible line where deciduous trees can no longer grow, we were overpowered by the scent of conifer and evergreen, of sap and needle, because it had rained the previous day so the forest had been steeped in a cloudburst of water, soaking, overnight, and breathing in I could only smile, I couldn't believe how strong it was, the smell, and OLDER smiled and commented too, how beautiful the smell was, a Christmas tea, so my mind was on ancestors, the dead, on OLDEST and the OLD MAN, because if the two of them were somehow up here, along the western summit trail, amongst the chipmunks and the moss covered granite, it would be something, it would be a beautiful place to spend eternity, but as I followed OLDER's backpack along, along the trails, it occurred to me, we carry the dead with us, the living, the dead aren't waiting for us at the observation tower, because the dead tow themselves to us, up the trail, along the bosky switchbacks, and our passage up the mountain is a kind of ceremony to ignite their presence, the presence of those we've lost, the arduous climb, the sweat along your back and under your forearms, sore leg muscles, a passage which helps clarify their presence, it removes the distractions of the every day, the mundane, the noise which surrounds us, so we can hear them better, the dead, so we can feel them, the dead, and following OLDER, I could feel OLDEST, I could feel the OLD MAN, the parts of them I loved, parts I hated, but here they were, with me, because the living carry the dead, we preserve them like a bundle of tinder preserves an ember, like the dead kilns of tinder fungus, *fomes fomentarius*, the hoofed polypore, the iceman's fungus, those black cones we saw attached to birches and beeches, OLDER pointed them out to me, and I realized the dead are carried with us and through us, the living, and are understood wholly and perfectly, because of their stasis, because they are dead, because there is nothing left to explain, no voice to speak, rendered in silence and asleep for good, our living imaginations

at liberty to design and designate them however we see fit, how could the dead not belong to us, fixed, they forfeit themselves over to us, humbly, humbled by death, by the final hour, the final humility of our life, our death, so we the living act as their protectors, in a way, we protect those gone before far more than they protect us, and I was considering such thoughts while walking behind my brother, behind OLDER, a man who was alive, living, right in front of me, a man whom I hardly knew, because between the living we are strangers, alone, islanders, dead trunks of black ash sunk into the marsh, so I was up in the mountains with my own brother and I realized he would never know me, and I would never know him, so long as there would be words and confusion, so long as there would be perspectives and opinions to cloud the truth, so long as we muddled ourselves with concepts, so we walked together and hardly spoke until we reached the top of hoary Greylock to dream out across the horizons running away in each direction with their plains of rock and forest and expanse of sky, we sat in silence on a bench gazing out, together, but alone, and we continued on our way and finished the route and at the trail head back at the Visitors Center we removed our socks and shoes and grunted into a decision regarding dinner and lodgings, so we ate a hearty meal at a country kitchen and OLDER spoke mostly about his son and how being a father had changed OLDER for the better, OLDER saw things differently, OLDER had a life which had split from our childhood, from the shack on the island, from our common past and he had been consumed by his new duties, new roles, like I had been consumed by the city, by friends, by shows and late nights and self-indulgence, a hedonism of sorts, OLDER had been living for someone else while I had been living for myself, but we ate a big meal and drank coffee and rested our weary legs under the wooden picnic table before we agreed it was too late to drive home so it would be a motel down the road, we split a room together and when we paid at the desk the owner told us we ought to make use of the fire pit behind the building, the owner more or less ordered us to make a fire, behind the motel in the clearing out in front of a wall of trees where the property line separated one deed, one parcel, from another, so we obliged the owner and gathered branches and kindling and ignited a fire to sit near it, OLDER had found a pair of chairs at the pool deck which was closed for the season but OLDER hopped the meager fence and returned with the chairs so we sat in plastic chairs next to the fire, it was a

spectral October, with the crickets trilling and the fire crackling, we sat outside the motel and watched the flames dance, quiet, our chairs pulled up so we could feel the warmth of the flames as the night cooled, we looked up that night from the fire in awe like we had both forgotten about the stars and suddenly remembered, we looked into a fire only to see the stars, only in remembrance, to remember to tilt our heads back up at the stars we forgot, a communion of blue flickering stars in the clear mantle of night as the flames danced so we didn't say much, remembering, our forgotten stars, and in the morning after the fire had been left to smolder with its bed of coals we left each other, so October's comforts are nowhere to be felt, like those fifteen minutes of rapture as the yellow and red molten trees along the western bank of Sengekontacket cast their downy shadows o'er to the east across the pond, shadows climbing up the tree line on the opposite shore, shadows of trees on trees, anthocyanins and carotenoids, shadows and sunlight, grammar school backyards waiting at the trunk for the next leaf to fall to catch it and clasp it and claim good luck because you've learned the word 'auspices' means *looking at birds,* October and her colors, her tannins and petrichor, her life and death, her corn mazes, her golden dusks which linger and settle and wait patient and contented for a moon to find her footing, October with her tumorous gords and pumpkins carved and stationed to festoon on front porches, October and her final smudge of pale moonlight obscured by a band of cirrus, haze like a whale oil lantern out in the fog, a pale vanilla hue to the light with a silkscreen print of pitch pine branches framing a vision before goodnight, as October's harvest moon runs up above the tree line, any other season, any other time, none of it could be felt, nothing indicated or pointed towards or away from the storm, but now it was as if the storm was all that ever was, as if nothing else had been possible, no other point in time existed, past or future, there was only the storm, there had only been the storm, only the bleak determination of the wind and the pelting rain and the blackness, what surrounded me was all had ever been, so he was trapped, alone, and with the light of the headlamp pointed forward towards the kitchen, the howls of mechanical wolves outside, circling, and Marie is waiting, alone, confronted by the same noise, surrounded by the same violence, so he regrets being alone in the kitchen with the light of the headlamp pointed towards the blank screen of the microwave, he regrets not leaving with Marie,

floating down the dirt road, their feet wet from the puddles, muddy, splashing underneath them, mud covering the bottom of his linen pants, their hands linked together, the cool rain on their skin, he regrets being alone, he regrets it and soon he blinks to realize it had been my choice, I had chosen to be alone, I had chosen to wallow in loneliness, a choice I made, a choice I continued to make, it wasn't like the old man in town with his Velcro shoes tightened and black, the straps pulled across the leather tongue, oversized shoes with his feet in a forward struggle against the concrete, against the weight of his shoes, he's wearing a coat and khaki pants, it is late July and his coat is a windbreaker, zipped up, a cane in his hand, and he's alone, hunched over, his cane out in front of him, his strange old eyes like a halibut, his entire life behind him, an old man in the rockingchair of his days with foggy eyes, he's outlived everyone he's ever known but it wasn't his choice, he hadn't chosen to be a survivor, the old man is with his shoes and his cane while a toddler across the street tugs at his mother's arm pointing at the old man saying mommy, mommy, look at that strange boy, look mommy at the strange boy wearing a coat, it hadn't been a choice for the old man, but it was my choice, my choosing, I had been surrounded by an Atlantic for my whole life so it was natural to exile myself to the chains of the city, snared, barred into studio apartments, alone, locked up and surrounded by the swarm, unable to connect, an inability to reach out from myself and make contact with another, a lighthouse keeper along some rocky and inaccessible coast, in the maw of the ocean, the fathomless deep, waiting for resupply, there were so many like me, there would be so many more, alone, by choice, afraid to choose otherwise, to be vulnerable, there would be entire generations stoned on nightmare pornography, in full color, there would be a world where little boys no longer concern themselves with the stories of their fathers or grandfathers or great-grandfathers, who possess no sense of lineage, of purpose, who feel no weight from the past, the passed on, who would feel nothing unless a television screen dictated it to them, yet as I stare down at my hands illuminated by my head lamp, my own two hands, I further realize whatever this is, it doesn't last long, and there are more choices to be made, and I'm alive, this is life, so I will find Marie, I will jettison out into the hellscape and brave whatever it may bring, I will reach out to her, I will reach outside of myself, Marie, whoever she is, whoever I am, and the

percussion of the rain cuts through the screeching wind, the rain is falling on top of the shack, unending vibrations, a trance of tempo, it was the sound of the rain outside with the windows shut, in her bedroom, as she delicately rolled an oversized t-shirt down her body, her silhouette disappearing with the loose fabric, a light from the hallway penetrating into the dark room, her hair at her shoulders, she ties it up into a bun and pushes open the handle of the door and the rain is washing over the roof and the deck, the wind in the trees is blowing through the wet leaves, her silhouette in the darkness lingers and he stares at the place where she has left, as if she were still there, a strange and beautiful woman he's never actually known, this apparition, this lifetime between forever and right now, she's right in front of him but who has she ever been, who is she, who is he, and his imagination returns back into the present moment, he walks into the workspace and finds the handheld flashlight and he props it up on one of the cardboard boxes because he has to finish, he has to, then he moves to the door, drawn to the door, he checks so the knob on the front door is locked, with the mechanism turned clockwise, secure, he tests the handle of the door and the lock holds so he is satisfied, standing there, and he seizes in a deep breath and because of a faint curiosity he presses his ear to the door, listening, and it sounds like how it might sound to be burned alive at the stake, a dissonant, atonal overture of a horror yet to come, listening, holding his breath, but he is satisfied with the lock so he exhales and then is on to retrieve the ladder, which is leaning against the wall of the workspace, laying alongside the wall, an orange ladder with white and red and brown paint splotches peppered across it thanks to the activity of many years and many jobs, staining and finishing, from fences to bathroom walls, he takes hold of the ladder and glances back at the lock and it lurks out there, only a couple inches away, whatever is protecting him from it, but there is only resolve, he only felt resolve as he pulled the ladder apart and set it into position, a calm resolve in the face of death and destruction, whatever existential seizures which previously threatened to derail his work had subsided, because even if we are to be erased, everything, everybody, with every desire and every thought and every melodrama and every memory eventually asleep for good, fated for disappearance, our life had still been alive, real, it had happened, hadn't it, and more to the point it is real, it is still happening, he is alive, wasn't he, and wasn't Marie,

weren’t they two of the living breathing souls on this earth, constituted of desires and thoughts and melodramas and silly human misgivings, even if their humble lives paled in the face of the eternal, it is here, I’m here, and since his life was the life of MA and OLDER and OLDEST and even the OLD MAN, then it is somehow important, the pettiness, the confusions, the twisted heartaches and uneasy glances, the pride, the warped frustrations, the paranoias, our lonely suffering, somehow the ugliness which made us human and isled us from our fellows served a higher purpose, it carried the dead on and fought against the swell of cold sleepy eternity, so why beg to be an angel, so why curse your own breath, so why not assemble the fixture and continue with the work, so he is resolved to finish, standing on the ladder, with the central wire secure, a special kind of wire, thicker than the others with additional steel braids, he hangs it from the ceiling and now he is attaching the main arm of the mobile, hanging down from the central wire, the primary arm of the mobile, fixed onto the ceiling, he positioned the fulcrum, as he called it, in place, so he reaches for another arm, with rocks strung down from off of it, and then another, another arm, and these had been designated as the two primary branches, not that he had planned it, because it only happened that way, and the main arm would split with two secondary arms, and then each of the secondary arms would have an additional arm suspended from it, so there were five arms in total, or five fingers, he thinks to himself five is a natural configuration, a strong configuration, whether it be a five pointed star or five fingers to a palm, five members of a family, and with the few remaining stones he hasn’t attached to an arm he will use those to improvise, to balance the scales, I’ll add a few to each arm as necessary, because my calculations are never exact, I never quite have the weights lined up, I’m always off by a small amount, a fraction, but so long as I arrange the general positions of the arms in a way so the balance isn’t too far off I’ll be in decent shape to make the final adjustments, because the weight of the final stones I add while improvising will round the equations off, I’ll use the three stones from MA’s bookshelf, a finishing touch, those will be the final three I set onto the piece, the final elements, it was an idea which happened upon me and because it happened it had to be the correct idea, it had been decided somewhere else so it was simple to accept the decision and carry it out, that was more or less how the work went about, the ideas

appear and I act upon them, as a kind of medium, a channel, a current between an unknown place and the place I am able to touch in front of my hands, though I don't want to be precious about it, let's not make it out to be anything more than it is, though I suspect the whole thing is full of wonder, isn't it, and now the silence is back inside of the shack, the handheld flashlight beams from on top of a carboard box and the rocks and the wires cast shadows onto the walls of the workspace, I act as a kind of marionette, bringing life to the lifeless, a channel, a medium, but I don't wish to consider it further or become precious about it because the mere consideration would break the silence, and the silence and the shadows and the flow of the work provokes a kind of melancholy to color my experience, a kind brokenhearted happiness, a kind of knowing like this might be the most beautiful afternoon of my entire life and already it is gone, and the melancholy probably has something to do with Marie, on the periphery of the work is this experience, the potential of it, a release, somebody out there is waiting for me, and it's been so long, I've been so alone, walled in the turret with the eerie cries of gulls, with the lilting of bagpipes off beyond the hills, so now the work has Marie in it, something of Marie, something auspicious, something I couldn't understand earlier in the day looking up at the cloud but it was contained inside the moment, in the stones, in the next arm on the mobile, I slide one clamp down the metal arm, then another, first come the gross adjustments, then come the fine adjustments, once all the arms are fixed, all five of them, they will hang lifeless, broken necked, as the arms are linked, with one primary arm, two secondary arms, and then an additional arm under each of the secondary arms, and slowly I will bring them to life, the crookedness of the arms will align to a perfect balance, I will crimp additional stones onto the arms, I might slide the fulcrum of one arm slightly, I might adjust the clamp with the double braided wire which connects one arm to another, I'll make the adjustments, in search of balance, then once the piece comes to life, once the rocks are suspended in the proper configuration, the configuration resembling the same idea I'd been working from, the dream inside my head, from some other place, however it finds us, I'll fix all the arms with a final crimp, there's a final securing of the wires of each arm and the clamps, it's the concluding step to accomplish before the work is alive, summoning it to life, this lifeless thing, this waxy

container, so his mind wanders, caskets, folded arms, white lilies, an image bubbles up, his friend Sam from college, his roommate, Sam who worked part-time at the funeral parlor, who told stories of exploding organs in the cremation furnace, of deceased bodies belching and farting, how tiny the men's penises shriveled, Sam would describe his clandestine work in the back rooms of the funeral parlor, before a person was formally buttoned up and laid to rest, before another wake, another funeral, another procession of incense, our loved ones, Sam made his living in a place which was hidden away, a world everyday grocery shopping people weren't supposed to encounter, and Sam captured the essence of it, Sam would come back to our apartment with his head firmly set on his shoulders, because Sam understood everybody dies, everything dies, so what is there to be scared of, there's nothing to worry about, it isn't so terrible or impossible, there's nothing precious about it because it happens and then it's over, we're reduced to belching and farting folds of cold skin and tissue, Sam never confessed if he believed in a heaven or a soul but Sam lived in a way which reflected a distinct respect and admiration of life, Sam loved life, he appreciated being alive, the life in others, the life in the world around him, so then he adjusts one of the secondary arms to crimp it in place, fixed, five arms of the mobile, five parts, with rocks and stones dangling at varying heights, and the arms are set in place, he senses the weight is close, the distribution from the different sections, it appears to fit, each balancing point on each arm it tends towards a final resolution, easing its way, and as he continues to work, finding balance, an image flashes inside of him, as he moves onto these finishing touches of one of his pieces, it's a floating leaf, a cherry tree in September, the leaf is yellowed and lifeless, suspended on a spider web twirling under the boughs, a perfect twist of ballet rotating back and forth clockwise to counterclockwise in the wind, suspended by an invisible cord, thanks to a spider, so why be embarrassed, Marie didn't care, she wouldn't judge him for welcoming spiders into the corners of rooms where the walls met, Marie, and he looks up at the shadows cast on the wall of the workspace and the wind is vicious now, he can sense the pain in the trees shaking and swaying outside, lightning scarred trunks hundreds of years old pushed and pulled and bobbing about, strained, tons and tons of carbon floating overhead, massive trunks which would bend and crack and finally dismember to relent under the power of the turbulent drafts,

in wails of collapse the trees would crash to the ground all over the island, he was certain of it, a rafter of turkeys bunkered together would be flushed out from their dugout and cast out into the merciless wind and then where would they flee, what shelter, he could feel the confusion like crooked weathervanes surrounding him, like trees blown out from their roots, like a lost child, a confusion compressing the shack, but here are those three stones from MA's bookshelf, the last three left to arrange, three stones remain, he would hang one on and the whole piece would fall out of balance, but then he would add the next two to restore the level, the remnants, and he listens to hear for the instructions, from the silence, because the white stone is meant to be near the top of the piece, while the jagged rock would sit at the base with its corps of purples and menacing blues, and the stone which seemed to glow belonged in the center of the piece, an ember, at the exact center, because the glowing stone was like a coal in a fire and it would smolder so the light and the energy of the piece would never be extinguished, and he thinks about MA, he sets the rock into position so it centered itself amongst the others and he considers how MA had been like a smoldering coal for their family, for so many years, she kept the house in order and paid the bills and afforded a perfect grace for us find our way as men, raising three boys, this last stone would be for MA, smoldering, for years and years, up until that first Christmas after OLDER's boy had died, after Buddy had passed away, MA wasn't herself that Christmas, OLDER wouldn't come home for the holiday so it was MA and me and I was quiet as she sat at the dinner table, she didn't touch any of the food we had prepared, there was no joy in it for her, losing Buddy had done something to her, something was taken from her, and she was tired, I could tell she was tired, and I realized how much she had done, how much I had taken for granted, for all the kindness and courtesy and love he had taken for granted, it was the fixed point where everything worked itself out around, it finalized the arrangement of the piece, while the low lying blues and purples which formed the underside of the cloud somehow felt heavy, felt wet, it felt like rain, while the whipped tops almost seemed to blow off like spume, a dynamic action played out at each end of the suspended work, a finished work, a balanced work, because as he stepped away the arms of the mobile worked themselves out in a balance, in an even plane, and the rocks hung off the wires and the vision was finished, so now the cloud was about five feet in

height, four feet in width and depth, with hundreds of stones suspended, and as he looked on using the light from the flashlight and the light on his forehead he smiled because it worked, the colors worked and the shapes and finishes of the stones worked, so the cloud wasn't reductive but more so representational, the cloud was implied, it wasn't so much a cloud as much as it was the result of a desperate man with a set of instructions on how to build a cloud made of stone and so before him was the desperate man's attempt, it was more like a map of a cloud's psychic life, its appendages and personalities, he had used the gradients of color and the texture of the rocks to create a feeling of buoyancy and airiness in the cloud, and beyond the impressions of airiness and buoyancy, and heaviness and water, beyond the contrasts which are held together, united, a kind of prayer resonates, a kind of affirmation of life, an openness to the possibility of something beautiful happening, no matter how small, a bridge beyond the isolation, beyond the oceans, beyond the heavens, outside of ourselves, our islands, a hope exists, hope, because without hope what could be said about any of it, and the mobile in front of his eyes is somehow more perfect than the one he has been cherishing in his imagination, with its shadow in solemn rotation morphing shapes in shadows against the wall of the living room, it has replaced a representation inside of him, bottled up for the past seven or eight hours, to become real, to become capable of producing a shadow, a ghost is born, a ghost whispers, so he flips on the flashlight then he walks around the piece, the main hanger is fixed on the hook in the ceiling and he allows himself multiple views around the suspended figure, acknowledging each of the rocks, when he had picked them out from the cardboard boxes, he can see himself setting each rock on the black bedsheet and he can taste the rocks on his tongue, he remembers each one, and out from a cloudless sky emerged a cloud, capable of casting shadows, of obscuring the light but at the same time indicating a light present, a blue heron with its thin neck camouflaged amidst a cluster of reeds along one bank of the estuary, he's inside of the piece and inside of himself and the feelings are present, which is everything, that's the crux of being an artist, to forge something tangible out from the intangible, an artefact, to touch what cannot be touched, so even though he doesn't want to be precious about what he's done he can't help the goosebumps on his arm, a subtle grin of satisfaction, because you've done something, didn't you, you've

done something and now you can share it with somebody and it will become something for them, too, but then a terrible crack escapes from the roof overhead, the shack erupts in a way he has never heard before, as if it's being undone, a cry for help, as if the structure is giving way, so there's MA on the couch watching *The Wizard of Oz,* which was her favorite film, a film which troubled him deeply as a young child, on account of the flying monkeys, the wicked witch, that house spinning up into the tornado, I eventually came around to appreciating the film but at first it was too intense, Dorothy's house yanked up from the ground, spiraling, in a free fall, he could feel the ground falling up towards his feet into his own stomach whenever he watched the film and now the same elevator feeling is in his stomach, foreboding, no matter if the television in the living room is long gone, so many years later, he could feel it, I feel the awful feeling inside of my stomach and now the work is done and there's no time to be precious about it because the hurricane is bearing down on me, I have to act quickly, I have to take my finished work into the garage, I have to protect it, inside the garage is the only place it will be safe, the garage is made of concrete and it will withstand the fury of the hurricane, it won't spin up into the sky, because now it's a terrible fury, I'm scared to walk to the windows and glance outside, at the snaking rivers of rainwater bubbling and foaming, pooling up into lakes in the dirt road and the driveway, rattling tree trunks, the quake of the earth, I didn't want to face the brutality of it, I have been avoiding the physical truth of the storm over the course of the day but I can't hide any longer, so now I have to strain myself to look, and I'll shut off the flashlight and now the headlamp and press my nose against the pane of the window at the front of the house, and outside he can see his worst visions confirmed, a roar of thunder but without the flash of lightning, water and wind, one of the oaks across the road is down, the tree where jays used to descend and ascend, their blues and greys, svelte, nodding confidently like prizefighters, battles over acorns, where MA had seen them one morning and she pointed to whisper 'They're getting ready, ready for a fight,' and branches litter the lawn and the driveway, huge branches, thick, the scene is one of constant motion, pulled apart, chaotic, so how can I manage it, how can I protect the mobile, how can I bend my way up the road to Marie, exposing myself, but it's too late, no, it has to be done, you have to do it, so I'll undo the piece from off the

main hook in the ceiling and carefully I'll settle the arms and the stones down and out on the blanket, folding it up, reducing it from three dimensions back to two dimensions, for so much of its life it has been flat, confined to a plane, so I doubt it will be much of a fuss to collapse the piece back, and I'll add another layer to wrap it in the comforter from my bed, I'll fold it up in careful arms into the black bedsheet and then the comforter and then I'll run it out to the garage, I'll pull the handhold upwards and position my finished work on the floor and then I'll shut the garage door, I'll shut it and I'll go to Marie, I'll go to Marie and I'll wait out the remainder of the hurricane with her, because these winds will push on for hours and hours, lasting through the night, this day without a dawn or a dusk will culminate in a fierce, harrowing night, so I'll find Marie, I'll go to her, and when the storm ends I'll bring her back to the shack and survey the wreckage then I'll open up the latch on the garage and carefully unfold the mobile and I'll locate the central wire to reassemble the piece in front of Marie, so she can see for herself, the cloud, so she can feel whatever it is my work is communicating to her, and maybe if she asks I can explain to her the feelings which went into the creation of it, piecing it together, I can explain the rocks and stones I used and why the colors were important in the different regions of the cloud, why I chose to hang short wires from some of the positions and long wires at others, how each of the stones tasted, we could talk about the piece and I could explain how earlier in the day, before I met her, a cloud from a cloudless sky full of clouds caused me to stop and acknowledge it and by acknowledging it I acknowledged something inside of myself, it caused a sadness inside of me along with a hopefulness, it brought to life my mother and my father and my brothers and my nephew, my family, dead, and I'd tell Marie finally about the four plots in the cemetery, I'd tell her when she approached the shack and knocked on my door how I felt the hopefulness contained inside of the cloud was somehow complete as she stood in front of me, everything I wanted to put into the work had been an attempt to imperfectly manifest something that could only happen between us, because she was everything now, she is everything to me, Marie, so she'll find herself in the cloud, and I'll be there too, and I wanted such a conversation to happen, I wanted it with a desperation so he flipped his headlamp back on and he unhooked the mobile from off the fixture in the ceiling and folded the stones

and the arms and the wires down onto the black bedsheet, he took care not to let any of the wires cross or any regions of material to tangle, then when it had found a natural place to reconcile he raced into the bedroom and pulled off the comforter from his bed and brought it into the workspace where he laid it on the ground next to the black bedsheet, and he folded the bedsheet and the comforter together in a way where everything felt reliable in his arms, the mobile had been deconstructed and packaged so he went into the closet for a raincoat and he zipped a navy raincoat up to his chin, then he changed out of his worn sneakers into a pair of boots and tied the boots tight, without any socks, he gathered himself together and lifted the headlamp up from off the floor and clicked the button but the headlamp would not turn it, the batteries had died on the headlamp, but with no time to waste on finding batteries and sorting through the pantry he let the headlamp fall back to the floor and stuck the flashlight in his pocket, the flashlight worked, it would be enough, then he gathered up the mobile in the bedsheets and the comforter and paused before he unlocked the locked door, listening, the wind like the drone of a highway, like the call of sirens, like torture, so with an intrepid gulp he is ready. I TOOK HER BY THE HAND AND I PROMISED HER SHE WOULDN'T REGRET IT. The door to the shack doesn't open as much as it is blown away from the hinges, the door shoves itself back against the drywall, so with one hand he pulls the main door back towards the frame and with his opposite shoulder he has to lean against the screen door pushing it open to cross the threshold, because the piece is tucked to his body under his other arm, so he feels the storm, crossing the threshold, and in one footstep he is between worlds, the boundary land, so now the gusts are pressing at him from every side, it's not a northerly or a westerly wind, the forces are schizoid and unpredictable and instead of waiting for an opening he blitzes outside into the elements, both doors are slammed shut so now invisible arms grapple at him from a well of souls in a murky darkness so there is a feeling, a dread, a nervousness as he trudges his way down the front steps, he shouldn't be here, in and out of balance, blown one way then another, he is deliberate and paces himself until he finds level ground and runs, now with his hands clutching the bedsheet and comforter to his chest, he runs to the garage, he finds the handhold at the sliding door and works the door open quickly, jolting it upward, he heaves the door up then moves inside, he

shifts his body under the door and then drops the door back down to the concrete, with the blanket and the comforter pressed to his body, the door is shut and the garage is pitch black and his only company is the sound of violence outside, rushing at the structure, the mechanical wolves stalking in their high-pitched screech and the noise is awful so he kneels with the bedsheet and the comforter down on the floor, careful to keep it as neatly packed as he can manage, and then he reaches into his pocket for the flashlight, so the bedsheet and the comforter are on the ground and there are rakes and shovels and canisters and plastic funnels and a lawnmower and various tools and instruments, most of them rusted and unused for years, OLDEST would have bemoaned the state of the lawn, the weeds and the patches of dead grass, OLDEST would have gone into a state of apoplexy over the lack of upkeep, but OLDEST doesn't drive home on Sundays for dinner anymore and OLDER doesn't call me on the phone anymore and MA doesn't bake her banana bread anymore and the OLD MAN doesn't put me on his lap anymore, because I'm alone here, in the garage, but the piece is safe, the work is finished and will endure because the garage is like a bunker, built without any windows, it's made of concrete and cinderblocks, and with the flashlight pointed at the ground he considers remaining, staying put, because it would be sensible to wait out a hurricane in a reliable structure, like a concrete garage, it would make sense to be here, safe, waiting for an end to the wind and the rain and the rivers of water and the branches and trees, and I can't believe I'm considering it because I used to avoid the garage, I never wanted to be in this garage as a little boy, I never kept any of my fishing gear or my toys in the garage because I hated to walk out to it, I hated to be contained within it, a box of shadows, a tomb, I hated it until one evening I shut myself inside, by accident, I had gone out in search of a bicycle pump because I noticed the door was open and my front tire was flat, and since I could barely lift the door and I saw it was open and I wanted to ride my bike all of these factors coaxed me inside of the garage, I must have only been six or seven years old, and the garage was open so I crept inside but on my way in I must have bumped the door by accident or maybe gravity won out in a twist of fate whatever it was no matter the explanation the door slammed itself shut and closed to the ground behind me, the space closed in, and I began to cry out, I was too small and feeble to lift the door back open and it was dark so I was panicked, I cried and screamed

for MA, for OLDER, for OLDEST, but nobody was around, my pleading went unnoticed, in vain, struggling to lift the latch on the door back up, and I remember being defeated inside the darkness of the garage, trapped in a pitch black container, a tomb, and because it was so dark and my eyes weren't yet adjusted the darkness seemed to stretch out in all directions forever, an infinite black, suspended inside of it, so I was a captive inside of the garage for what seemed like hours, in the darkness, I screamed and cried and kept my eyes closed on account of the magnitude of the darkness surrounding me but eventually once it became apparent it was no use, no matter how much I begged or protested, I began to let go, I quit sobbing and allowed a silence to fill in everything around me, I knew it was no use, hopeless, anxious and full of fear until the silence came, so I stopped, I could feel the silence in the dark and the presence of the quiet had a familiarity to it, once I stopped crying and I took a breath I noticed a familiarity to the silence, like it was a place I had been in before, a place I was always inside, I only didn't recognize it at first, so I resigned myself to whatever it was that would overtake me, whatever demons, whatever shrouded figures of my imagination, I resigned myself to them, but in was only silence, a kind of familiar quiet, and none of the monsters appeared, nothing happened, except the silence grew, a stillness, so I sat down on the floor with my eyes closed and I listened, with my knees tucked into my chest, safe, warm, quiet, and finally the door opened up and it was OLDER and OLDEST and MA because they had been running about in a frantic search for me, they opened the light up into my cavern of darkness, but I wasn't ready to leave, I wasn't scared anymore, I was at peace, because I found something to the silence inside of the garage, it was something important I had found, so it's an image of a little boy with his knees pulled up to his chest that he sees and feels and he considers waiting out the storm, but Marie, she's out there and she's waiting for him and for once he's not going to choose to be alone, he's not going to forego the risk, so the handle of the door is pulled up and the torrents of wind and rain meet him face to face, looking out, the forest dances, the trees are animated and ecstatic, he's never felt the massive presence of the forest like he does peering out into the darkness of the groaning branches, out at the dirt road, it's a swirling madness untamed and he resigns himself to whatever it is that waits, so he bolts out from the garage as the slider closes behind him and he

is off and running in his raincoat and boots, he's down the road and his focus is singular, he's moving with haste and ignores the cracks and the cries of the canopy above him, he's nearly swept over by the wind but he perseveres on, forging ahead, and soon enough because the dirt road is only about a quarter of a mile long between Marie and the shack soon he can make out Phil's house, a country cottage, the lights are off and the house is dark and lifeless but here we are, on the left, it's Phil's house, he recognizes it, and the trees are swaying above him and beside him, the rain has him drenched and he can feel the water against his skin but he's almost reached his destination because his feet are pushing faster and faster so once he's on the porch resting against the door he knows for certain the house is dark, solemn, there are no lights on, but hasn't the power cut out, the power lines must have suffered damage, so the whole neighborhood is without electricity, probably the whole island, the moment the microwave clock in the kitchen flickered blank, and I keep my hands pressed on the door and I look over to the side to make out a couple of windows, because the house is a typical cottage, a two story cottage, a front door and some windows, and the windows off to the side I can hear the glass shaking, he can hear the shaking glass so I begin to knock on the door, he can hear the shaking glass in between the thumps of his fist against the door, then he separates from off the door for a moment to check the windows for any sign of a flashlight, any sign of Marie, for a flicker, a shimmer, but maybe she's in the basement, maybe she's down in the cellar with a bottle of wine, she's picked out a rare vintage for them to enjoy, to ride out the storm together, she might be down in the basement on a couch with some blankets and candles, so maybe the dog will hear him, the collie, Sadie, even if he can barely hear himself, he's banging his hand on the door, he's thumping against the door but nobody answers and he's shouting her name, calling out 'Marie' and then 'Marie' after he bangs again and again with his closed fist, and he's concerned now, because she might have left, Marie could have fled to Grace Church to pitch together with other folks, she might have changed her mind about their arrangement, about him, but he can barely hear the sound of his fist against the door, he can hear the trees and the shaking glass but he can barely hear his fists so he stops and closes his eyes and suddenly he kicks the door once and then again and the lock breaks out from the wood frame and the door swings open to an empty

house, the house is dark and empty, he can make out a hallway from the open door so he calls inside ‘Marie’ but nobody answers, no dog barks, no flashlight flickers on, the rain is falling inward past the threshold of the door onto the tile floor of the entrance of the home but he can’t make anything out beyond a few feet and it wouldn’t be right to go inside, he’d be a trespasser, so he calls her name again and again to no answer, to no avail, nobody can hear him, the dog or Marie, nobody is home to hear him so he stands facing the empty house with the storm raging behind him, at his back, so reaching inside for a sense of composure he tries to understand, he tries to make sense of it, this situation, where could she be, what could have happened, his face is pained with agony because I knew I should have left with her, I should have taken off my shoes and my clothes and ran away with her when the rain started, when there was a light in the day and the wind hadn’t grown so immense, I should have abandoned my work and sailed off with her and forgotten about the piece, she appeared like an angel and I should have flown with her, but my work, my feelings and my preciousness about my art, I should have dropped everything, the wires and the stones and the crimper and the drill, what did any of it matter, I should be with her, her swaying body and her white painted toenails, I could be with her, right now, with Marie, Marie, her maroon tattoos on her clavicle and her forearm, the slopes of her flanks and those odd strands of grey hair streaking through her black curls, Marie, but something happens inside of his brain, the silence finds him inside the empty house with the wind and the rain at his back, lost into the darkness, mesmerized, a realization occurs, he connects to reality, from one world into another, and he realizes a simple truth, a fact, an undeniable truth confronts him, and the truth is Marie hadn’t been the sister of Phil, Phil his neighbor, Phil who would stop to wave hello while walking his collie, no, Marie, she had been the old woman down at the far end of the dirt road, further along, the old woman, Marie, the Marie who visited him had been a an old woman in her sixties who lived down at the end of the road, who stopped by to check in on me, Marie who had been friends with MA, who brought by food after MA’s funeral, who stopped in to check up on me occasionally, she had made a case for me to head to Grace Church with her, she had told me she was headed to the community shelter because she was afraid of what might happen in the fierceness of the winds of the hurricane and she had knocked on my door and in between the

dream and the waking world I had crossed the threshold onto the stoop to speak with her, the truth of Marie, the old woman who knew MA, to tell her I was alright, to tell her I wasn't interested in Grace Church or pitching together with the other folks, I would be fine on my own, she implored but I refused, because my exile is self-imposed, my isolation, it is a choice that I choose, that I have chosen, because I have shut everyone out, I've shut the world out, the waking world where people have stories and are doing things and going places, where people have bodies and aren't ghosts, I've been locked up inside a dilapidated shack for months and months and I haven't let anyone in, I stepped out onto the stoop to speak with the old woman Marie who lived down the dirt road who checked on me before the hurricane struck, my memory of the moment, bits of it return, what happened, the Marie who came to see me, not the Marie with her eyes closed running across puddles in painted white toenails, not the Marie whose breasts swayed, such a Marie had never existed, such a Marie had been a construct of a warped mind, my mind, because the truth of Marie is she is an old woman sheltering with other residents at Grace Church, so what comes next, after you begin to experience hallucinations, I've lost myself into a silent hallway, the hallway of a home I've broken into, uninvited, unannounced, because I'm losing myself, how can I trust, how can I know, and as he turns to face the storm he shuts the door and tears fill his eyes, tears cluster inside of his eyes but when the tears force their way out of him they can't be distinguished from the barrage of rain, from the water flying around him, up at him, down o'er him, buffeted by wind and rain he's lost his footing outside the dark empty house huddled up to a broken door, crouched over, his jacket up around his head, and he's weeping, he's crying amidst the maelstrom, because he is lost, a castaway, he has lost himself, he doesn't know what to trust anymore, and MA is yelling at him, he's helping her into a diaper, her legs are white, varicose veins, she's seated on her bed and he has the diaper at her feet but she keeps kicking at him, yelling, so after a struggle he walks away from her, the diaper in his hands, and he's crying, he doesn't know how he can keep going through with it, her meals, her diapers, her shouting and cursing, he's crying and alone, with a feeling of helplessness, helpless, how can I withstand, at the doorstep in the midst of a hurricane, crying, and in the tears he realizes even though he couldn't control the circumstances which unraveled around him, the people

who died, the hurricanes which blew through, he did control his being an island unto himself, he knew it, he knew it was his own fault, his own blame to assume, and he's lost, he had lost himself, because now he has lost contact with reality, by hallucinating, by imagining people and interactions, his imagination was creating people who weren't true, fantasies, so he pulled his knees up to his chest and was crouched down, huddled by a broken door, defeated, lost, and the intensity of the storm bears down on him, like a vice, like the truth of his realization, he's up against it, and his eyes are closed and the hood is pulled over his head from the raincoat, his pants are wet, his feet are wet, soaked, he's soaked through, and he doesn't know where to go, where to turn, with no sign of lifeboats, because he's alone, he's lost and alone and Marie turned out to be a phantom of his subconscious, a secret desire washed up onto the shores of reality, as if she had come to him in an empty bosun's chair, a rocky shore, the lee side of a lighthouse, years and years attending to the flame, trimming the wick and maintaining the levels of oil, chipping ice off from the glass windowpanes, he had been a scrupulous lighthouse keeper, in his isolation, which has caused his mind to falter, my mind's not right, like MA, I can't trust himself anymore, crying, with tears rolling down my wet cheeks, the glass shaking from the windows of the house, and I'll die out here, I'll wash away in the waves of this hurricane, I'll end up down the road, face down, I'll let go and who cares what they do with my body, who cares who claims the house, the property, the beat up El Camino in the yard, none of it mattered, the story of the my family will vanish as the waters choke out my breath to disappear forgotten forever, worse than the ashes of stars, and the tears are welling up in my eyes because this is the end and my decision is to die, I've made a shipwreck of my faith but who cares, a planet full of lonely animals, islands, go ahead and ignite cataclysms of warheads, poison oceans, starve out the children of Africa, who cares of recklessness or excess or stupidity because we were never supposed to reach this far in the first place, we were never supposed to make it out from the caves, with vicious clubs in our hands, ours is one giant cosmic mistake, meaningless, so why cry, stop your crying, stop it, there's nothing to weep for, there's no one to weep for, death is an empty hallway dark with the echoes of footsteps and you've seen it, you've done it, so why be afraid, why sadness, if anything, if there are tears, it's the living we ought to pity, to be alive is a cruel punishment,

the sufferings of life, the confusion and alienations, why be so precious about it, why, but then a sound from down the road turns his head, down the road towards the shack, one massive crack and then a crash, two loud bangs, he hears the sound and his eyes sharpen up through the hood beyond the collar of the raincoat and he knows for certain it was the shack, his home, something crashed into the shack, so he pulls himself up and dashes off, the flashlight is in his hand and lighting the way, the potholes filled with mud and water, the tree limbs dipping up and down, he runs down the road in a fight to keep his breath then he turns after a stand of eastern pines to find the shack, he shines his light onto the shack and the roof is collapsed, the roof is caved in and a massive oak column has fallen onto the house, it has broken through the house in a terrible mess of limbs and roof tiles, smashed walls and windows, he loses his breath for a second, it escapes him, to find the shack broken open, but he reacts, he inhales a gulp then he runs up the stone walkway to the door and opens the door to find the trunk of the tree in the workspace, the cardboard boxes are splayed out, stones and rocks cover the floor, chunks of drywall and shingles and glass, from the kitchen to the front wall next to the door, his room, the shack is open and exposed, rain pours in, the wind is howling, and what can be done, what should I do, the house is destroyed, gutted open, every memory of MA in the kitchen or OLDER in the living room, the place where so much of the past had been stored up, contained, it has broken open, and the closet door has broken free from the frame so the closet is open with the hooks and the coats and he finds an old rope on the ground, the rope is frayed and had been used on camping trips and as a makeshift clothesline, but an instinct takes over so he grabs the rope and secures one end around the trunk of the tree with a simple knot then takes the other end and fixes it around his waist, he ties a bowline knot like how Clark had taught him, so he’s anchored to the tree, revenant winds blowing and the rain pelting down on him washing over the exposed rooms of the shack in waves, everything is destroyed, but he’s secured himself to something and though it would make more sense to move himself to the garage, I should go to the garage, where I stored my work, the cloud, I could hide out in the garage but what if another tree falls, a pile of rubble, suffocating and collapsed, that’s no way to go, no, I’ll ride it out here, outside, underneath this sky of water, this ocean of torrent, I’ll ride it out so if it’s meant to be then it will

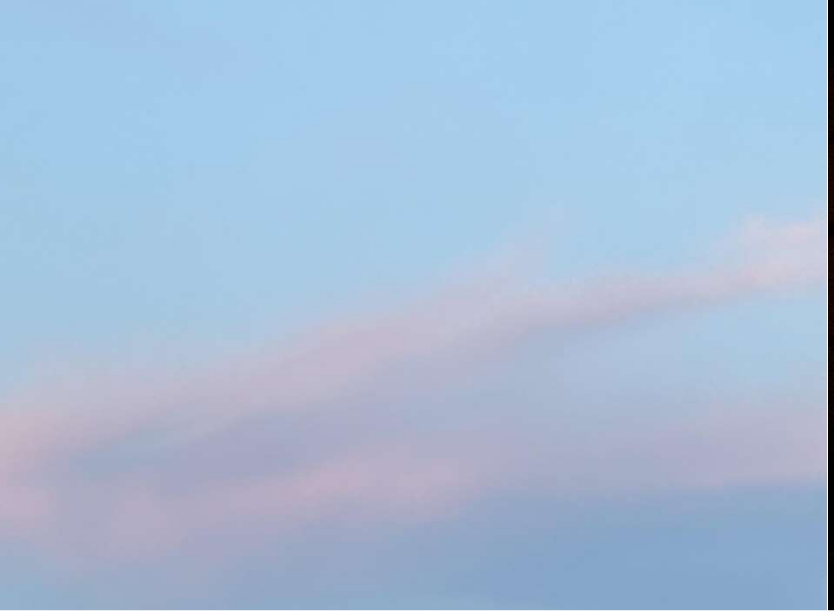
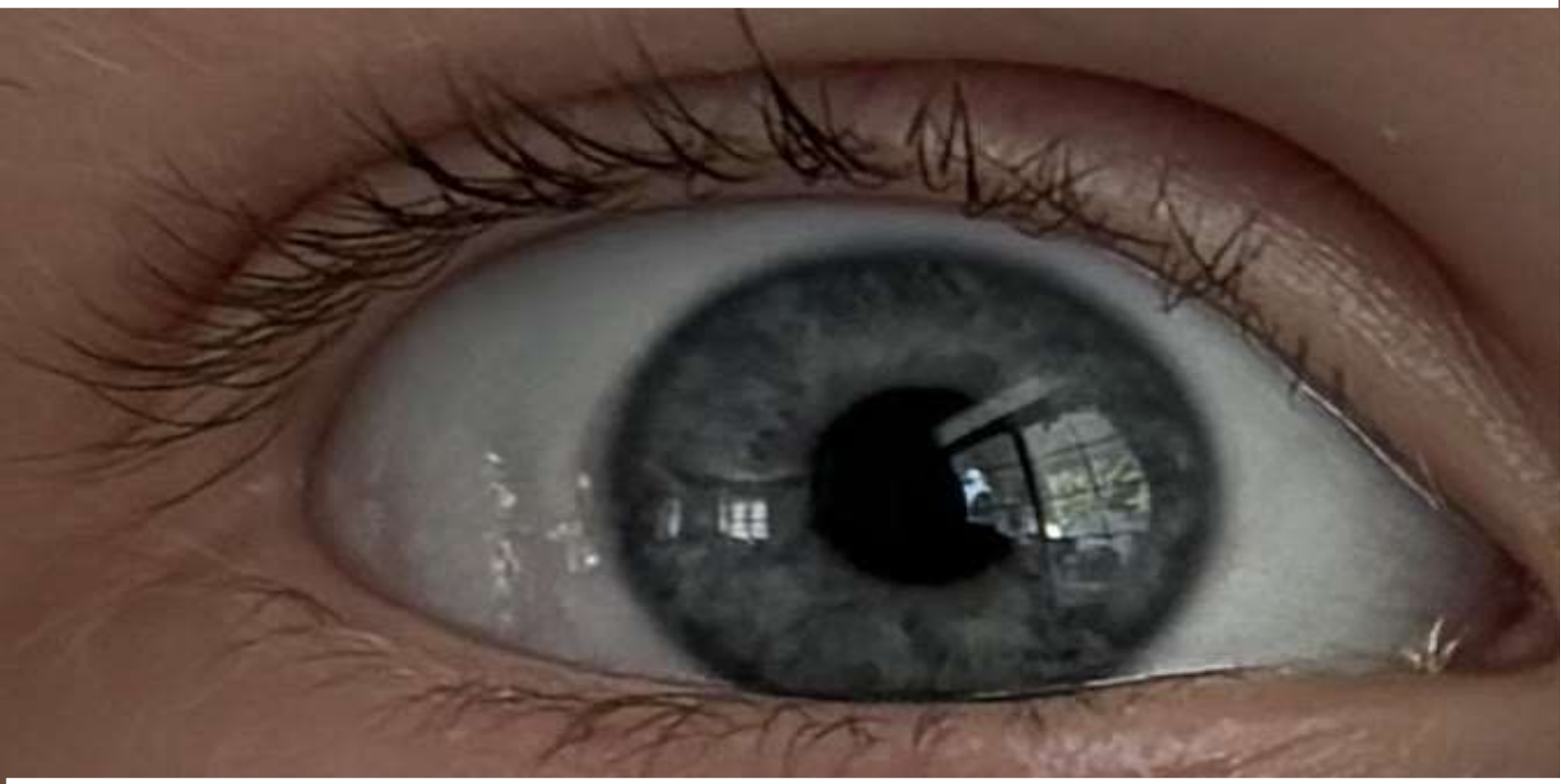
be, I'll survive, it will be up to whatever is in control, whatever thing decides on when a hurricane makes landfall or if a little boy is hit by a car while riding his bike, whatever is in charge of this world of coming and going will decide my fate, so here I am, resigned to it, but it won't be in a pile of rubble, the end of me, it will be out here, in the face of it, so he's fixed to the trunk of the tree, his boots splash against the hardwood floor in the shack because water flows underfoot and he turns the flashlight down to see the water, his feet, then he clicks the flashlight off, into his pocket, his waist fixed to the rope and the other end of the rope fixed to the trunk of the oak, like how Clark had taught him, cinched and secure, and he closes his eyes, I closed my eyes, in a silence, and in the silence is the OLD MAN, he's in his late thirties, there's a shadow of coarse stubble across his cheeks and neck, and it was the day the OLD MAN lost the job, the OLD MAN had shown up to the site early and the foreman had told him to go home, no more work, but there's plenty of work, what do you mean, well, it's not for you, that's how it went with the foreman and instead of arguing or causing a scene the OLD MAN kicked up dirt walking back to his truck, he was out of the union now, nothing protected him so what was the point, he kicked up the dirt and then turned the truck around back into town, that's how the OLD MAN found himself at the locked door of a Package Store at half past seven in the morning, the last of many jobs the OLD MAN had lost, waiting at the locked door, and the OLD MAN is thinking about the first job he lost, the job he never got at the Fire Department, when they told me I hadn't passed the test, when they explained to me on the typewritten letter with the town clerk's stationary how I wasn't fit for service, from then on I had gone on to lose plenty of jobs, lost plenty of credibility, plenty of friends, plenty of dough, and now I've crossed the Weweantic River with only enough in my pocket for a quart of whiskey and two or three minutes on a pay phone, ten cents a minute, because I'll have to call back home to let MA know I wouldn't be back tonight, I'm not coming home, not that they'd want me around anyways, who could blame 'em, the boys, MA, they know I'm no good, after I grabbed the youngest boy and pulled him up to my face and barked at him because he wasn't eating his dinner, MA screamed out he's only five years old, he's a boy, it stunned me when she screamed and I realized what I had done, what can I do, a monster, it's gone too far, I'm all frustrated and fed up and it all started

when DeCarolino, that sonavabitch, in league with the town mayor, he made certain my application was declined, made sure an excuse was cooked up, DeCarolino made it so I wasn't brought on to serve in the Fire Department because I had beat his son out on the baseball field, and there had been scraps between us, me and his kid, the Italians hated the Irish, it was a feud between me and the kid and my own father was long gone so there was no one to step in on my behalf and talk to the mayor or the town clerk, there wasn't anyone on my side, and I've been bitter and resentful my whole life over it so here I am at half past seven in the morning waiting at the Package Store for the door to open so I can hand the proprietor what little money I got squandered in my pocket for a cheap quart of whiskey, and I'll be on a spree for a few days and I won't go home, because I'll at least try to grant them that, I try to protect the boys and MA, when I take off on my sprees, isn't it better to be as far away from them as I can, though who am I kidding, I drink constantly, every day, and even if I hide out for days when I set off on my more dangerous sprees when I come back it's still me drinking and angry, that's who I am, who they're forced to reckon with, you're no saint, though it's the least you can do to not drag them along when the wheels completely fall off, a sonavabitch like me, waiting on the door to open so I can sit in the cab of my truck with a bottle, to piss and moan over DeCarolino and his son and the mayor and the Fire Department, over having been kicked out of the union and losing my license as a carpenter, losing the roofing business, a lowly grunt now, laying asphalt, you sonavabitch, I could have done something with my life but here I am, and now the door is opening and the OLD MAN walks silently past the proprietor, a harried woman with the keys in her hand, and straight to the whiskey, he reaches for a quart on the bottom shelf and declares it at the counter and not hardly a 'Morning' is spoken between them before the OLD MAN is out of the door and back in his truck with his empty denim pockets and his bottle, he starts the ignition and pulls out from the street and lopes along into the town center with its white church steeple and library and  payphone, so he parks, then he edges his way out of the truck, and the bottle is left on the seat next to him, and the OLD MAN inserts a couple of dimes into the slot of the payphone, he dials a number and he speaks briefly into the receiver then the phone is hung up and the line is dead so he's back in his truck, back down the street, out from the center of town and the OLD MAN

finds a quiet parking lot with a view of a quiet meadow and the lot is adjacent to a closed down business so there aren't any other cars, it's an inconspicuous spot so he parks the truck and the OLD MAN takes the bottle from next to him and twists off the plastic cap of Canadian Club and he throttles a pull from the bottle, he manages a brisk glug and then before he can catch his breath there's another one down his throat, and the OLD MAN is quiet, the truck is shut off, he's staring through the windshield but the red eyes of the OLD MAN aren't focused on anything in particular, his eyes are bloodshot and there are tears welling up in them, it could be from the booze, from the fire in his stomach and his throat, or it could be something else, and I watch him hold the bottle in front of him on his lap and his red eyes are tearing up, I can see the OLD MAN, the OLD MAN is crying, there's another pull from the bottle and the OLD MAN is silently weeping, and the OLD MAN starts whispering, you could've done so much better for them, you could've done so much better for her, they needed you, and you hung on to the past, the anger, that's all you did, but there had been a stretch of time, remember, almost a year, nearly an entire year, after you had woken up on the floor of the kitchen, after the first of the boys was born, he was crying out from his crib, and you were meant to be caring for him because MA had gone off island to visit a relative, she had left you for a night while she went over to the continent, and it was your job to care for the little baby boy with the stump for an arm, the poor little boy you disfigured with your own bad blood, you sonavabitch, and you had passed out because you had taken on too much whiskey and the boy had been screaming bright faced for hours and hours, his diaper was full of piss and shit and you woke up on the floor and you had let this poor, defenseless, helpless creature to cry out in tortured wailing desperation for God knows how long, you had let your own son down, your own blood, poisoned or not, because you got drunk, so after you woke up from the floor and changed the boy's diaper you made a phone call to a carpenter you knew, Joe Franklin, you called Joe because you remembered Joe was sober and had talked about being sober and going to meetings and having a better life, you remember Joe used to crash cars and wake up in jail and Joe lost his wife, she left him, on account of all the drinking Joe was doing, but Joe had cleaned himself up and had put together a nice business and was doing alright, you knew Joe was alright and was sober and you knew for somehow Joe would help you if you called him, so you

found Joe's business card in your pile of business cards and dialed the number after you cleaned the boy up and fed the poor thing a bottle of formula to calm him, your son, your first born, after his face changed colors from angry purple back to a clear peach, after his eyes lost their terror, the little boy's eyes, you called Joe and explained how you wanted to clean up, to be sober, how you didn't know anything about being sober but you knew you didn't want to be drinking, you wanted so bad to not be drinking, to not be a drunk, because you had a family now, a baby boy, and you had seen your own father drink and curse and die young from cigarettes and booze and meanness, you knew nobody would ever be a saint from your family but you didn't want what your old man had left you, you wanted out, you explained how you wanted a way out, so Joe said come with me, I'll pick you up tonight and I'll bring you to a meeting of Alcoholics Anonymous and you decide what you think, I'll tell you what I did to get sober and then you'll have to make a decision, that's what Joe said to you, you'd have to make a decision, you've got to want it for yourself, you can't do it for anyone else, it's got to be a decision for yourself, even if your wife wants it, even if your baby boy wants it, you've got to do it for you, so you told Joe you wanted it for yourself, you went with him that night to the meeting of Alcoholics Anonymous and you kept going to meetings, Joe handed you a pocketbook directory of meetings with times and locations, and you spent evenings with Joe, you told MA you wanted to be sober and you were going to make things better and MA was quiet when you told her but she supported you, she told you to go to the meetings and sip as much coffee as you need with Joe, and it went on like that, without alcohol, without hangovers, without barrooms and lies, being reliable, showing up with a clear head, it went on like that for almost a year, and it was a good year, MA was happy and the little boy was growing and you were doing alright, like Joe, you did what Joe told you to and things were alright, until that one afternoon, it was a rainy day in April and you were finishing up a job but the owner was a welch trying to stiff you out of some money, the guy who had hired you wasn't paying up, so you were in town after the argument and you were frustrated and angry when you ran into DeCarolino, who was driving a brand new truck, who was clean and well dressed, who you ran into and saw and shook hands and the sonavabitch told you about how good business was, about his father's business he took over, he worked at the Fire Department

and ran his father's business on the side, the sonavabitch had been making money, boy had DeCarolino been doing well, a wife and a few kids and according to DeCarolino everything was great, then he said I'd buy you a drink but I heard you're an alcoholic now and you can't have even a single beer, you don't have any control over your drinking, there's something wrong with you, DeCarolino had the nerve to say it to you then you squinted your eyes and announced to DeCarolino nothing was wrong with you, you could drink or not drink as you pleased, you paid your taxes, you were a grown man, so if you're buying I'm drinking, you sonavabitch, and so that was it, when the meetings ended, when you quit seeing Joe, when things stopped being alright, and it's been so long, these sprees, these terrible regrets, you could've done something with your life, you could have done so much more, so the OLD MAN takes another pull from the bottle but his face contorts as the liquor goes down, the OLD MAN's face collapses into an shooting pain and suddenly the door to the truck opens and there's vomit, a pool of red vomit spreads out on the ground outside the door of the truck and the OLD MAN is staggering, he's cursing as he vomits, blood is coming up from his stomach and out his nose and throat and something has happened, a metallic taste in his mouth, in his nostrils, covered in blood, a terrible rupture has occurred inside of him, fatal, so he knows he has to drive himself to a hospital, he has to act quickly, and I can see his arms and his wrists, the black hair on his forearms and wrists, his wrists like a ploughman, he takes the quart of Canadian Club and throws it towards the meadow and stumbles back into the truck and takes off towards the only hospital he knows, because he's been to the hospital in Barnstable, that's where my boys were born, my beautiful boys, though he'll have to cross over the bridge at Bourne and speed out along the Cape because he can feel the blood inside of him, something has jarred loose, like a valve has opened up, something is opened up inside of him and the bleeding won't stop, pouring itself out of him, the life, so the truck bed clanks out of the parking lot onto the main road and all I can think about is my beautiful wife, her blue eyes, her blue eyes and the boys, their blue eyes, all of them, a sea of blue, a sky of blue, their blue eyes and how I wish I could have been better, how I wish I would have stayed hooked up with Joe Franklin and kept going to those meetings, because I wanted so badly to be better, but something inside me had defeated me and marked me like Cain and I couldn't

overcome it, and I hope whatever curse it was is going in the ground with me, buried, I hope it dies and passes over them, so they can live, and have good lives, and be happy, I'd kiss them to tell them of the wishes I had for them in the cabin of the truck with the blood escaping out from me, how love and happiness is all I ever wanted for them, you sonavabitch, your wife, your boys, their blue eyes, and the truck goes until it stops and mixed inside of the regret is a penitence, is a feeling like something good may still come from this, even if they bury me in the shadows of a lonesome past, even if they bury me in the poisoned blood of our fathers, even if they dig a grave in the north winds, even if they dig a grave in the bottomless sea, even if they dig a grave of fury in the sight of my failures, ultimately, they will dig a grave in silence, silent, to hear his breath, inhaling, the quiet, exhaling, because now the winds have stopped, the storm, the gales and the tremendous comets of violence have quit their onslaught because the rain has stopped so his eyes open to an impossibility, a miracle, how could it, crossing over from one world to another, to silence, to illumination, the storm has halted, somehow it has ceased, quelled, so he opens his eyes to see the tree where the rope is tied and then to the folded roof of the shack and the floor boards and the sodden cardboard boxes, as if the shadows and the anguish and the gnashing of history had been stuffed into those boxes, for a moment, sealed in silence, perfect silence, even the water running through the house is quiet, because the shack is flooded, he can see in the soft light how water has pooled across the floors and there are structural beams bent and smashed in, jagged portions of the walls, resilient, standing among the ruins, and the dark hallway to MA's room, the hallway is open to the outside now because the tree has smashed through and collapsed the living room and his bedroom and the roof above, so the hallway is open and MA's door is shut, a perfect silence, a shut door, so his eyes climb towards a light, he gazes up to find a wall of clouds, a wall of clouds rising vertically and climbing without limit up through the sky into the night, as it slowly pulls open a clearing from the hellscape of the storm, it opens up a portal, moving out of sight, further away, so now the sky widens within the eyewall, the center of the hurricane, like the bloom of a flower petal, and he thinks to himself I'm watching the tranquil center of the storm passing overhead, exhausted in the most perfect silence, and the menace of tree branches dancing has disappeared, motionless, the

hatreds of wind and the onslaught of water, a silent motion, he watches the wall of clouds in a smooth rotation, a pillar of smog reflected in starlight, encircling him, a circle, and up through the center are the heavens, the constellations, pinpricks of light, and I remember a painted sign from town, in one of the shop windows, from earlier in the day, I look up and I can hear the words, I can hear someone speaking them, yet they're unspoken, because the words are coming from the place where unspoken words come from, a place where thoughts, ideas, where miracles are sent from, to us, and the unspoken voice is somehow like my own voice, it sounds like I'm saying the words to myself as if the words are coming from out my mouth with my own breath but they aren't, the words are coming from somewhere else, *STARS ARE OPENINGS IN THE NIGHT WHERE OUR LOVED ONES SHINE DOWN FROM TO LET US KNOW THEY ARE WATCHING*, so under the stars, in the calm, walled in by a circle of turbulence, a center of peace, I recall the sign in town and I can see into the clear sky, the clouds have vanished, upwards, up into the mantle of night, starlight, tranquil in their twinkle of forever while I make out the call of a single crow, haw haw haw, I hear a crow, unmistakable, so I smile, because it is a bird, I hear a bird, an auspice, a portend of good luck, lucky, because I've been purged, purged myself from death, from dead works, from the fear of death and the loneliness which has surrounded me, purged from their power over me, its power, my family dying, my brothers, my parents, my nephew, the dread of empty hallways and footsteps, I've been washed clean from fear or doubt or indecision because my living itself is a decision, in this breath I choose life, to work and love and suffer and live, whatever else may come, I know you will.