

SWOONED

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I

Or, with quavering voice and reddened eyes, one would tell the story of one as other, as one might compose a dirge for all that is tragic and regrettable. Or, with penitent voice and flickering eyes, as one might stammer childlike apologies to all that is authority and shelter. Or, as a lullaby to the unoccupied crib, with hushing voice and bloodshot eyes, a frantic wistfulness. One would tell the story of one's love for one, fumbling for colored words, a freakish assembly of amber and thrift and spew and whimsy. If necessary, one would speak in a flurry of choice and option, struggling to deny the brutal spiral of the *nothing but* with an exuberant twist of the kaleidoscopic *or*. One stories one into a telling, a fiery silo, a dug grave in the backyard of one's dollhouse, a shotgun faint, a flattening city. One tells of unliving, unives through telling, and one hears one's doubts and studied contradictions, and a sporadic breeze through a stand of slender palms. One would swoon for one, one would *swoon*.

:So one says, while inbetween slumber breathings, inbetween wakeful breaths [So one hears: "Mark space, cupboard time, stove meaning..."]: "The shadows thrown by air, the space that is not the space between the motes, and neither the motes themselves nor the space within the motes, these shadows on floorboards oscillate imperceptibly to the ill-equipped observer, they lift off untreed surfaces [So one hears: "Write scree, speak shard..."], the flooring not as effective if it be tile or slab cement or packed dirt (let it never be linoleum or carpet), the air as full of particle life as industrial pipe water, the lightest flecks ceiling bound, the whole shaft emotionally volatile to the casual languisher (brutal to the invested), an axiomatic universe of interior snow [So one hears: "When speaking, friction and likelihood spark with scant threat of flame, plunging the shorn unwritten skull into flint powder, to peel stone skin, to brook shale, to fold back layers of sight..."], a portal for one wishing to go from bedside to windowsill, a wavelength endeavor spanning the room, the (unseeable) unseen shadows providing

the measure of the wooden spool, the loosening wood screw, the halved toothpick (the twirled human hair, the undampening cherry stem, the linen tuft), but not upon any of these from coming lamplight, nor can such impermanent shadows stain exposed flesh with any permanence, nor can a burg be long hindered from going bigtown, nor can a metropolis stall its crawl toward ruination, nor can water be lifted clean from oxygen, nor can what is said be easily distinguished from what is heard [So one hears: “nor what is thought from what is dreamt...”], the charmed from the perfect from the discreet from the shy, the recurrent from the cyclical, the alarm clock that is a fowl from the alarm clock that is not”:

:So one says, while wristing a curtain aside [So one hears: “One is not to blame if one feels responsible for everything...”]: “To be a tree, to get wood, to become a tree, a purchaser of soil, oxygen philanthropic, adviser to the water table, sun interrupter, a begetter of saplings into forests, stretching one’s roots, bestowing one’s shade, marrying air to loam, swelter to shelter, trek to repose, to be language bark on a mobile tree amongst trees of station, all echelons and apertures, wandering out beyond the woods into a vacant field under a skysheet, bleached and flat and summery end, offering every thimble of autumn sap to the shelflife of a pale tannenbaum star, cursing the perfect temporal circling of future stump rings, to be stark planted along the edge of a common copse beside a saggy bone-paling fence that runs between cotton stale and cemetery fresh, days filled with sack-dragging reveries and shovel stints, to be a tree, to have been a tree, to become a tree, to unbecome as a tree, going from flesh to seed to tree to wood [So one hears: “Speech is strained through cross-grain filters, a husky sisterlush buzz, lip service to tongue waggle, swallow to vomit, brute choir to confession...”], to matter as much as a stand alone piney post, a spot to tether a heifer, a rod to mechanism a lightning strike, to be the framework of an oblong dwelling, all fantast and fakery, the counterfeit woodsy siding on a wagon-like trailer, stuck smack dab in a lackluster hollow, flank grain simulated and unhosed, all coy and mucky, a facade of unnatural emulation [So one hears: “A symbol gets rendered with sibling affection, the curve and the straight, the loop and the angle, folding upon itself like a girl succumbing to her period, his comma, the soft sound of wasted plasma, the spilling of warm wax, the impermanent gesture of threading aureole washers around nipple bolts, adhering sternum to shoulderblades, collar bones to spinal cord, keeping the heart gourd intact...”], to become the timber trailer itself and not just an arboreal by-product, pet pungent and carpeted shag mustard, a place where one’s sister would undress with shaky limbs, getting carried away by twisted sky into profound stripout beauty of lounging

rural noonings [So one hears: “Magnified human skin is a critical text, there are no paths until they get traveled, pass lips across corduroy, brows along corrugation, heels of hands down the community spine to the conduits...”], to undo the doing, to be grateful to the blue fairy going the opposite way, limbs petrifying, a simple woodentop, dowel-jointed, drop-jawed, able to sit indefinitely without drool or cramp or desire, to take oneself out of the picture as if the picture were taken out of oneself, the ground falling away from the fallen such that the falling reappears to disappear, to be inanimate as a calling, an occupation asked of objects over subjects, matter that can be broken down without the ceasing of the whole, because wholeness is as illusory as partiality, to be a crack in out-of-the-way pavement, the defect in an isolated iris, a fleck of paint under the eave of a seldom visited outbuilding [So one hears: “When terribly young, phantomhood is elsewhere, a jutting out, a loner tree at its tip, a gathering spot for honeybees spilling their seed in salt air, arithmetically sure of dissemination...”], to be a spool stabled on the closet floor, not far from the ratchet and the shoehorn, in the smell of must and shadowy leather, traces of mothballs, cardboard and blanketry deep above, coat-hang and shirt-droop, spool without string, ratchet without sprocket, shoehorn with shoes appointed, the spool refusing to move as if motion cannot be forgiven, a curl of fluff lifts off the floor after the slightest of updrafts, a shifting of domestic air, dust is dislodged, displaced, a house wishes to fall but does not fall as it is afraid it will not fall as it wishes [So one hears: “Too much tension in a building erect, too much rest in one fallen...”], to be domino houses side by side in the sun, white dotted surfaces of math count, portholes to armchair doze, tumbling down under the roused surf, structural faint, apex swoon, a roof untaught not to molest its slab [So one hears: “To not fall as one wishes, to fall as one does not wish...”], to be out the yard and down the lane to the flattening fields, the cutting underway, odor of yesterday’s sudden soil, muddied shoes now caked, a jean’s knee torn and frays now breezed, one feels closer to the home when the house is hunkered on the horizon, a rutted ribbon of dirt connecting, to rural inadequacies into harvest-hope [So one hears: “To move as if motion is always forgiven...”], fruity plain to shimmed shore, structures along the bulge crumple under a storm’s shiny fury, clouds can be dismantled, rain gathering in the shade of an apology tree at sunup, to walk those fields near the daunting hills, hands in skirt, hair in hood, treating oneself like a foolish child by searching the low sky for flocking birds, for come snow, to listen for what might be the sound of bodies shifting way back at the house, trees branching and chimney smoke curling, this listening as fraught with inevitability as a leaf letting go”:

This, then, is the substance of pattern, the shift from what mattered to what matters to matter.

Foreground tree, middle ground tree, far off tree, occlusion, birds.

A house is built of, a house is built up, a house is down, settling.

All things wood: wooden nails in a cabinet drawer, wooden screws on their heads on a windowsill, wood shavings afloat near the bottom of a glass.

A tree collapses, leaves rise to block view of the event.

One tree is planted but most trees develop out of thin air.

One's thin white rope and another's moist wooden marble make a reduced redwood.

When one raises one's arms above one's head (to spread fingers to the sky, to clutch onto the headboard, to touch the frame atop the doorjamb), one's erotic apparatus shifts heavenward.

Wooden wires, wood so elongated it can be woven.

Under the table one squats, a wooden bowl in one's lap, not soup, but milkish meal, flannel under the tongue to capture flavor, the whole house dark.

:So one says, while glancing at the wall where a window might be expected [So one hears: "Accept failure only as a fortuitous reminder of mortality, only as a good joke had upon a good sport..."]: "Toward the south one suggests a power, a ferrying of indifference toward all that is usual and marvelous, a clear path out of the here to the more remarkable now, away from the moment toward the spatial irrefutable this [So one hears: "It is too much to assume a polished stance, too foolhardy to salt the fields of an earlier frolic..."], the pleasure coming not from insistence upon clarity or innovation or even creative verve, but margins of open relish, vacant lots of the tremendous and the unrote, a way of seeing that when it is done and echoed, echoed faintly and then strained

to remember, it measures nothing that is measurable and one floats to the surface, one bobs waiting salvage, one is currented into a past so distant that memory gets there faster as prophecy [So one hears: "Interrupt the navigation with unquestioned answers, gum up the sextant with confidence, fill the telescope lens with obvious mattering present..."], angling into the sun with sudden desire for long sleep, the low straight light casting a shadow across packed dirt and bending it, bending one's it halfway up the visual glare of a wall, the passion of such common conclusions still shrinking the pupils to quickly abandoned pointillism, a solitary dot with a companion beyond the ridge met always surprisingly through thunder rolls, staring off into inhabited space, uninhabited certainty; texture breaks down into smaller worlds, places of subtle indifference and lost motivations; one shifts in one's plastic chair uncomfortably in an effort to slide into wooden meaning, a way of hoping for the regular positive push, the same texture under a breast that one might find under a tortoise shell, just under the lip of the shell, the extra soft softness":

And so when it comes time to speak one's peace, it is not surprising to discover it is best (even then) to keep silent, to raise one's eyes and hold one's tongue. The ego rises to accommodate pleasure, lowers to meet joy. Trees then twist into storms.

Out back in the field behind every house the wistful is harvested, the unfortunate is dug up, moisture is stashed.

Out back in the field in the broad sun one faints. Fainting cannot ever last long enough. The cut grass stems against one's skin, the darkness succumbed to, limbs under no obligation to manipulate, to twitch, to fondle. Sky observes. A wide wash of blue without discernible judgment (attached or spread).

Out in the yard that becomes a field that becomes a making plain one faints (a full swoon of disengagement). What do insects know of the celestial expanse. What does clover grasp of human shame. A scuttling here, some chlorophylling there. In one's pant cuff one archives the modest history of an out-the-door day.

While prostrate on a maker plane, prone in the flattened weeds, heart thumping the ground, brain temporarily down, all else (of personal

body) still, one begins to feel a part of things. All is not lost when nothing is gained. One becomes old without any unusual aging. All become old and live too long.

Neutrality is the least articulate voice; tape is never successfully painted over, whether it is pulled off beforehand or not; dust collects on one's tongue the moment before the stamp is licked and thus matter gets shifted about from place to place in semi-sarcophagal fashion.

So one celebrates the few moments when day to day drudgery is conquered, a seahorse (male) giving birth to water ponies, clouds crumbling like ancient libraries, toast burning bright on the kitchen counter through the night.

A tree grows up through the bed between one and one's one while both slumber; so one and one's other snuggle to it with bellies to bark as a parenthetical pair, re-umbilicaled.

All across the fields the straw is humble, the fences penitent, the furrows spent.

And so one wishes for reconciliation without open palms offered up to sharp scrutiny, benevolent or not, trusting, trusted, no difference, the palms too lined, too vulnerable, pale and soft and accountable.

Slip away off into the woods and through into the open fields where the sun is mighty and the moving water cold.

:So one says, while negotiating the distance between one protrusion and another, the common pock between, the shift in the terrain from low sternum to chin [So one hears: "This loss of pattern undermines one's willingness to exchange positions, to adjust from here to there, to process travel..."]: "One never knows when a rising of the hope quotient will precede great happiness, when running one's finger along a serrated edge will provide context, when the nap of a patch of carpet, the manner in which it has variable height, will bring sadness to one lying with one's cheek upon it [So one hears: "It all falls apart under the stress of incompatibility, it blossoms out of its own rubble, feeding itself with its own demise, replenishing itself with what is corroding its internal necessity, the texture holds its own understanding and communicates its borders, margins

and interiors, its occasional tendrils out into other textures, terrain relief...”], this lift, that tuck, that rise, this hollow, one reads with one’s ability to distinguish height, width and depth, to be at the surface of the water as if the water were impenetrable”:

When one scales a ladder in a library with ceilings as high as three of one up upon unsteady shoulders, one looks down to the polished floor as one’s reflection smallens, and one might think (or one might not).

The wood of a ship, a hull, a floating tree with masts of cousins, cotton sails, decks scrubbed with turtle teeth.

In the petrified forest with a nosebleed.

In a cask with naked water.

A wooden watch, a wooden kettle, a whistling of the wooden way.

Wood scaffolding within a whale, four stories tall, deep and dank to the tail, tapering, lashed with sinew of bygone friends, damp wood still able to creak and groan as the leviathan takes a spin around the bowl.

The old plank road stretches across the pondered waste, the lowering desert, and one could pull a wagon full of sawdust, a place to sleep (burrowed out of the night air) if one were still as small as a child.

Wooden spoons flip wooden shoes from tender feet to tendered laps.

And so one becomes wood, a stiffening of joints quite beyond arthritis (or even rigor mortis).

A hand gone to wood, hope in a hand basket.

A curled shaving, all in one piece, could be lifted from one’s head as if it were gauze, finally exposing at the core a wooden tub with one and a friend and a friend sailing off toward a hot shore, a brighter lee, deepest, deeper, deep.

From what one feels to what one thinks is a late autumn field after a wet wind, a muddy afterness. One shouldn't spin the wheels when the gears are unlatched.

In the wooden box the felt grows.

Looking through a postage stamp window, scratched and cracked and thickish, past whatever is on top to whatever is on the bottom, a way of looking past what is insignificant to what is likely not significant.

A wood tinman.

One steps out of the shade of the tree into the sun and quickly one is too hot. By stepping back against the trunk it is not long until one is on the verge of shivering. In the dappling transitional zone the sound of the leaves in the breeze is constant and maddening (even if the temperature is bearable). If one were to climb to the crown of the tree where the light and wind blend in a near hush, one could hurl oneself to the ground with a whir and a thump. Or, one could whistle and sway and feel inadequate, desperately inadequate.

To be of use, some simple, momentary or enduring, undeniable use.

Into the coming day one can bully and bulge, inch by inch, hair by hair, eyes straining for the glory door. Or, a glance and a grimace, a partial blackout, eyes upon the sky's light.

The marvelous cabinet where the elemental morsels are hid, rusted flanges of structure, hinges immersed in foundation, embered with scaffolds, imbued with factory steam. one days, one nights, one turns out one's lights.

One puts one's foot in the dinghy and the craft is unstable on the still water; one puts two filled boots in the boat and all routine business goes topsy-turvy; one shoves one's hand in the water and fish come to suck; one sticks one's head into the dark pool and one sees aquatic gears, cabled linear traction, modified pulley truth.

This house will not let one speak, this house will not let one sleep; one climbs the tree beside the house to look across its roof, to look down upon the bleak square of backyard, the half-hearted fence that keeps little in and nothing out.

:So one says, after the inhale, exhale, inhale, exhale [So one hears: “The unstoppable breathing, the keep going apparatus, perpetuation of the ridiculous, assistance to the sovereign legacy of life, upon the back of one’s hands, upon one’s other’s chest, the rack of those ribs, the navel, that remnant of the ancient airway...”]: “To be a fish in the deep blue sea, to be a limpid mollusk, a seahorse in a death box, an anemone of ocean floor love, to be a liquid abider, current prone, afraid of the heights above [So one hears: “The embraced breath, mouth to lungs, lungs to bloodstream, refreshed by the occasional disengaging gasp, a system of loosening and stiffening, the mouths locked, a hand on a shadow, a finger in a waterglass, colored gravel on the tongue transferable to the other tongue...”], afraid of shipwrecked genitals”:

:So one says, while skirting nightly activities, hovering along the rain gutters of rooftops, obsolete antennas, broken-bricked chimneys [So one hears: “This is not what one knows is important, even if one does not know what is important, if one did know what was important one doubtless knows this would not be it...”]: “To be a colored strip of light, tubed and blinking, twisted and configured and electrified, aiding in information dispersal, clamped to structure with semi-rusted assurance, ever modern and nostalgic, a method of sharing potency, inviting what is exterior to be interior, commercial sirening”:

:So one says: “To the stomach goes the spoils, the spoiled, the spoiling acid covenants, the shouldn’t haves and the would’ve preferred not tos, the bile of ages, chewing the fat, stewing in the juices” [So one hears: “Wild is the brain, stirring is the wheat, shafted is the silo, blank is the mind...”]:

All of our buildings are falling, have fallen, were never built.

:So one says: “A telling of one and one’s other, one’s other being one’s one, one’s one potentially arising from other alls, and all others becoming better because of one’s one, one’s self being inadequate as one’s other, one’s other becoming a portion of one’s self [So one hears: “To be secreted, a globule of muck from a stranger’s stray organ...”],

the tenable other, the unassailable other, the other out of all proportions, the other's other must not be other than one”:

Light creates observational space.

Space, without light, becomes indivisible void, rendering movement as idea.

Motes shown by a slant of sun into a room through steep windows collectively carry linguistics.

Aurora borealis (and australis) sky riplings, rainbows, prisms from crystals hung in trailer windows and swirled onto walls say something.

Light off of a swimming pool surface onto a glass half empty of water can be read.

Creation happens whenever light is perceived (as new or good or speedy or necessary).

Light blurs texture into pattern; languages are patterns; light frees language from sound.

Shadows are observational spaces.

What brings one shadows, those lengthening happinesses and shortening sorrows, is not only light, light resistant objects and shadow receptive surfaces, dawn to twilight exteriors, interior lamplight, or earnest moonshine but our ability to distinguish certainty from accommodation.

Shadows can be seen but not felt; lack of light can be felt, not seen.

There exist paintings (one knows the ones) of piazzas abake in the grip of afternoon death and melancholy, rooftop flags stiff, greenish skies, facades, staffage, possibly a locomotive or a clock; even these shadows, outshadowing most all of their cousins, on canvas or off, cannot burn the palm like noon baked metal.

There are dark darks (corners, closets, hallways) and darker darks (cabinets, drawers) and even darker darks approaching darkest darks (mouths).

One could trace the whole of a silo's shadow, or that of a country highway billboard, or that of a water tower, keeping one's body within its shade except for one arm outstretched, palm up, sunlight warming the arm up to the elbow.

Do this alone, equinoxed, not solsticed, wearing clothing of solid muted colors, possibly corduroy, anticipating imminent corrugation.

In the forest, dense and mighty, one can move from the generic shade atop pine needles between the trunks to the particular shadier recess of a hollow tree or a massive fallen log.

Shadows, like the untongued, are marvelous for what they are missing, for what they spare one.

Hope holds that a time approaches when we will value the space between matter, the rest between sounds, and the vacuum between ideas as equally as the matter, the sounds, the ideas.

Some shadows are quiet; some are silent.

The shadow cast upon the Earth by the Moon during a solar eclipse could be said to be *louder* than that thrown by the Earth upon the Moon during a lunar eclipse.

What a huge difference, opposite ways of seeing, whether one views a shady space while immersed in sunlight, or whether one stares into the glare of the day from a shadowy retreat.

Between sunlight and shade lurks an interstitial university.

From within a cathedral, or a cave, or a cadillac, gazing out into day or electric luminescence, one feels equally public and private, hidden and exposed, involved and aloof.

If, as has been said, life is an illusion, a shadow, a story, if all life is a dream and dreams themselves are only dreams, then the passage from shadow to light is a kind of awakening, a kind of bright death.

Physical privacy is held too aloft, whereas private language, in all its supposed self-defeating codex shutting, is myopically maligned, everybody being their stand alone vernacular.

From the bottom of a pencil cup, looking up toward a stained ceiling past the shafts of implements, some wooden, some plastic, some refracting light, the shadow one is in is plural.

From a shoe, or a toy pail, or an empty brown medicine bottle, where there is sufficient shadow (sufficiency, as much as anything, is indeterminate), one can watch the world go by with parallel aplomb.

Quitting must always, for the sake of bare bones dignity, be an open option at any point in any game in which nobody wins.

From under a travel sweater, through whose head-hole one's head is yet to emerge, strong wet smell and scratch of wool, weather warming, one sees the world as if it were somehow incomplete, although it could be argued the view from any given hole is as complete as when one's head at last breaks clear of the cloth.

From under a foot that has been raised to negotiate a step, the shadow growing paler as the foot continues its ascent, one feels the world brightening.

Motion fills and empties shadows of their black as fully as does obfuscation (say, clouds) or do alterable levels of light (say, Earth rotation).

From an escarpment (say, a brick wall) where the shadow has been thrown from below (say, a floodlight blocked by a sign of some sort) one cannot logically be said to be able to 'crawl out from under' the shadow's oppression.

From the valley of the shadow of death one stares stupefied at the hill
of the blaze of birth.

The shadow knows just what the lightning bugs, the burning bush, the
yellow suns and the wattage lack.

What shadows kiss hath but a shadow's bliss, granted, but that bliss is
not insubstantial even if it be without substance.

Telephone wires cast shadows as sheet music bars along highways
outside of hamlets, outside of towns, outside of cities. Clumps of
wildgrass become the notes to sing.

What a thrill it is to follow one's airliner shadow as it slides across an
unfamiliar landscape.

Shadows thrown into the air, into the sky, without anything to lay
themselves upon or across, are shadows nevertheless.

:So one says, while above the timberline where the airstream gleams, below
the timberline where the current roils, alpine moth to cavern salamander, jagged shard
to smoothed stone [So one hears: "Motion from here to here is an impossibility, a
matterful negation, a way of couching it in a summer shack on an insectless swamp
night, near nude and flowery bent..."]: "One grasps the range without traversing the stiff
distance, there to there is a conceptual trope if one hesitates to make one of the theres a
here, if one refuses to here any there":

:So one says, prong into casing [So one hears: "When keeping it furthest
forward, keep it furthest forward, the blood limit at its most stretched pulse, pale stem
as plunged as plum tip, no fraction or increment of withdrawal, not for even the most
immeasurable moment, not for need or friction or reassertion or the arousal of any
secret spot, keep it forward, keep it furthest forward..."]: "Here one abides and here one
is abided and here one and one abiding is two as an abode, outside meshed to inside,
double warmth, double moist, thrust as taut as grip is tight":

And so the fury unshingles the house, unbarks the tree, peels the clothing
from a doll in the field, dulls the fence barbs into nubs, huddles stones
against fresh ruins, polishes hands held before squinted eyes.

The bush, the scrub, the brush: all this is a superior substitute for the almighty forest. A place to squat, shelter enough, sky still accounted for, residually naive.

A boat is fashioned from a fallen house to sail away in the gap between storms but it grows roots and moors itself far from sight of land.

One stands smiling and squinting against recognition, or not smiling at all but glancing off toward some out-framed horizon, neck tendon treating an absence, before the rain begins, before one has an urge to be elsewhere, after one has swallowed half of the day.

Keeping items in their places (wooden screws in metal drawers, marshmallows in flannel pockets) is enough to make one's hands shake; every thing's proper place is wherever it happens to be and yet nothing can stay where it is for very long, out of the more light into the less light, into the less late, into the less long.

So one moves one's hands away from one another, an unclapping. One cannot insist upon silence. One knows nothing of silence while one has breath, while one is; once one is not, if one can ever be not, then, well, silence. Out of unnoising, nonetheless, comes pulse quickening, sprung hope.

All spring hopes for winter, hating midsummer for its wilting heat, that point just past spring's fulfillment and furthest from its promise.

One knows outside from inside and prefers those spaces with something of both, the inbetween territories, half and half with air and enclosure, shelter and exposure, a roof without a floor or vice-versa, walls with open sky, portals, porches, patios, sunshine at a slant, the extremes are less vital than the fulcrum.

One frequents a mown field where no ball is played, an emergency airstrip never once needed, no cattle, one tree off in the corner as if it were the number on a postage stamp. A storm off to the south. Come, lightning, here one stands.

:So one says, while listening for a mark to unbend, an uncurling of chimney smoke, an unfurling of hair after the wintering farm hood is flipped back [So one hears: “The chance is narrowed when the prayer is one of arithmetic, when the hope is bargained as self-fulfillment, a filtering of belief out of geometric mystery...”]: “Sanctuary between petals, curiosity between lips, power of propaganda between breasts, these forgettings began as projections, flickering amplifications, hollow legs on one shouldering good wide lives, blood surge and semen spray, egg wiggle, a walk in November fields with hands clasped together under a sweatshirt, fingertip to navel, one shoe untied and laces dew wet, a startled flock in flux like liquid pouring over the horizon, the ruts in the road proofed by yesterday’s travel, knee showing through a rip in the jeans, the back of the knee welcoming cold morning air wraparound, the mouth unthirsty [So one hears: “A swoon begins with a willingness to relinquish some resolute *now* in return for some absolute *later*, a sprawled darkening as preface to full length lightening, one is not to blame if one is unconscionable toward everything...”]; one locates solace in twice-remembered memory, once as image, once as sound, the audio trailing the visual as speed of sound does light, all becoming thrice-forgotten experience”:

:So one says, bathed in a glass of dust, nose pressed to the thick slick surface [So one hears: “The storm surge brings down the beach house, pulls it to driftwood, piles it on the ocean floor as a bonfire for drowned sailors, leaving just enough earthbound for one to build a roughened dollhouse, a tabletop field shack with cauliflower trees and a plastic figure in the initial knee-bucklings of a faint...”]: “What one fishes from one’s pockets, be they shallow and translucent or vast and cushioned, plumbing those reefs and depths, spreading the loot out upon one’s kitchen table, an everyday fortune, banal and fathomed, precious and unique, this and that and those and these, unhockable, unsellable, beyond barter or philanthropy, raffle or auction, covenant or cornerstone or cemetery plot, something to tuck under the tongue, to fasten into the spleen, to mount in the eye, what one holds in one’s palms mustn’t disappoint but ever and ever does, what one has done in a lifetime is undone in a wink, what one clutches in a moment cannot be yanked away in a planet’s history of hurricanes, the ground is there to break one’s fall (outside) or the sink is readily busted (inside)[So one hears: “Nailed to the exterior of the door are the rules of exit, compliments of tomorrow...”]; what one discerns in the trees where they once lived, the soil in which they hunted, the sky from where they watched one sprout and heave and grow, such discernment is founded upon the frank concurring of an admitted individual striving for general dissemination, some

there, some way over there, some far from way over there”:

:So one says, bonnet missing, shoes missing, blouse missing, standing in the after-harvest field, wind abated, horizon scuffed, porcelain cheeks cold and scratched but not reddened, hair tangled back away from brow [So one hears: “One dreams one thought one dreamt of thinking, one thinks one dreamt a thoughtful dream, a dreamy thought...”]: “The knee is exposed, and behind the cap is sinew and tendons and joint capable of helping to implement a kneel, whether that knee or its companion or both touch the ground, whether there is penitence or decorum or gratification or mild vertigo, whether re-verticalization or pronation follows, damp dirt sticking to the unshaven hairs and also clumping in the loose white strings of torn material, the cold early air certainly concentrated on the cap itself [So one hears: “Grief is as potent as guilt, but when arriving together they cancel out one another’s vibrancy as red and green meet to become brown...”] and upon a doll partially undressed, one and one’s sister exchanging clothes, the house back over the slope in future disarray, in shameless indefatigable collapse, waiting for something inanimate to entrap, one on the way toward plastic or enamel or wood (if wood, the entrapment is more temporary, less permanent), one with harvest chaff in lungs, sawdust in loins”:

:So one says, crop circles in mind, back of the hand geometry, heartland patterns viewed from accessible air, night cloud motions imagined from a solo bed in a collaborative house, sheets sopping, pillows on floor, string running taut from around one big toe to the lamp chain [So one hears: “Shuck space, shirk time, shove meaning...”]: “Not having to discuss anything unimportant or of supposed importance is the sublime gift of one’s friend to one, and one, being a friend to one’s friend, reciprocates, making the talk necessarily sporadic, naturally strung with silence and lulls, but away from one’s friend and one’s one, one must endure the chatter and the insipid sounds of living, the non-panic of squeaks and clicks and gurgles and mumbles, lives asserting their animacy, insisting upon their entitlement to secrete and consume and widen and fill, dispensing one’s insomnia to one as infernal memory, internal and confounded and circulatory [So one hears: “So one has this friend, the spiritmate, not the soulmate, not one’s one, but one’s other one, from childhood, or near childhood, or for a long while anyway, and the friend is in a bad way, needs a bit of taking care of, a lot of looking after, needs assistance (though ambulatory) to get from anywhere to anywhere else, emotionally empty of volition (one knows the place), and so one totes this friend around as a beam...”], bloodstream specific, night and day and night”:

One paints the wood not because the wood needs painting but because the paint needs wooding, a surface to spread itself out upon.

Gravity is as easily created and cheated as sleep.

Petrified houses (tumbled and broken, stacked and scattered) litter the hillsides above the foaming sea, telling of effort finally come to fruition.

What moves when one is not moved (there is no utter unmotion, no absolute still point), when one is unmoved, when one becomes immovable, where is the corresponding movement, the excusable mobility, the forgiven motion.

The house creaks its settlement toward false stability, toward becoming a plagued landmark of historical significance, visited and painted and photographed and filmed and gawked at, toward ultimate collapse, rubble and ruin, archaeological remembrance, excavation, restoration, numerical wonderment, new swoon.

One always and never gets out with time to spare.

[So one (head bruised, teeth chattering) hears: “We, as humans, when we fall, do so with the hope and intention of getting back up, resuming our day, going along with the goings on, but we, as objects, when we fall, do so resigned to staying put awhile, unless some force soon applies its force (some inexorable force will eventually apply its force), ‘staying put’ being inaccurate phrasing, erroneous beyond figurative approximation, blatantly wrong except as metaphor (nothing is not metaphor, everything has something else standing in for it). We, always subject to falling, often subjected to having fallen, permanent subjects of a fall, stand, when we stand, with bemused and frightened little looks upon our faces, waiting for the balance to irretrievably shift from more individuals standing than not, to more of us forever flat on our bellies than not, the only eventual way to stand out being to stand firm (heroic and impossible) or to stand up (saintly and fictional), the sky sparks, the sky crumples, then there is no sky, no cloud cover, no blue, no black even, no stars, no color and no non-color, no void, nothing beyond nothing, making perspective not even a possibility, not even a hope of

hope, not even a foundation of emptiness, not even a feeling of pride or power or illicit knowledge or shock or anything remotely anything, no language, no notation, no slide toward any glass, no waiting for any potency, no new way of seeing, no new way of seeing...”]

[So one (head throbbing, teeth clenched) hears: “We, as ones, as ones with and without ones and other ones, are not one, were never one, won’t be one in some great by and by, oneness being a construct, a frightened reverie fabrication, so much so that we aren’t even ourselves ones, but manys, detritus held together by temporary proximal illusionary circumstance, colored aquarium gravel at the toes of a sunken waving skeleton, every bright chunk yet to crumble into pebbles, and subsequently into specks, and everlastingly into diminishing particles of unseeable substance, material certainty, infinite regress divinity; one need not concern oneself with oneness but with cohesion...”]

So one dreams The rooster crows from the sub-atomic farmyard, the weathervane melts under the noon lab lamp, the barn roof sags to its stalls in the spiraling twilight, shooting stars collide and divide all the live long night while one thinks This is not what is wanted, this macrocosm in a microcosm wraparound stew, this stirring of everything into nothing, anything into something; what is wanted is October memory, wandering in those troubled hills of low clouds and wet boulders, slippery patches of leaves and fallen logs, eyes on the mist among the lower branches of the evergreens, hair in hood, damp strands cold down around one’s collarbones and nape, one knee scraped, heels of hands scraped, palms scraped or What is actually wanted is arboretum nostalgia, one with one’s friend watching palms sway on a smoggy afternoon, the resilient slender trunks coaxing the eyes to the clump of fronds against the peach and aqua sky, their movements more alluring than any stripclub genius, they will physically outlast one and one’s one and one’s other one and one’s everyone, not only in their palmness, but

*those exact palms, where they stand, beyond a century,
to be gazed upon while sitting on a bench beside one's
dozing friend, legs crossed, trousers without a rip,
shoes unsullied.*

:So one says, while flattening one's nose against the pane [So one hears: "Culpability is distributed as automated self-serve miserabilia..."]: "To be rain, to fall one time as one particular drop, to hurtle from weather toward land or water or structure or (this could be a long list) treetop, to strike a leaf, to slide off onto a limb, to join others in a rivulet down a trunk's bark ravine to the ground, to seep into the soil, to be soaked up by the roots and journey skyward through the tree's interior back toward the earlier struck leaf, everything has its path, and every path is perpetual, and 'everlasting' is without the grace of fundament or the peace of eventuality [So one hears: "Speech is too imprecise to merit surgery or jewelry, it should be stockpiled or recycled or tossed out in the field to sink away into the mud..."], 'forever' has no legitimate opposite, to be water in water, in the bottom half of a glass beside a vacated suburban pool, in an industrial asphalt puddle, in the fountain in front of the palace, in the brook behind the grove, in the belly of the architect, in a raingutter of the teetering house, in the saliva of an obsolete orator waiting for the bullet that never comes, to be liquid within liquid, to be privately secreted in a public moment, unlike drool from a hunting dog's mouth, unlike tears from a suddenly exhausted emergency worker, unlike the sticky goop from the pads of an amphibian in a subterranean cave [So one hears: "A mark on a page is not comparable to a mark in the sky, or a mark on one's sister's lower back, or a mark in strata from ancient upheaval, one being renderable, the others being rendered, one being prone to duplication, the others rare..."], to be fluid within a solid ('fluid' and 'solid' understood as approximations), blueblood within weathered fence paling marrow, espresso in a tombstone, happy sweat coursing through the threads of an orange and brown afghan on a pull-out bed in a dumpy engineless camper, hydrogen twice and oxygen plus, seeking the low spot, the local dead sea, past the alkaline fields and the saline reservoirs, into the magma bloated kidney [So one hears: "A nest is built a twig at a time, sprig to straw, string to leaf, discarded materials woven, warp and woof, bent tension, deft fingers and weft mouth, knob into crook, twirl and loop, the bowl takes shape suddenly and profoundly, gorgeous hollow of comfort and refuge, the waiting and biding, the internal effort and the awesome insistence, that initial peek over the tangled lip..."], into the deeper global system":

One constructs a nest the size of a honeymoon cottage, sticks and limbs and pliant branches, pillowed with countless dandelion puffs, the nest tucked away under an abandoned water tower in the hills above a collapsing town, a sweet place to hunker and nap.

Hush now the making and the unmaking and focus on the unverbbed.

Debris slide, rubble trough.

So one thinks Ambition becomes regret, passivity becomes shame, desire becomes nostalgia, pride becomes no one unless assigned without motive by someone else, prestige becomes patronization, talk goes bargain basement, the revolving door, death becomes rescindable, the rolling wheel while one dreams out on the refreshed field, in one corner of its flatness, the tree that was struck by lightning smolders, scorched but flameless, pushing smoke into the crisper air, putting out sufficient heat to warm one's hands and flush one's cheeks, while inside this tree is an endless sky, ashen and replenishable, textual and flickering, near and far and tactile and untouchable, while outside this tree is a darkening day, moist dirt, the aroma of after-rain and of wood consuming itself from the inside out, as if its viscera were stoked with coals or out on the wind-lashed field one stands blackened, galvanized into a lopsided iron post by an electric shaft shot from above and below through one's heels and spine and halo horns.

Any epidermis distances what is outside from what is within, the creator of this and that through the lie of distinction, its permeability allowing it to get away with being a hypocritical sieve.

Erotic skin is a salve for one's inability to exchange fluids and cartilage with another of one's choice (one's one, one's other one).

A walnut shell, a peach pit, an olive stone, tree bark, a scab on a knee.

Language is a crushing blow withstood only by silence, just as shadows survive the absence of light by simply shrugging off their losses.

Touch is *the* sense of animal creation, but it was voice that brought all substance into being, and speech will crumble it down.

:So one says, while lowering the shade, going further down than one has thought to go before [So one hears: “Successive nights immeasurable bring a terrible comfort, a comforting terror, an inanimate persistence so far beyond life as to stun one into a blackout slump...”]: “Exterior light seen from interior space is as alluring as interior light glimpsed from exterior space (depending, naturally, upon one’s circumstances) and this is true, to a lesser extent, of interior light within an interior space and exterior light out in an exterior space, these being marvelous sources of balm and freedom, but not as wistful, not as agonizing or as poignant or as indicative of that existential wink and nod, light coming so much from the ‘let there be’ that it is still the welcome newcomer, the eve to the adam darkness, and the bride is ever adored over the groom [So one hears: “Gone is the one with hair in hood, gone is the one with snow on blanket, gone is consciousness and all things bright...”], adorned and envied and emulated and tragicomic”:

So one dreams The friend wakes while one dozes on the dappled bench, hair tousled, mouth ajar, the friend grins at one’s sudden vulnerability (one who is typically guarded and coy), and watches with bemused care as a honeybee lands upon one’s breeze blown cowlick, trying not to bother brushing it away if a small measure of patience and trust will suffice, the bee treating one’s hair as a flower, as if in pursuit of mental nectar while one thinks This day becomes that day as soon as the rooster shouts, as soon as the leaf blower across the street is cranked, as soon as the clock chimes an hour as reasonable as it is unreasonable, one swoons out of sleep, hair out of hood, snow off of blanket, the house re-erected and arrogant, the doll’s blouse buttoned to the chin, one’s jeans intact, laces neatly

looped and tied or This way of mulling must give way to narration, spoken narrative, steady and true, focused and reliable, a telling of a walk in the grove or a stroll down the rutted path or a frantic flight across the fields or a calm conscious striding into the waves...

:So one says, housed, prone and alone in the mid-morning mid-summer gloaming [So one hears: “A skyscraper topples upon a dollhouse and the dollhouse maintains its integrity, four walls upright and a watertight roof (its brick-patterned metal chimney a little bit crumpled, a cardboard painting askew above the cute couch in the living room, a tiny dish or two rattled off the hutch shelves onto the kitchen floor)...”]: “So that is a ceiling, that is a ceiling lamp, that is a hanging plant, that is a smoke detector, that is an abandoned spider’s web, that is a serious crack in the plaster, that is a dirty transom, that is whatever *that* is [So one hears: “The dollhouse one day falls upon the accompanying doghouse that squats in its lime green yard, denting the pitched red roof, jarring the porcelain doberman back deeper into the protective shadows...”], and it is doubtless that one’s ceiling more often lowers to meet one than one ever rises to meet it”:

:So one says (hands covering one’s ears): “One has one’s one or one has one’s other, or if one does not have one’s one or one’s other one has a memory or a dream of one’s one or one’s other, or if one does not have a memory or a dream of one’s one or one’s other one has one’s thing or a memory or a dream of one’s thing, even if the having or the remembering or the dreaming is pluperfect, even if one’s having of one’s self is past perfect, past adequate, past tolerance, and so this saying goes on and on, unstoppable, a trickle, a torrent, words upon words, a babble, a flood, and lowering one’s lids toward virgin sleep or back toward known sleep does nothing to threaten the spoken tides, nor would fully waking to assault the day, nor would an undeniable frontal faint, nor a facial color-draining limb-splaying backward splat, nor a stiff-armed square-jawed power play, nor a clever entrepreneurial feint, nor a governor’s pardon, nor a wing and a prayer, nor a neon colored rabbit’s foot, nor even a language drought; one has no choice but to acquiesce and listen, or put up a word barrage of one’s own (a story, most likely, most effectively, with beginning, middle and end, full of life slices and thrills, adventure and emotion, nuance and wisdom), or be swept out to sea”:

:So one says (fingers shoved into one’s ears): “We, as humans, as thinking

audience, receptive or fidgety, captive or cajoled, alone or collective, fall into the pit of assumption, the void of presumption, with tongues flapping and larynxes rattling, assured that, even if we are wrong we have our rights to be wrong, spewing is justified whether it be grotesque or lyrical, volcano mouths, ashes to ashes, thoughts aswirl, dreams as sparks, all fall down, believing 'exhaustive' to be a satisfactory substitute for 'pinpoint accuracy' or wielding a shotgun when a high-powered rifle is needed, words as hand grenades, language as strip mining, speech as clearcut, some of our ankles stiffening with desire to be replanted, some of our flanks feeling the solidarity of cabinetry, one of our tongues in one of our forested mouths in one of our lightheaded skulls curling into a wood chip, wary of sound, weary of voice”:

II

So one stares at the photos one took of oneself, days before, while pallid browed, about to faint away into the post-harvest mud, eyes toward a wind-washed heaven, adam's apple risen, shirt collar in stunning sunlight, the polaroid camera about to drop to the ground without regretful damage, half of a flock of birds in flight in frame against the autumn blue. One took the photos, ostensibly, to provide proof of one as perpetrator of a life. Arms stretched straight out, the beginning uphill motions of a smile, lightheadedness, equilibrium shift, thumb press, click, keel, thump. While staring at the photos, one courts the mood to pass out all over again, an interior swoon toward the kitchen sink, pale brow to meet paler porcelain, the cool blue tile floor refreshing to a burnished cheek, a polaroid skidding under the white rounded stove into the secretive gunk of such an unfrequented domestic recess. One's eyes would flutter, one's hipbone might hurt, one could imagine a doll erect in the field with blouse blown off and auburn hair elongated and tangled in the limbs of a nearby tree, one could project one's self into the kitchen of a dollhouse (still holding up under the weight of rubble from a fallen skyscraper) where one would be sprawled on the painted blue metal floor, a dish or two from the shaken hutch scattered about, a cauliflower tree visible through the glassless window, and one tries to no avail to think of oneself as a plastic figurine, posed, poorly painted by machine, a consciousness without bodily ambulation. One imagines a body big enough for there to be cuts to sleep in and one swallows.

So one stares at the photos one took of oneself, days before, moments ahead of the blackout, and one begins telling oneself a story, outloud and ornamental, just as always *The human, not the doll, hair in hood, goes down the early dawn rutted path to the field, the combines silent since the evening before, the work done and the workers dormant on this sunday morn, November chill, bird migration, a sweet doberman lurking by the silo, one's friend from the neighboring farm walking along the treebreak at the far end of the nearest field, gutting half of a loaf of bread by eating its interior while leaving the crust alone,*

resembling one's sister in oblivion (one's sister was never a doll), catching sight of one's sweatshirt hood and shifting direction to cross the field, the south wind suddenly rising into a fury, one's friend becoming a vertical doll in the dirt, a blouse thrown up into the gale, one stumbling and tearing one's jeans at the knee, scuffing one's palms, lying beside the path and watching a plane fly far off in the distance over telephone wires and other people's trees So one stops telling the story (it isn't much of a story) and one stops staring at the photos (they aren't very good photos) and one sits at one's kitchen table and became past tense, hands folded in one's lap, asleep in a wound *One was a spool (wooden blonde, not colored plastic), without thread, without pragmatic purpose any longer, abandoned on a closet floor, back behind the seldom worn shoes and the broken badminton rackets, in proximity to a shoehorn and some sort of discarded ratchet, reasonably content to hold one's position, to be upon carpet, in a shadowy place, out of the way. Now and again the closet door opened, there was instant light and a burst of activity, then one or both of those went away and the near darkness was back and the beauty of inanimacy undisturbed. This was one's way of being, an existence of waiting for something to happen, to become useful in a child's game, to be rewound with loose thread, to be tossed in the trash and hauled to a landfill, any or none of it being entirely wonderful* One knew this then and one knew it now.

So one said (while inbetween never-slumber and never-wake) what was on one's mind, that to have been a house, to have stood as shelter and haven, home and promise and balance, to have witnessed trees grow past the eaves, to have fallen unwillingly and prematurely in a fashion unchosen, to have let the inhabitants down, the young and the old, the people and their pets and their pests, to have failed to persevere, was more chagrin than one should be expected to bear, *to have been a structure, to have scraped the sky, say, taken a poke at heaven, only to topple on a severe and windy day, to crush the roof of a doll factory two city blocks away, one building having quickly been followed by another and yet another into the pavement below, the lemming effect, the most formidable metropolis gives way to the relentless levelling, the sprawl and the towering and the collapse being an ordinary process, like seasons, like breathing, like everything* more than matter was ever created to endure, the universe asks of its stuff only what its stuff is capable of giving, or so one assumes, considering oneself a compact conglomerate of some of that stuff, one among many, all finite, all malleable, all in the dark as to the shape of the whole (as the parts of one are to the shape of one) *like this hasn't all been said before, over and over, many different ways.*

So one heard (while fingering oneself with blood thickening pleasure in an ever darker closet) what was hearable, that duration and distance do not contain meaning,

that nothing is a part of anything else and all amalgams are illusions and all things are amalgams, there are no true building blocks, no foundation objects, no ultimate simples *One also heard the birds in the trees, the breeze through the leaves, the bending of one's knee, the creaks and pops of the settling of the house, the flow of one's circulation, the flaring of one's nerves, the swirl of one's dreams, the barking of a docile dog* So one has been told stories, gets told stories still, tells stories oneself, tells oneself stories, stories within stories, stories of stories, stories of fact as fiction, fiction as true, true and false as nonsense, nonsense as a maelstrom, stories as belief, a belief in stories, a howling hurricane of stories bearing down upon one's narrative-free shack, windows unboarded, storm cellar undug *keeping one wistful about one's individuality or the possibility of durable community, maintaining the delusion of the what next, the doll as obvious signifier, the hair in hood as trope, the trees timbering as fetish, the 'so' as linguistic ploy, the 'one' as self-defeating, the listing and lyricism as self-lullaby, the maxims as paranoiac prayer, all of the alling as knock on wood, as there but for the grace of, as nevermind.*

This, then, became memory almost as soon as its happening became event, mattering itself into matter, transitioning into another kind of story, one with linear volition, a different beast altogether, a story one could sink one's, a story one could wrap one's, a believable fiction of logic and conviction and emotion and *One time, upon a tall sea, out under the forever after, one sailed toward a happy town, a harbor place, toward a hillside park where once one had lost a pencil in the grass, a nub of an implement, worn down almost beyond sharpening, shorter than a child's thumb, having fallen through a hole in one's skirt pocket motivation* *The sea lifted the little ship well above the rooftops of the world, and from the masthead one searched among the distant chimneys for a wisp of familiar smoke, that particular curl and aroma from bed dried wood, from a chimney waiting for one to be near enough for it to wobble and fall, so it could flatten the pansies and the sweet williams, so it could scatter the water from the birdbath, so it could shatter one's skull, and resonance, a story to end all stories and begin a couple more so one could vanish into the lawn like a stub of a pencil slipping out of a pocket.*

Soon after, after that story and whichever of its cousins have been told and absorbed, told again and dispersed, told and told and told, sanctioned and archived, retold on occasion at occasions, one could begin to project into the subjunctive, into the if one were to, the so one should (if only one would), wholeheartedly into the mights and maybes, *So one would wander the harborcoat streets deep into the day in search of the incline that led to the park that led to the stone couch that led to the sack lunch and the skewering nostalgia and (if one were to admit it to oneself) the showering gratitude, sunlight and shadows, air and skin, twilight having made its way past blue into that most startling of*

purples possibility having no more basis than cold hard facts (and no less), what is yet to take place being so intertwined with what has gone by, whatever is going by, that from one perspective (if the risen leaves don't block one's vantage point) they are one and the same thing, indistinguishable, inseparable, liquid sloshing about in a sphere *so that one would be capable of coming upon the park in the quarter-light and stumbling upon the boot of a hungry sleeper and rolling head-over-heels down the steep slope toward the sparkly waters.*

So one will say (while negotiating the imagined gulf between image and imagination) what has already been said (leaving the inexpressible to the mute and the sage and the dead), that parables and fables have the inherent power to instruct and illuminate, that bedtime stories and fairy tales often have the potency to permanently awaken, that fish stories and campfire tales *One will land (after the tumble that followed on the heels of the trip) upon a stack of firewood behind a quayside pub, the bartender coming out to collect a double armful to stoke the hearth, and one will be hauled inside as if mistaken for a fagot, a stubby stick without lead or eraser, and thrown into the flames as tinder to warm the hearts and skins of the pub's patrons* are a collective sigh to fend off the blasphemy of taking selves too seriously, to ward off the sin of actuality with a pinch of the sin of fabrication *and the least known portion of one's self will curl out of the chimney into the milky night air and float above the rooftops and over the hillside park where the poor famished one is sitting up surveying the pencil nub found moments earlier in the cold grass.*

So one will hear (while navigating the narrow straits between realism and idealism) what is easily heard, that one thing leads to another, a necklace of causality, a bracelet of, a ring of truth to, fingernails down a chalkboard, the under the fingernail torture of this is the way it is and this is the way it will ever be, *Back across the conjured ocean to the fields and the cycle of days and seasons, to the dizzy doll and the birds on the wing, the spool and the little dishes and the torn jeans,* past, present and future, then, now and later, soon and never, here and there, this and that, fact and fiction, story and paradox, one and one's one, one's one and one's other, one and other, *the tree becoming flesh and the flesh becoming wood* or so one would say, if one were to say something, if one were to say anything at all.

III

So one imagines A we, wooed by and wed to wood, aspened and bristleconed, papered and domiciled, life-ringed as one venerable tree. One develops into an intricate mahogany marionette, kite-stringed and rosy-lipped, the other into a ventriloquist's dummy, shabbily clothed, and we put our wooden noggins together (one with lustrous curls and the other croquet bald) while we slump against the interior flank of a steamer trunk, one that is ultimately bottom-of-the-ocean bound. We are happy. We sit in the stuffy dark with a fingerless hand upon a thigh, a string rubbing against an ear, hard shoe tips touching. Nothing will disturb us now until some intermediate destination is reached, whereupon we will be slightly jostled while the well-packed but not jam-packed trunk is transferred from ship to train, or from train to taxi, or from taxi to theater, so that the hand might slip off the thigh, a string might twang across a glossy cheek, our shoes might tap together a time or two. Then, peace and immobility again, until a rehearsal, when we are removed from the trunk into the world of human action, and afterwards, inbetween practice and performance, there is the unpleasant likelihood of being set upon a counter or in chairs without any of our appendages or surfaces touching, and without verifiable knowledge of the whereabouts of the

other, even if the other be in close proximity, but there is also the possibility that we will be placed in such a manner that we might stare unblinkingly at one another, sending concentrated gazes of the most intoxicating sort across whatever space separates us. Sometimes, within the trunk, while in transit or waiting for travel to resume, one of us is laid upon the other and the unstoppable touching is shock inducing, far beyond the sensation of the saw or the adz or the plane or the sander or the duster or the paintbrush or the costumer's hands or the master's fingertips. To be unable to move is magical, forgivable. To swap clothes (not as a change of one's own outfits, which is common enough, but with one another) would be a delight, one would suppose; to inhabit what the other had so recently filled, to feel what had been felt.

As a we, as toothpicks stuck in finger sandwiches at a holiday party, as twin splinters in a throbbing tongue, as the post and the beam of a burning lawn cross, we validate the soliloquy unto the chorus, the monotone within the harmony, the two shackled to the ad nauseam knee-jerk pastoral three, we twine and link and pulse and flicker and dichotomize and flex and shimmy and shine...

A tree and a tree don't make an orchard (or a forest or a copse or a stand or a windbreak or a grove), but a tree and a tree constitute a we, and as a we, we wave our limbs at our limbs and wrap our roots around our roots and squeeze with joy, we suck up moisture and sunlight and we foster nests, we spread shade and dapplings and blustery rustlings and leaf death, we crack sidewalks and shatter pipes and stove in house roofs when we drop hefty limbs

in bad weather. We allow migratory perchings. We spook on blowzy moonlit nights. We provide sap for romantic tragedies.

All of reflection amounts to all of creation. Whatever is, is remembered, and whatever is recalled, is called into being, accurate or falsified making no difference whatsoever.

Memories are as shadows. When the object and a light source are present, a shadow is subsequent. Where there is life and an observer, there is memory, be it emphatically exaggerated or denied or embraced, be it immediately forgotten or forgotten again or catalogued as indispensably dispensable and filed away in the safest available fortified nook after each and every dispensing.

As a we, two popsicle sticks, distinguished by decorative colorful markings, child chosen and rendered, child clutched and tossed into the surge of gutter water provided by a green garden hose, an armada of sticks jockeying for victory, a race to the end of the long L-shaped block where the water disappears into a storm drain, challenges abounding, such as debris dams and too shallow asphalt eddies, rambunctious dogs, automobile tires and poor-sported kids, one wishes to float alongside the other in a perpetual dead heat, often touching thin sides, occasionally one riding up upon the other and staying thus stuck for the duration of a driveway or two, not comprehending enough of the future to fear the possible accidental plunge into the drain of only one of the two of us, should there be sudden child absentmindedness or disregard, one of those miserable twists of fate

(or serendipitous, when it turns in one's favor, the rarer direction) that leaves one heart-strangled and fetused and gulping for air (unless one is a popsicle stick, at which point language fails).

And so we persist as one and as other, other being other only when there is one to be other to, one being one only where there is other to be other to, as parallel bed frame slats under a saggy mattress, as consecutive railroad ties in trestle track above a dry wash, as adjacent floorboards in a squalid house vacant now for quite some time, and we flavor life as a tick and a tock, a heave and a ho, a proverbial and a quintessential, and we become the oars of a rowboat, one side and the other, together keeping the craft propelled straight and steady, working in tandem, the water not as cold as the air, but as with our days as marionette and dummy, we function only to the level of the quality of our making and the skill of whatever animate mover guides us, the culpability of failure and the glory of success having no way of sticking to us, no way of gaining purchase, no genuine connection to our individual existences (only our circumstantial being).

This could go on indefinitely, this solo make-believing of objects as lives, having, by nature, no goal, no desire for resolution (of either the wrap-up or focus kind), no active collaborator, no impartial mediator, no inherent time constraints, no knowable over-arching structure, no universal *raison d'Être*, no comprehensible continuity, no pathos or pith or epiphanies, no

IV

:So one says [So one hears: “So one says what one is thinking, what dreams surface through one’s esophagus, what nonsense seeps out of the pores of one’s imagination, saying these things with impunity, spewing them into one’s cupped hands, pretentious shellshock, a version of self-suffocation by word inundation, a calculated piling on after a perfunctory blitzkrieg, a rising tide of disassociated blather while absurdities and platitudes rain down upon one’s lap, a stew of poor man’s philosophy potatoed with anecdotal sentiment and non-sequitur gibberish, a steamy pot of high-end vocabulary, all for the purposes of avoidance, an emotional glance-away when suddenly glanced at, a psychological pin-the-tail-on-the-donkey with a tail but no donkey, metaphorical mush, a self-served subpoena to provide a true-to-life deposition of an autobiographical autopsy, a soft-shoe off in the wings hours after the show’s cancellation is announced to no audience, a hubbub of shadowplay in a vacant lot on a dying sunday afternoon, and one has been told that once in the roundabout one need never yield again as long as one stays circling...”]: “So one hears what one wants to hear, angelic whisperings of consolation for one about to faint into one’s sink water, and one tries convincing oneself that one’s willingness to put all the tiny dishes back onto the hutch and to even put the painting straight above the adorable couch in the living room will compensate for one’s massive mediocre failings, one’s mass of self-loathing, one’s amassing of language waste, one’s wanting existence and sentience as a thing, but without the obligations or choices of a whole lifetime, and who can fault one for saying what one wants to hear, and who would cut out one’s own tongue if one’s tongue were found to be the emissary to one’s soul, and who would hold one’s own tongue if it felt like moldy flannel, and who would make a vow of silence knowing one gurgles in one’s sleep, and knowing that if texture is language then certainly pattern and sound are too, and so one hears what one says before it is said, and one spouts faith and folderol and enough encouragement to spin one’s head and send one crashing to the linoleum, y-axis plateaus to x-axis under

the vertigo plane, and one imagines the dirty floor to be waxed blue tile, one coming around to the aroma of lemon and envisioning the ceiling opening out to reveal a deep sky of wandering stars [So one hears: “What one desires is simple eloquence, an autumn evening elegance of expression, a post-harvest articulation of a free-will job done well and the honorable predestined disappointment, surveying a season lived that one knows to be severely inadequate but that also must always be good enough, somehow just good enough no matter its inadequacy, as with all life, short of the mark but fine, acceptable, utterly okay...”], or one buckles to the ground under the white-noise sky of a surprise squall, doll or no doll, dog beside the silo or no dog beside the silo, wearing jeans and a hooded sweatshirt or wearing a skirt with holes in its pockets, or one falls out of bed, hitting one’s head on the bedside table, knocking over a glass half-full of water, forgetting for the time being what one had been dreaming”:

So one goes about one’s day,
the gradual or alarming awakening, the building of a crucial fire or the turning up of the furnace, the splashing of cold river water on one’s face or the warm oblation shower, the boiling of mush or breakfast at the big table or a bite on the fly, a glimpse of birds scattering out of a tree or a glance at the morning paper or a nod at the too loud kitchen television, the walk to the fields or the drive to the office or the bus to school or the train to the factory, tedium and challenge and tasks and tokens, effort and pride and embarrassment and shame, and this one whom one has spoken of, thought of, dreamt of, heard from, imagined, this one goes about this one’s day in a similar way, ears open, eyes open, mouth opens, an apologetic sound, a day languaged into submission before one is even vertical, words offered to a captive ceiling, a ceiling quite aware of its duty to stay put, this one’s wake-up chatter being the opposite of bedtime prayers, a litany of justifications for immobility and discontinuance of breathing, a hardening of the arteries way beyond heart-attack risks, a stiffening of the joints, a thickening of the mind, a congealing of the will.

This, then, is the greatest place on Earth, this wherever one happens to be place, this certainly as good as anywhere else place, this here place, this now place, the sure satisfaction of the self-contained object. One is content to accept rain upon one’s surface without seeking shelter, to be dusted with snow, to be swept clean by harsh winds, to be covered by long snow, to be uncovered by longer sunlight, long sunlight making long and lengthening shadows, longer than their objects are high, one’s shadow stretching out far past one in the lowering daylight. One is as at peace in moonlight as in sunlight or in starlight or lamplight or flashlight or pitch darkness; one is as pleased to be underwater as on land, in desertscape as in alpine tarn or tropical garden, indoors or outdoors, or some combination of false stasis and movability. Wherever one is, one is happiest, always in transit, since all matter is always in

transit, 'always' existing shy of eternity. But one can no more imagine oneself inanimate than one can imagine oneself dead.

And one hears the other's voice, not one's one or one's other, but some other other, fabricated or historical, filtered through one's spilled water reverie, saying: "One is a hypocrite and an ingrate when one enjoys sensational animation only while immersed in it, that joyous wrestling, full of motion and flesh and sounds, tenderness and tease, thrilling animal fun, a human bestial display of passion and odors and tastes, a healthy romp with no goal but mutual satisfaction, procreation or no procreation, normal, natural, warm-blooded, loving, that is how we respond to death, the one and the other, not just any one or any other, that is our loudest and brightest answer to the inevitable, our way of holding on to what is meaningful and potent and alive." At this point, one blurts: "Sure, but—" and is interrupted "Admit to the pleasure, sink into the good froth, give into the sweep and surge, even if only as memory, only as wistful projection, only as hypothetical possibility." One is silent, in this wherever one is place, this wherever one's one or one's other are place, this greatest place on Earth place, the tenuous satisfaction of a social creature.

:So one hears [So one says: "So one hears what one has thought, thought without all the frills and frosting, without the honey and mustard-tongued amenities, these praises of birthright, of instinct and impulse, urge and satiation, the species one (as far as one knows) involuntarily joined at conception, that primal purpose, those loin twists, the focal thicket...]: "So one says what one has dry dreamt, a thirst for arid hush and stellar swiftness, a tortoise distance, an andromeda span, an oceanic albatross silence, snowfall throughout a solitary granite night, suburban sunlight across an empty holiday parking lot, the untraversable valley between any matching shoulderblades [So one says: "To want what one doesn't have is a human given, a done deal from the get go, confidently expected and delivered on time, the grass is greener gospel, the garden curse and the sprouting of weeds, the beloved pencil stub in the idle hands of a stranger, the forgotten blur of a misplaced polaroid, the immaculate trousers and the unsoiled loafers, a shotgun and the colored aquarium gravel and a wounded bird, the broken-off and never found tail of the porcelain labrador become doberman, the miniature blouse sailing over the treetops in a gale like an engineless airplane, the marvelous contribution of absence..."], but what one fails to keep localized are the comforts of a home town, the delights of an ancient rhyme, the endearments of a lifelong bedfellow, one feathering oneself into an afterdark backseat automobile stupor (with abiding trust in the wakefulness and competence of the one behind the wheel) just so one can float above the traveling car away from the pleasures of the upholstery, one gaining rooftop access in the city in the summer just to be alone with the old wooden water tanks

and the architectural vistas above the swirl of bustle and streetnoise, one seeking out moments of barren waiting, no birthings of anything ever being imminent, waiting for the waiting to commence, having faith in waiting for nothing the way some hold stock in planning for everything, all of this convoluted avoidance because one— [So one says: “So one hears what one has dreamt and thought and imagined and said being broadcast back at one with loops and samplings and static and feedback, not distorted or twisted or perverted, but lifted out of context, flipped back upon itself and scrutinized for flaws and contradictions...”] because one—”[So one says: “So one struggles to crawl out of one’s skin, to fill the other’s shoes, to gaze upon one’s self as one might gaze upon the slenderest of palms swaying in a languishing inland arboreal breeze...”]:

V

Cradling the loaf of bread under one's arm (a loaf ovened before sunup so that its lingering heat could penetrate one's sweatshirt and warm one from wrist to breast to ribs), one stepped out into the moderate chill of a November sabbath for a stroll in the pondering fields. A sliver of moon still hung above a distant treebreak, and with one hand one scooped a fistful of leaves and tossed them into the air to momentarily block its pale light. Then, one was frustrated that this hand that had been intended to pull at the bread and put the clumps into one's mouth was now soiled. So one went back into the slumbering farmhouse and, setting the loaf down upon the wooden counter, scrubbed one's hands at the kitchen sink. After diligently drying them, but before picking up the loaf to re-initiate one's walk, one took a bread cutter and halved the loaf into a more manageable size, sending pungent steam into one's lowered face. In the yeast heavy house the harvest was accomplished and pillowed. It breathed, dreamless, watershed. One threw oneself back out into the graying dawn, wishing one's sister were the kind to want to join one on a spin around the neighboring land. Upstairs, asleep, cinnamon-cheeked, auburn-haired doll clutched under chin, knees drawn, snow covering the blanket.

Out across the nearest field one strode, toward the adjoining farm where a good acquaintance lived. There, a fluttering, an explosion of wings, a whole flock lifting off the soil and rippling toward the horizon. One's fingers ferreted out the softest meat from the heart of the loaf while one hummed songs to oneself, songs of disparity and dichotomy, for female bass and birch trombone. This is the way it could be, one walking the edges of the post-harvest fields resembling one who has often done so, although one has never done so, these fields of constructed nostalgia, free of toil or financial worry, the loaf no longer putting out warmth, the sky whitening rapidly as if milk were spilled from one horizon toward the other, one suddenly catching sight of one's hooded sister standing on the rutted path across the way, faltering, the beloved doll dangling from one hand. Then, after a moment's sway, one watched as one fell to earth, swooned.

Accentuated. Love takes on this shape, squinting, one of attentive observation. A lean *toward*, a tumbling *into*. One knows one as other better than one knows other as one, yet one is not able to walk away from one's self and leave oneself bewildered in the mirror. The sheer stunning surety of one as other could render one speechless if the off button were not busted, and so one finds oneself picturing oneself sitting upon one's sister's bed, telling of the morning's curiosity: "You were out in the neighboring field, in your jeans and hooded sweatshirt, carrying that doll, and a furious wind arose and knocked you flat, and the doll's blouse flew off way above the treetops, and—" "It could've been that neighbor youth. We resemble one another, as we resemble one another." One sits staring at one's sister, the frilly flannel gown, the freckles, the pointy knees under the pastoral snowscape embroidered across the fuzzy blanket. Sun stuns the wood of the windowledge. And one begins again: "One faints on hot days at the equator, one's knees buckle from exhaustion after a day of throwing hay, the blood flees one's head and heart for one's ankles and one goes kerplunk, a sudden scare, tragic news, a belly too swollen with bread. You tore your jeans at the knee—" "See, a scab. It could scar." The leg has been thrust across one's lap and there is flesh and a rootbeer colored, postage-stamp sized, healing spot. One shifts one's gaze from the bare kneecap to the eyelashes and the ski-lift nose, and one thinks of one's own nose, one's own eyelashes. "Your nose went skyward, your hood slid off, the tendons of your neck stretched taut, your hair unfurled into a tree's limbs, you looked like one struck by winter lightning—" "There isn't a cloud in the—" One is not listening, a conversation with one's self goes nowhere, just like this one, and progress is artificially measured. One's sister is never one's one and seldom one's other and those sharp knees need to stay where they were, under the blanket, covered in snow.

"What one needs in order to understand what it is to be," one will say, sailing alone in one's loyal boat toward one's happy harbor "is to *not* be for a span of time. To know hot, one must know cold, etcetera. Death must be memory, or life will need be memory, or most likely it is an ongoing flip-flopping rigmarole. When one is exceedingly hungry, it must be difficult to remember that bloated disgust of a holiday meal. When one is alive, it is impossible to recall having been dead. When one is dead, one cannot recollect having been—" Or, forget the salt water spray and the little curl of chimney smoke and the hillside park and the stub of pencil. Too sentimental, leading to flawed logic. "What one needs" one will say, floating alone in one's personal space in one's afterlife, one's life after this life, waiting for the very next life "is not the bigger picture perspective but the *biggest* picture perspective."

Attenuated. Another scenario speaks of waking back into awareness after fainting into a furrow of a fallow field in the not yet budding springtime. One struggles to sit, peripheral vision reeling, the noon sun steep and frank, warming one so that one's sweater needs peeling off, one's skin being flushed and damp and itchy. As the sweater inverts over one's head, the aroma of the wool, still damp from a surprise shower earlier in the morning, stops one's motions. One breathes the soiled woolly exterior, now sensual interior. The nap is sufficiently loose for one to be able to peek (with one squinted eye) through a gap in the material at the brightly lit land. A tiny blurred curly thread jiggles with one's breath. One looks past it, and out in the field, back toward the farmhouse, one spies a wounded bird flopping about in the dirt. And one can see the dog from the vicinity of the silo coming toward the winged commotion at a sprint. Or, once the sweater is removed, one's upper arms and moist pits catch a subtle breeze, and one imagines one hears one's friend speaking to one from one half of a bench deep within an arboretum in a sprawling city, a city foreign to one and to one's one and to one's other. There, away from this impending sequence of bird and dog, the sky is smogged, the words are rationed, the palm trees swayed. One remarks to one's friend one's lust for lessening.

When one goes to one's death it could be that it will be of no substantial difference from going to one's life. One will slip in or out of one's skin, a donning or a shedding, an exchange of burdens, a change of scenery, a memory oscillation.

One erects a hilltop church with a steeple, white roses in the yard, bells that ring of broken birds. One allows a graveyard to be established on the sunniest slope, whole families and lonely souls, little plots of patted soil with stones at their heads which open up like fresh books but read like fireside chats. Come winter, deep into the snowy hush, the graves welcome thicker coverings. Or, one mounts a cathedral project with alabaster from a quarry of one's youth, the spire intent upon puncturing the burgundy firmament, gargoyles that hum melodies capable of luring birds into their grasp to be eaten, stained-glass windows with depictions of summernight childhoods. From its recesses, far below the polished pews, the aroma of adolescent semen rises uninhibited toward the vaulted heights. Or, most desirously, one conjures a weedy ravine where dead kitchen appliances have been dumped. A clapboard shack, weatherworn past the point of paintfleck, lists against a champagne-colored refrigerator, its half-collapsed roof framing an open sky. One sits upon a stump long ago lugged into the shack. One stares upward, waiting for moments of migration, the flocks not capable of flying so high as to escape one's adoration of their formations and envy of their windbrushed breasts. At night, with head hunkered into one's flipped collar, one's breath warming the air, one is patient

enough to watch for the split-second occluding of stars, knowing planes by their red and green flashings, satellites by their cold orbit steadiness, birds by the instantaneous tingle down one's spine. Some days, cramped and stifled, crook-necked and bored, one lifts a loose floorboard and resumes digging catacombs toward one's own private inferno.

Out in the fields of complacency and indifference, one is content to scuff rows of impotence with the toes of one's shoes while the dog and the bird dance in the dirt and the voice of one's sister lullabies from a lifetime's distance. One could say, hands on hips: "This is not what was expected, this cessation of flapping, the dog slobber, the lush sibling siren song, the silo engulfed in flames, auburn smoke tangling into the sky..." Or, one could say, bent over, hands on knees, panting from having cut off the dog and chased it away: "One's sister cannot fly (nor can one), not being an angel or a bird, having no wings between the shoulderblades, no levitational prowess..." The silo stands as silos stand, upon land against sky, empty or partial or half or full, the wooden ones quaint and flammable, the metal ones stunning in the sunshine like plump rockets. What a difference it makes when the day withers and the silo's shadow consumes one's resting place, one having buried one's self as a dog might a bone, to be unearthed when wanted in the future. One buries oneself on the hillside in the sunrise shadow of the steeple, one cremates and urns oneself into the nether regions of the cathedral, one mummifies sublimely within the ravine shack, and thus one becomes one's brother or one's sister (or one's friend or one's neighbor or one's stranger or one's other or one's one), through chaos shift and fractal projection and patterning negative space.

Then, as one is about to speak perceptively of metamorphosis, holding up one's hand and scowling as if to stave off what one already knows, one is nevertheless told: "There'll be no walking in another's shoes, no getting into another's skull, no truly seeing what the other guy sees, that is just idealistic crock. One is one and only one, responsible for self, obligated more to the first person singular than the gathering we, isolated within one distinct perspective, malleable, but not exchangeable, one life, one soul, one chance to get it right..." One stands in the field, the hurt bird wrapped in one's sweater, the bundle tucked under one arm, and one says, shaking one's head: "That message is stale, faux simple, hybrid and convoluted, ancestral without being elemental, a voice one need not heed. Now, what was about to be said before all that was said..." A truck has stopped at the edge of the field closest to the road to town and one's brother has emerged from the cab, waving, the cream-colored long underwear sleeve catching the early afternoon sunlight. Or, one wakes to find oneself in one's brother's arms, post-faint, being carried back toward the house, cheek to chest, the taste of flannel shirt musty upon one's tongue, a button having scratched one's cheek, one's pants torn

away from the scraped knee, one's fetched unbloused doll clutched in the callused and swollen-veined brother's hand at one's shoulder, the doomed house steadily jouncing closer.

When one goes to one's death it could be like being lifted and cradled and borne by a sturdy loved one toward one's bed for care and recuperation. One will slip in and out of awareness, the loved one's breathing and smell and heartbeat, the lure of the milky pillow, the erotic giving in to, the willful letting go of, the quite perfect relinquishment.

One erects a tower at the edge of an abyss, a cliffside swimming pool at its cylindrical base, a garden with cacti that bloom obscenely, in unison, midnights and monthly. A tire hangs from a huge sprawling tree, and one allows the reckless neighbor kids to swing out over the precipice before looping back and splashing (white-lipped and goose-bumped) into the welcome water. After they grow into disinterested youths or move away, the tire might occasionally swing of its own accord and the phantom splashes will make one smile from one's rooftop hammock. Or, one concocts ruins on an urban mesa out of noon baked metal and barefoot childhood asphalt, palmed and chalked, the sway of the skyscraper perceptible and worsening. Far below and two city blocks away, out in front of a doll factory and storefront outlet, none of the window shoppers think to raise their eyes to watch for a neighboring building's collapse. Or, most wistfully, one wonders a treetop bier into being, a leaf shrouded platform of long repose. Here, amid the lofty bowers one lies prostrate under the seductive curve of the atmosphere, protected from groundswell ambition, splayed and vulnerable to falling visions. Clouds, by day, whether wisped or puffing or brooding or stormed, provide pure companionship. At night, drenched in pinpricks and twinklings, one is enamored not by heaven's lights but by the unlit spaces within one's self.

The outburst of a shotgun rouses one from one's blackout. A bird thumps to the ground a short distance from the rutted path, but it isn't dead, and it batters the dirt with its frantic wings. Across the field, toward the farmhouse, one's brother shoulders the gun, the smoke from its blast still twirling in the air above the truck, the labrador dashing toward the downed beauty. That night, cozy under one's down comforter in one's still frosty April room, one's hands clasped under one's gown upon one's smooth stomach, one could say: "That was typical testosterone violence, that triggering and that boom and the resultant suffering, that hairy-armed thickheadedness, the freckle-faced tears salting one's mouth..." Or, while one is sunk low in the steamy evening tub, hot water soaking into one's privacy, one leg thrown over the porcelain lip to keep the raw knee dry, one could say: "One's brother can be so sweet (so can one), muscled and

confident, a wide-shouldered savior, carrying one out of the frightful gale..." The silo fell, one remembers, glistening, flopping back to the thigh of the land. What a difference it would have made if the silo's after-image had stayed thrust into the clouds and not dissipated within the sheets of rain. Then, a stranger could be envisioned, a stray dog, inclement organ music, one's shoes squishing in the muck, a telling of *other* distinctly as other, as none other than other.

"What one needs in order to understand the threshold between impossibility and possibility," one will say, clumping along the old plank road in a wagon loaded with sawdust, the low desert sun baking one's downy shoulders "is to learn to distinguish what is fathomable from what is the stuff of faith, what is from one's family tree and what is manufactured fertilizer. One already has a fundamental grasp upon the immovable stone door between possibility and impossibility. Doors open only one way (unless they're of the wishy-washy swinging sort or the round and round revolving kind). Toward the within or toward the without depends upon the hinge. When one is outside, one desires security. When one is inside, one wants risk. When one is the door itself, one longs for—" Or, dismiss the old plank road and the creaky wagon as genre hogwash, linear and predictable, untruthful. "What one needs" one will say, evaporating into the midday glare or being dissolved into half of a glass of bedside water "is not another establishing shot or plot melody, but the making of a joyful noise into belief."

Everything that is anything comes out in the wash.

When stories refuse to get themselves told, one might ought to grab them by the scruff of the neck and haul them from their crawlspaces out onto the garrulous porch.

One has more faith in confusion than clarity.

So one believes One must question declarations of certainty, snicker at smoke-screens and sleight-of hands, be as suspicious of clever obfuscations (like this one) as simplistic narrations (like this one). Nothing is undeniable, magic out-truths logic, pretentious convolution (such as this) is as laughable as righteous slice-of-living (such as this). Innovation is a convention, conservatism is risky, partisanship should never extend beyond the

eyes on either side of a nose allowing two segregated perspectives to create one integrated image.

One shouldn't follow one's heart, but one's spleen.

When stories insist upon being told, whether they be authentic or homespun or apocryphal, one might ought to hurl them (gagged and bound) to the bottom of an abandoned mine shaft.

All markings, even when obvious, find their way off the wall.

So one believes Self-sacrificing heroism is ineffable, cowardice is relative, neutrality is more repulsive than either aggression or defensiveness, and sardines is a socialistic refinement of the capitalistic hide-and-seek. Messianic elitism is terrestrially trumped-up, traitorship is born of fanatical patriotism and paranoia, mediation is homogenization in sheep's clothing, and marco polo is the earliest exacting meter of courage and honor. Salvation is a poker-faced bluff, execution is the ultimate act of fear, moral cooperation is the unlaudable mean, and murder-in-the-dark promotes mischievous fealty amid the judicious farce.

:So one says, while crouched in the hollow of a neighborhood tree, knees to chest, chin between knees, the musty aroma of moss, a streetlight silvering a torn spider's web, pine straw poking one's bare ankle [So one hears: "Reject success only as an unfortunate reminder of immortality, only as a bad joke had upon a bad sport..."]: "A hushed joy arises when the one whom one desires to be the one to first find one's hiding place is the one whose shoes and cuffs one spies in the evening grass, knowing it could happen differently, of course, and horribly so, with the other who initially comes upon one's hollow tree being the last one on Earth one would want to have squeeze into the cramped space beside one, and this other might be elated to be this one, without awareness of one's disgust, and one will inwardly recoil, wondering *what if* the one wished for feels this way about one, and the situation could be worsened if the one one hates happens along next, followed by the one one desires and then some other one, so that the one one finds disgusting and the one one utterly despises now squat between one and the

one one desires, and the one one desires and the one one hates are pressed together because of the structure of the game and the sardine necessity of the tight space chosen by one wishing for, one in hopes of, and to make matters even worse, the remaining two or three kids can't seem to locate the tree hollow so that this intolerable situation must be endured far longer than one would have thought possible; or, it could be that the one one desires is it and goes off to hide and one wishes there were a foolproof way to ensure one might be the first to find this coveted one, wondering if one has been given hints as to where the hiding spot is or if one should *just know*, but one searches those places that hop to mind to no avail, and as time goes by and the night grows emptier and deepens, it becomes clear to one that the others have found the one and become sardines, and that one will be the very last to do so, and it turns out this hiding place is under a dark porch, and sure enough the one one hates was the first to stumble upon the hiding one and sure enough one is the last, and one's inability to find them has given them oodles of moments to be allowably squished against one another; or, it most often happens in a banal fashion, and one isn't found first by either the one one patronizes or the one one loathes or the one one adores and the latter two won't come along one after the other and won't be pressed together to mold one's anguish; or, it could transpire as one wishes (without any whispered clues or conscious collusion), the anticipated shoes and cuffs, one not coughing or making any overt sound, the blessed stooping happening nonetheless, the full visage of the wished for face peeking into one's shadowy space [So one hears: "Perpetuate the aimless wandering with dismembered amnesia, humidify the barometer with absurdity, strip the forecast of its opaque inconsequential future..."], the sparked eyes, the half-shy candle flicker smile, the crawling in on hands and knees, the heart-thumping acknowledgment of the unacknowledged":

This, too, needs amending, as no one was now speaking in the thirsty summery field. One knelt at the stump, sorting dry aquarium gravel by color, creating a rainbow aligned with the dead tree's rings, bright in the sunlight, brightening one's hands. Then, like a watery mirage, the deciduous have given way to evergreens, the fallow fields to daunting hills, the blue skies to sunken clouds, mist swirling in the slate green branches, slickening the boulders and fallen logs, the luminous gravel long gone with the sound and smoke of gunshot, the brother doubling over in pain or laughter, birds scattering from the silo's roof. These hills trouble one, not because of potential danger, or risk of becoming lost, or the decline of the day, but because of disorientation and denial, because one feels it is October and the colorful wet leaves on the ground do not match the foliage of the forest. One's memory is fallible. The fallibility is fallible. One

cannot verify the accuracy of one's memory by oneself. All memory is an approximation, a collective 'close enough.' So one struggles along, trying to make a story out of a mosaic, a landscape painting out of off-handed dabs and unintentional drips, something (anything) out of everything.

Everything and nothing, in the beginning and in the end, are synonymous.

Brothers aren't sisters and sisters aren't angels and angels aren't strangers and strangers aren't brothers.

As soon as anything is taken from everything or added to nothing, one has something. Everything thus becomes something, and that something is nothing, and anything can as easily be nothing as everything.

:So one says, while— [So one hears: “—dashing through the silver blue of the street light, the light making the green of the trees glow gray in the dark, the dampness of dewed gray grass and a shivery night chill (of excitement and dark, not cold, since it is always July), and one runs and falls and plays with the neighbors, knowing or feeling that there's a chance one might get grabbed...”] one ghosts in the graveyard with the neighbor kids, one not now the ghost but waiting for the ghost to pop out of a bush or from behind a lamppost or an automobile to grab one before one can sprint back to the home tree, listening to the cicadas and frogs in the summer's night, and the voices of adults emanate from out of enclosed porches and through the screens of lamp lit houses: “There is no mystery in something solvable, even *before* it is solved, even if clues toward the solution are portioned out by an expert tease. Every individual is a mystery, every individual is provincial. Whatever can be understood cannot be divine [So one hears: “Now one speaks again in epigrammatic arrogance, ignoring the charms of nostalgia or of anecdote or continuity or everyday drama or the one whom one keeps in one's silvery peripheral vision while waiting for the ghost to show so that one can dart toward safety, only to be too molasses so that one is grabbed and becomes the ghost so that one can hide with the intent to surprise and momentarily grasp the desired one....”], all that is once is always”:

:So one says, having finally made it to the barn through the sudden squall, one's clothes soaked and clinging to one's body, one's hair dripping upon the doll's skin, the auburn hair dripping into the animal smell [So one hears: “One's sister held the shotgun

as if one's sister had never held a gun before (one's sister never had), and pointed it at one's brother as if one's sister never had a brother (one's sister never had) and when the blast scattered the birds and blew the doll's blouse off its pale upper body, one fainted dead away into the dust of the dust-to-dust (rain had yet begun falling) and was revived by the neighbor dog's doggy breath upon one's cheek as it sniffed about the prone person in the bread-pungent sweatshirt..."]: "One believes the truth is an interior truth, having nothing to do with autumn fields or brooding hills, springtime fields or summer indolence, sisters or brothers or dolls or dogs, storms or silos or strangers or swoons, leaves or trees or wood or matter, words spoken or thoughts scribbled, notions mulled or visions tooled; one believes creation is belief, the horse is beautiful, the hay sweet":

So one believes The hay is beautiful, the horse sweet, the loft as dry as imaginary storm clouds, a place of childhood barn games, played with tightly wound balls of twine collected from a small farm no longer farmed, a small life no longer lived, a bird roosting on a marionette's stiff arm, half of a colored popsicle stick in its beak, a way of unfolding incontrovertible biography, a way of mimicking actuality, of fostering faith. One foundations oneself into a modest structure, able to withstand the tubercular puff of an old wolf, staying vertical just long enough for one's collapse to hold substantial contrast, the ruins giving way to ground shifts and to thriving plant life and the poignancy of all that is discardable.

A sequence of diversions, patterns of passing time, abandoned shack wallpaper, dreams shed like obsolete skin, cluttering corners, tinderboxing sparks.

Trees fall in one's heart.

Snow falls in the way one wishes one could live, but it never falls as long as one could watch it fall.

Clouds disperse, a patch of blue, the hills gleam, one rests upon the steaming trunk of an uprooted tree, the sun and rising moisture making a happier mist than the

lowering gloomy fog. Here, in a standard moment of reflection, alone in a nature place shy of wilderness, considerably shy of hardship or imminent duty, a luxury misunderstood, organic self-examination misconstrued as biled self-pity or brow-furrowed angst, one grows light-headed and tumbles backwards upon a canvas of moss, out cold, a glass-jawed ponderer. In one's swirling stupor, as one gradually comes to, one stares out through a gap in the tree trunks at the flatlands in the distance, the wasted fields, the slumped farmhouse, peopled with tropes, one's constructed tragedy, uninhabited. The clouds gather themselves anew, blocking the drowsy sun, shutting off the narrow vista, chilling one through one's skirt and sweater and blouse, straightening one's hair, dampening one from one's dirty white collar to one's dirty white socks. "So," one says to one's self, aloud and into the pretend twilight, sinking away into the moss, "one spoke to one's barned brother as one might have spoken to a fielded stranger..."

While flopped in the loft, up among the thick timber beams, the storm abating, the dripping now louder than the rain upon the roof, one said: "Any path one takes keeps one off the other paths and there doesn't appear to be time for one to come back for every path at every time as every one." One's brother squinted. "Fate," one's brother said. "That's a description of—" "And the path one takes becomes one's path and it's a path for one and one only and for only one time so that one and one's path show themselves to be mutual, as one and one's siblings could be said to be mutual." One's brother stood at the top of the loft ladder, staring at one's scraped knee and its scarred companion, two caps tucked tight together like those of a collapsed planet, one's brother's hands in the hay as wide as one's sister's eyes. "That," one's brother said, the squint developing into a wince "would be a ridiculous thing to say, as if—" "As if one becomes the ones one loves, and one, when loved, becomes the ones one is loved by, like a snail's trail could be said to be inseparable from the snail that laid it down, even if the snail is snatched away by fate's swift hand..." One's brother had already gone down the ladder, out the barn door, out into the fields swept clean by wind and refreshed by a rapid passing earliest April storm.

"What one seeks in order to be overcome by happiness," one will say, speaking to one's friend on the bench beside the spice garden in the sparse arboretum "is to be underwhelmed by everything, by the palms, the lemon sage, ambition, comfort, the lure of the other if one has no other, beautiful inbetweens, seams, bloomings—" "An ever short and ridiculous attempt at exhaustive cataloging." One sits, silenced, legs crossed, hands clasped in one's lap, nowhere to go with a laundered list out hanging in the air, a diaphanous list coating one's shoes, a cumbersome list swelling one's tongue.

Ameliorate. Fondness for the other shifts into love for the one. This shift is either a promise or a tonic, the thing that keeps one unphantomed, that puts independence

and solitude and transcendence in their places, that prevents one from becoming a two-by-four. “The other carries sex in a brown medicine bottle down to the sea and brings it back salty in a toy pail.” So says the other, pail in hand, sand in swimsuit, a grin against the gleam of the breakers. “The one breathes blessings into shoes, parallel or perpendicular, whether they lie on the closet floor or squat on the porch or bask amid the seaweed beside the blanket on the beach.” So says the one, barefoot, voiceless, mouthing the words up and down the shore. “One contains sufficient mass to cast a shadow across the loins of the one or the inspiration of the other, to congeal the fluids of the one or to scatter the sensibilities of the other.” So says one, just before collapsing into a cartoonish heap from an overdose of self, one’s limbs becoming pinned under one, so that the circulation is cut off, so that when one is found the next morning it is obvious the extremities must be pruned for the core to be saved. What this means, nuts and bolts, is that when one is out of one’s flat and into one’s city, being wheeled about in a modified field barrow by a conscientious friend (limbed, with shoes unsullied), and while one’s friend is inside the factory store picking out a doll for a nephew or a niece, one cannot hustle one’s self out of the way of debris from a swooned skyscraper two blocks southerning. So, in a panic, one leans away, and the barrow flips one into the gutter and fortuitously covers one like an enamel painted tortoise shell, sheltering one as plaster and steel and glass pummel the street. Then, with chaos raining down, unable to move, cheek to asphalt, one sees a popsicle stick in the gutter amongst the filth and leaves, the small dab of hardened residual chocolate midway down bringing comfort to one waiting another saving, the thought of a stranger’s teeth and tongue and lips (child’s or not) upon the stick (this stick, now discarded, purposeless, one of the things that are all true in their own way, unsalvageable, undemanding) touches one, moves one out of self and situation, and also steeper into it than one’s equilibrium can stomach.

“What one seeks in order to be smitten by tomorrow,” one will say, lying beside one’s one in a hillside cemetery of the one and one’s choosing, fingers and toes clasped like roots “is assurance that yesterday was plentiful and one’s most absolute harvest was adequate, with something to spare, an increment just above ‘just good enough’ to drop the ‘just’ out altoget—” “When one’s inadequacy is one’s *sense* of inadequacy, one isn’t listening to one’s one.” One’s tongue has become stiff, plastic wood, sticking out between one’s lips, secreting watery sap all the way through one’s nerve endings to one’s shoes, sending carbon up through the soil into the breathable air.

Acclimate. Love, not fright or gravity, is the grand swooner. A cute fresh puppy can put soldiers flat on their broad shoulders in the dust. “That’s not love.” Sunlight on an ancient column in a deserted square can reel a sensitive tourist into a fountain. “That’s

not love.” Chrome fenders catching neon on a summer’s night can— “That’s not—” One contests oneself to deflect commitment and liability, to provide one’s own friction and critical platform, to bolster believability and buoy belief, to— *Belief insinuates a subject and an object, or a subject and a subject, or closest to the truth, an object and an object, the believer and the believed subservient to the creating belief, neither being necessary, except as translation apparatus, allowing belief to be reduced to language, like tree bark, like doll’s hair, like scrotum skin, like crow’s feet, like knee scabs, comprehensible not only as markings and sounds and patterns, but as relief under fingertips and tongues and wonder.*

The not knowing is *the* good gift, and the not knowing how to not know is one of the accessory splendors.

So one wonders *About that dog and those birds, or that bird and those dogs, or a self-held camera ejecting polaroids of mostly sky, or that gutted half of a loaf of bread dropped to the ground, or one’s clumsiness with genuine sacrifice, or one’s inability to suck anything dry and one’s inability to stop oneself from trying to suck everything dry, or the colored gravel between one’s frozen toes, or the silo’s shadow stretching to one’s window, to one’s bed, toward one’s own considered midriff while one knows nothing of any shotgun or life and death struggle or storyteller’s tension, nothing of rural nuance or urban collapse or latent incest, next to nothing of fictional trajectory or representational integrity or pandering for the sake of the joke, for the sake of timing, for the sake of light streaming in one’s window, across one’s blanket of snow, onto one’s own considered midriff.*

One stirs the contents of one’s half-full glass of memory with a half-empty vial of unsubstantiated shame.

So one knows *Everything about childhood games and infatuation and innuendo, everything about one’s brother’s flannel shirt and one’s sister’s flannel gown and the flannel patch one keeps under one’s tongue to capture odd*

flavors, most everything about failed unbecoming and those moments of gorgeous inconsequence while one wonders about the summer of trees and the winter of wood, or the wooden screws interminably unscrewing, or the languorous exchange of glances between a marionette and a ventriloquist's dummy, or the stereotypical pleasures of a day spent beneath a boardwalk or a wooden rollercoaster or a shotgun shack, or one's tendency to exaggerate the concept of temporary eternity, or one's tendency to blind spot the next likelihood, or one's quaint apostasy toward cause and effect, toward any big bang or perfect circle, toward toe-tapping happy endings or hand-wringing brow-knitting unfortunate consequence.

Those cycles of days and seasons, the cycles of years and epochs, these are reliant upon the cycles of moments and instance.

To start again, then, to go for a stroll around the freshly planted April fields, or to go to the stump with the bright gravel, hands in skirt and hair in hood, or jeaned with hands clasped under one's sweater against one's tummy, the threat of early afternoon showers showing above the treebreak to the south of the house, birds lining a distant telephone wire along the road to town, one's brother fussing playfully with the dogs while working under the hood of that beloved truck, one wishing one's brother were the kind who was more inclined to join one for a spin around the neighboring land, to step between the rows, to chat about the weather, for days of days and days.

:So one says: "Soon one must begin to speak of one's folks, one's mother and one's father, one's grandparents— [So one hears: "One's cat, one's goldfish..."], one's aunts and uncles and cousins, one's son—"One's therapist, one's mortician..."] and one's daughter, one's grandkids—"One's left foot, one's god..."], one's contextual community, one's nature and nurture, one's protagonistic badge, and when one unfolds one's blueprints one won't be able to pinpoint the hairline flaw in the construction that will one day bring the whole thing down":

One's pockets are stuffed with the aquarium gravel one spread on a plank and

dried in last mid-summer's sun, not long after the cat ate the fish, the colors of the fluorescent gravel being blue and yellow and red and green and orange and purple and the most vivid of pinks, and one knows one has tiny holes in one's pockets because an odd pebble or two have tumbled down one's legs into one's shoes as one hustles to the old stump beside the rutted road. After dumping the gravel from one's pockets onto a patch of dirt swept clean with one's palms, one begins, with maniacal patience, to place the colored pebbles around the stump rings to create a circular rainbow. One's pockets, even stuffed, could not hold all the gravel, and one must make another trip to the house. When every pebble has been put into place, even the ones from one's shoes, one is unhappy with the yellow center and painstakingly switches it with the pink, pebble by pebble, until done, and when one stands up to survey one's accomplishment, one's shadow moves off of the creation and the sunlight blasts it and one beholds the concentrated pink in its stunning glory and faints stiff away like a chopped tree.

One's mother calls one from the porch to come in for supper, the voice its usual melifluous self, melting and caramel. The horizon storm never amounted to anything, the sky is merely dotted with clouds, and one lies beside the stump, chilled but dry, awake but immobile. The evening star twinkles in the purpling sky beyond the silo. Now one's father is calling, this time with an edge to the voice, either out of annoyance or concern, as one has not been seen around the house all afternoon. One is twilighted into sadness and a sudden warm tear slides from the outside corner of one's eye, across one's temple, and into one's ear. The world becomes liquid wonder and one is swimming naked with one's brother in a vast pool or bathtub or glass of water, everything erectable innocently erect, a friendly skeleton waving from afar, one's father's normally lackadaisical voice telling a story of its childhood, of a barn mishap with a friend from a small farm no longer farmed, a friend no longer friended, a sparkly July rocket fired from the open hayloft at its neighboring silo.

One's sister shouted from the top of the stairs, an insistent screaming for everyone to come look. One dashed up ahead of one's mother and one's father in time to witness the orange tail fin of the family goldfish disappear into the black and pink mouth of the family cat. One joined in one's sister's giggling, unable to resist. Neither had ever been fond of either animal, one's sister preferring dogs that chase cats and fetch birds and one preferring birds that are hunted by cats and eat fish, but one's brother, who loved all animals one couldn't legally and seasonally hunt, had come along belatedly to the top of the stairs, surmised what had happened, had grabbed the cat and was now trying to squeeze the goldfish out of its belly, or to get the cat to cough it back up like it was a hairball or an engagement ring. Even at that moment, while the cat defiantly

clawed one's brother's arms and neck, and one's mother implored one's chuckling father to intervene before one's mother was forced to intervene, one already had one's heart set on the aquarium gravel.

One's brother, one sparkling March afternoon, tried to teach one to shoot a gun. One stood rigid and attentive while one's brother pressed close behind one, breath upon nape, hands as wide as an unplanted field, and showed one how to balance the stock and where to put the butt to one's shoulder and how to hold one's breath while pulling the trigger (one *never* 'squeezes'), but the jolt one took when the gun went off was so startling that one staggered off behind the barn and vomited one's lunch, one hearing one's mother's voice, deep in time and shallow in memory, telling one that one would soon be getting either a sister or another brother and one secretly wanting only another self.

One's father stands on the rutted road looking down at one while one looks up at the splayed galaxy after the dogs have found one and sounded the alarm. One is lifted and cradled in one's father's arms, like long ago, outside of memory, and carried toward the house. One's brother smells unlike one's father, one thinks, and one's sister smells unlike one's mother, one remembers, and one wishes one smelled like come snow, like snow on its way to blanket the world. Inside the toasty house that smells strongly of suspended meated supper, one is taken up to one's bedroom and laid upon one's bed and helped to get undressed by one's mother. After one has slid between one's rainbow sheets and settled into comfort, one imagines one's father and one's mother at the supper table exchanging odd and weary looks between perfunctory bites while their only child slips off to sleep upstairs.

A light goes out a split instant before one grasps that something irreplaceable has been taken away. When the light is switched back on, the resulting light is a different light altogether.

So one knows *All stories bleed together, like chalked murals in a rainstorm, pooling into a narrative puddle beyond lies or truths, without verification or oath, lacking genuine beginning or ending, as cliché as elitist opacity (such as this) or opalescent lyricism (such as this) while one wonders if one's sister was truly guilty of goldfish assassination, if one's brother had been more hairy in the loft than while swimming in one's body*

*of water, if one's mother and one's father were still
sexing one another in their vast downstairs bedroom,
in these days of days and days, if one's strange longing
for inanimacy will follow one past death's door into
purgatory's parlor, so that one might become a fake
wooden pomegranate in a mounted diorama of
pointed ironic kitsch.*

If the light had shown without ceasing, without perceivable interruption, one would have gone on taking it for granted and believing it to be the same light from one moment to the next moment to some final moment of lit moments.

So one wonders *Whether one never had a sister because one never had a brother, or whether one never had a brother because one never had a sister, or whether one was never a good neighbor or good son or daughter or shotgun shooter or paper folder or wing healer or ventriloquist's dummy or rocket launcher or sleeper or swooner while one knows A jury wouldn't convict one of perjury if one refused the initial vow, if one couldn't accept any solitary telling of the most crucial or insipid event, if one felt every truth was as fractured as any refraction, and anyone's strange desire is a dubious thing to most everyone else, even those who listen to the telling as it unfolds its many folds.*

In a sweaty fit, pillows knocked to the floor, sheets tangled about one's spleen, one yanks the chain with one's big toe, but the bulb must be burnt out as the light refuses to shine for one tonight.

One pilgrimages to the dollhouse to speak to one's diminutive porcelain self, to sit beside one's self on the cute plastic couch in the tastefully decorated living room, its stand-alone television set perpetually showing the static image of a discontinued game show. The dog is barking outside its doghouse at the immense fallen object that bent the chimney and is now blocking the sky. "What is needed," one says, placing one's

palm upon one's hard flesh-colored thigh, just below the hem line of the crimson and navy checkered skirt, one looking not at one but straight at nothing "is a reliable reality gauge, an agreed upon measurement of how to tell what from what, not just between us, but also taking into account the emotions of the dog and the cauliflower tree." One doesn't respond to one, staying in one's pensive pretty pose, legs tightly crossed, one's sharp dangled pump pointed toward the tidy kitchen.

:So one hears: "One neglects the wooden spool and its proximal ratchet and shoehorn companions, leaving them under-scrutinized on their carpeted closet floor, because one is worried about credibility and pace and sanity, one is more frightened by that scenario of domestic stasis than any shotgun or silo catastrophe, or that endearing marionette and ventriloquist's dummy's love affair, or— [So one says: "One doesn't have to listen to a voice one distrusts, whether it be that of one's father or one's mother or one's sister or one's brother or one's bird or one's shadow or one's undampening cherry stem or an utter stranger wandering the fields..."]. One is not some stem or some stranger— [So one says: " So when the old silo's wooden roof caught fire, as one's mother tells the story, one's father having appropriated one's mother's childhood, nobody was around to help put it out, and while one's mother and one's mother's friend stood stupefied outside the barn, the engulfed silo fell into the field and ignited the harvest chaff and the brewing storm's rainless wind flamed it toward the dry weedy ravine that ran behind the barn and the house, and before they knew it the whole farm was ablaze and the sparks were swirling into the gathering clouds..."]. What if this were one's sister's story and not one's mothe— [So one says: "One's mother having appropriated one's sister's childhood, one's sister standing out in the already ashy field beside the resembled youth from the neighboring farm, watching the barn and the house burn and suddenly remembering the cat and the goldfish, then equally suddenly remembering the goldfish was not a concern any longer, that the cat would undoubtedly bolt to safety out the pet door, that one's bedridden sister, for whom one was this day responsible, was nowhere to be seen or heard..."]]:

Melodrama is as ugly as bastardization, as prevalent as sanctimony, as dense as pig mud or a meaningless groove.

So one wonders *When one will accept that one's mortality is non-negotiable, one's everlastingness is non-rescindable, that one is, was, and always will be recyclable matter*

while one knows *All this will give way to personal journalistic pretension, to confessional diaristic diuretic sharing, reducible to the first or third person singular for purposes of sanctioned literary deflection, with a dash of plural 'we' to demonstrate community awareness, a pinch of eccentric characterization as common courtesy, and a smidgen of omniscient narrator to diminish accusations of preacherly ego.*

There are no strangers in mass graves.

So one knows *What it feels like to have one's legs go out from under one because one has no stomach for one's own soul, what it is to taste the soil of a plowed field as if one seeks redemptive nourishment, and what it's like to wake to dog slobber while one wonders why one's brother ever put the shotgun into one's sister's hands, why one's sister insisted upon having a glass exactly half full of water upon the bedside table and would measure it out with a steel ruler one's father had permanently 'loaned' one and one's sister, not for that bemusing purpose, but to draw straight lines in rainy afternoon floorplans of someday dreamhouses, why one's sister never drank from the glass as far as one ever saw but would empty it and refill it every night before crawling under that fuzzy snowy-landscaped blanket (fall or winter or spring or summer), and why one never wore a bonnet, not one time, not ever.*

One knows nobody knows anything about death whatsoever, unless it correlates to sleeping and waking, or comatosing and astral projecting, or fainting in a park and being revived by automatic sprinklers.

:So one says, one eye scrunched shut and one eye concentrating on the silver edge of the ruler and the silvery level of the water in the glass, the water settling out of its 'the-glass-was-just-put-down' wiggle [So one hears: "Language, not being infinite, is capable

of getting on the most patient person's nerves. The most saintly abider of repetition and aesthetic scrambling will eventually weary of human discourse, of animal chatter, even of tree talk...": "One thinks of the road to town not as freedom or adventure or frontier, but as a tortuous indicator of one's finite choices, a reminder that every *there* to one is a *here* to someone else at some time or another, and that one's here, *this* bed, *this* room, *this* house, *this* farm, *this*— [So one hears: "One smuggled the wounded bird (gingerly wrapped in one's sweater) into the house and up the stairs to one's bedroom. A pellet had lodged in one of its wings and one plucked it out with one's blue tweezers, feeling as if one had never done anything this magnificent before and might never do anything this magnificent again, not even if one's life were to be exceptionally long and philanthropic..."] parcel of land, *this* countryside, *this* continen— [So one hears: So one lifted one's screenless window and flung the healed bird out into the air and it managed to flap its wings two or three times before thumping to the ground, just missing an empty wheelbarrow and a rake..."] is only a temporary here, a way station, a—" [So one hears: "One sprinted out of one's room and down the stairs, hissing 'stupid! stupid! stupid!' under one's breath, but when one sped around the corner of the house toward the tragedy, one saw one's miracle fluttering off over the nearest trees..."]:

One wakes between one's rainbow sheets, disoriented. It's a clear night. The room is awash in harvest moonlight and one throws up one's wooden hand to block its refraction of the unrisen sun. Despite the warm pumpkin-colored glow, the room is cold, and although one knows this, one doesn't *feel* it, not as one has *felt* it before. The branch shadows from the big oak between the barn and the house pattern one's far wall. It was in one of those branches, one recalls, where one's favorite paper airplane of the day lodged itself one summer afternoon, and when one tried to dislodge it with a palm-sized stone, one missed and accidentally shattered the windshield of one's brother's truck. One stood as if shell-shocked, as one's father or mother or sister must have stood in the field as the flaming old empty wooden water tower fell to earth, as the bushy ravine caught fire, as the barn and the house ignited and burned to the ground. One knew of one's brother's love for the truck and of the short supply of money and of the bowling plans in town that night with the neighboring farm sweetie and of the usual build-up of a summer evening storm on the horizon. And one could hear one's brother running down the stairs within the house shouting 'What was that? What was that?' Now, alone in one's bed, one's constitution strangely altered, one's perverse wish come true, one's memory is resonant of one's father's mouth from across the table at dinnertime, one's mother's voice from the edge of one's bed at night, one's mother's hands on machinery,

one's father's hands on fabric, one's father's voice from across the morning fields, one's mother's mouth in the snow, one's sister's knees.

:So one hears: "One liked to stand in the shade of the water tower on hot summer afternoons, as a vague re-enactment— [So one says: "It was a *silo*..."] of when one lay within a billboard's narrow early afternoon shade with one's mother and one's brother on a trip to town when the station wagon— ["It was a station wagon..."] broke down and one's father grappled with the engine under the hood while one and one's brother lay on the blanket with throbbing heads in one's mother's lap (heads sweat-soaked from having, at first, foolishly dashed about the roadside playing, one's mother stroking the matted hair from the moist brows with long elegant fingers ["One's mother's fingers were somewhat thick and stubby..."]). One remembers looking up at the billboard, the advertising side of it, while waiting for one's mother to get the blanket from the station wagon and spread it across the shady dirt. A slinky woman with prominent collar bones was smoking a cigarette, a cigarette held in long slender fingers like one's mother's, like the elongated trunks of palm trees, and the words 'cool' and 'menthol' were huge and blue. One remembers asking one's brother what 'menthol' meant and being told an unbelievable obscenity ["One's memory has become transmutable, as if it were matter, the doll belonging to the brother, the truck to the sister..."]. But one remembers the backside of the billboard, the unsunned side, even more, viewed obliquely from one's mother's lap, with its wooden girders and support beams, its angled two-by-fours, its rusted rivets and white streaks of bird shit, the washed-out summer sky surrounding its frame. And one remembers stretching one's arm beyond the blanket and out of the ribbon of shade so that the sunlight blazed upon one's arm from young fingers to crusted elbow":

While one lies in one's frigid bed, not feeling the cold, not able to lift a finger or wiggle a toe or lick a lip or wink an eye, one feels empathy for the objects of one's closet floor, for the objects in basements and attics and bottom drawers and on top shelves and closet floors everywhere, for the forgotten marble in the end table drawer, the twirled human hair next to the tub's drain, the linen tuft in one's sister's navel, the halved toothpick in a floorboard crack in the ravine shack, the tongue depressor in the gutter. One's memory, being transmutable, reception become matter, moves this way and that through one's experience, flavors caught by a patch of flannel, the affection for one's wrist while about to throw a paper airplane, the sunlight on the blondish hairs of one's arm in one's peripheral vision, the bend of the elbow, the rotation of the shoulder in its

socket, the lift of one's pectoral, the stretch of one's abdomen, the short step forward by one's lead foot, all of this coiling and release as exquisite as the bright white flight once the plane is let go from one's fingertips and sent toward its quick looped and glided destiny. Or, one lying unclothed in the hayloft on one of those rare days when nobody else is home, the hay poking. Or, swimming exactly half naked at night in one's sister's waterglass while the whole house sleeps and settles. Or, one loving the unmet one, one's perfectly imperfect other, just like every one and every other, just like one's brother and one's sister and one's mother and one's father, just like one's neighbor youth and one's stranger in the field and one's collar-boned woman on the billboard, a love confused with loneliness and inadequacy, lust and fetish, infatuation and swoonable need.

:So one says: "One's sister, not in a dream, not one's brother or father, cradles one in smooth birch arms and carries one, as if one were a doll, out of one's room, down the stairs, and across the moon stark fields toward those daunting hills in the distance [So one hears: "One was dangled by one of one's hands, one's limp body banging at one's sister's flank, one's nose bumping against the flannel of the gown covering the striding thigh and catching wafts of sistersmell, one's auburn hair tangled from sleep, one's bonnet missing..."]. One never wore a bonnet [So one hears: "A fury arose, a sudden wind out of the south, one's sister wobbled, one's shoes were torn away, one's blouse was ripped off one's flat chest and sent sailing over the trees, and one was dropped to the ground beside the old stump when one's sister fell as if shot..."]. One wished for the dark hills, for the hollow under the rock outcropping where one's sister would tryst with the resembled youth from the neighboring farm and sex one another like wild dogs while one watched at ground level with eyes unblinking, one's sister's knees and elbows flopping about in the dank air" [So one hears: "And in a dumpy trailer with dingy mustard carpet, one's sister wore a coquettish bonnet and one's unbuttoned blouse, and one wore one's sister's flannel gown over one's jointed wooden frame, and one and one's sister talked about the deaths of one's father and one's mother and one's brother and the cat and the fish and the dogs and the bird and the truck and the billboard and the collapse of every building the whole world over, long after the raveling of wires had re-invigorated oral tradition, after life had come to be commonly understood as humpty-dumpty fragmentation, and one awoke when the glass was knocked over by one's sister's wayward arm..."]]:

The water is dripping off of the table between one's bed and one's sister's bed, and one's sister is mumbling half-intelligible steamy stuff into the pillow and one is glad of one's rainbow sheets and doesn't envy one's sister the snow scene blanket, and

one says aloud, plenty loud enough for one's brother to hear (should one's brother be awake) through the thin plywood between the rooms: "One's one is never one's sister or one's brother, one's mother or one's father, one's dog or one's horse—" (One hears one's brother giggling) "one's truck or one's plastic skeleton, one's lust or one's philosophy, one's belief or one's imagination—" (One hears one's sister's muffled giggling into the pillow) "one's shadow or one's skin, one's self or one's memory—" (One hears both of one's siblings giggling) "one's history or one's genes or the biography of one's matter—" (One hears one's folks giggling in their bed downstairs, the dogs snoring in front of the embering hearth, the termites chewing on the walls and floors and ceiling, the timber creaking throughout the house) "One's one is one's—" Down comes the structure like a loosened bundle of sticks.

VI

One tells the story of one's love for one's one, with simple voice and lowered eyes, as one might compose a prayer for all that is elusive and tenuous. Or, with chiming voice and bright eyes, as one might hammer proclamations onto posts of public consumption for all that is worthy of gratitude and championing. Or, as a serenade to an unoccupied balcony, with straining voice and squinted eyes, a desperate longing. Or, clumsily, one tells the story of one's love for one's one, an earnest hodgepodge of assembled amber and thrift and spew and whimsy. If necessary, one will speak in an awkward slur, a stew from one's viscera, dampened crumbs from one's tongue. Pearls before swine, whatever the audience, except straight to one's one, or an arrow's trajectory. One stories one's one into a telling, a structure beside a chasm, a cemetery on a hill above make-believe fields, a treehouse for adults. One tells of living, lives through telling, and one's one listens for assurances and innocent discrepancies and the lapping of water against a dock in a happy harbor. One swoons for one's one, one swoons.

A stub of pencil, a tall pitched-roof house with a conspicuous chimney, a lofty shady park overlooking a secluded bay, a dark quayside pub, a chance meeting revolving around the singing of winter carols, a spilled drink upon one's desert shoes, a slightly husky voice hiding an accent of southern cotton, a good-bye until another time. One meets one's one, this way or that way, an office party in an unfallen skyscraper, a bumping into a mutual friend at a cafe, a tête-à-tête upon a dollhouse couch. And one knows one's one without knowing one's one, one knows that this is one's one without knowing as one is accustomed to knowing. It's not love at first sight, there will be sexing soon, but love will wait, patient, permanent, and one strolls the brick streets with a stuffed yellow optimistic sailor in one pocket and a stuffed congenial grim reaper in the other, one understanding that some survive without a one or an other, one or two out of every thousand thrive, but one needs one's one like one needs the nub of pencil one keeps tucked in one's cheek. One passes, unknown to one, the house of one's one while walking the street that stretches along the top edge of the park, these houses all tall

and many windowed, old and prominent but no longer exceedingly moneyed, crumbling to dust one granule and splinter and fleck at a time. One glances in those windows with undrawn curtains, this deep into the night with lamps still burning, allowing one glimpses of furniture or chandeliers or bookshelves or kitchen cabinets, or an occasional night owl inhabitant moving about in the warmth, one feeling pleasantly excluded, not a match girl, not a local shunned, harmless, introspective, homed elsewhere. When one comes upon the park this first night it is snowbound, the spruces and the firs stately in the hush, a streetlamp at one corner of the park making the snow glisten, and one feels blessed but incomplete. When next one visits the park, in broad daylight, with one's soon-to-be hand-in-hand, the deep grass cool and inviting, springtime in its health, summer around the bend, one feels blessed but inadequate. One brought out the stuffed sailor and grim reaper puppets at the pub, pulling paper strips from their mouths to scribble aphorisms upon with one's pencil, things like: One tree is planted, but more trees develop out of thin air. Now, in the park, one's about-to-be suggests composing fortunes on the spat up paper strips, good wishes, happy thoughts to hand out as gifts ("Make the epigrammatic possibilities active"). At this moment, sublimity, one's one becomes one's one in one's spleening heart. After the sexing, after the intimacy and the laughter and days in common in the park, the evening walks away from water, the nights in the tall house of one's one under that looming chimney, after the discovery of the loss of the stub of pencil, one sails back to one's desert emptiness, to the nearness of one's friend and the swaying of palms.

The telling of stories, of one's one or one's other, of one's friends or one's family, of strangers or fabrications, is not for the weak kneed or faint of heart, considering all that can go wrong, finish to beginning, middle to middle, start to end. It is widely held that the story is integral, but one feels that only the narrative matters, narrative being time plus space plus observation. One's telling of one's one isn't a story, good or bad, skeletal or cardboard or scintillating, flawless or flowless. One's one's telling of one's one's one is different, is no different, is *different*.

One's one sails to one from another shore for another purpose, a purpose of esteem or naive niche, of distillation unto death, a desperate hope for the unknown one. And, astonishingly, one is that unknown one, and one discovers through one's one that one is mostly unknown to self, and that that is a standard condition for one alone, or one together alone, or two alone together and not together together, as one and one's one switch places with enough speed to blur separation, the sailor and the reaper joining in the cock's crow. The grass is deeper than cool, the skin more shallow than words, the snub-nosed pencil shooting blanks, a tugboat's worth of doggerel, the black and pink slit accepting the watery white rope. Up the slope, the biggest spruce in the park appears to bend toward one and one's one for a better

look, an imprudent peek, permissible, perhaps, for such a venerable tree. One's chimney, too, from above the treetops and down the block, begins to lean perceptibly toward one and one's coupling, making one's mouth go dry. The way one's one zips the side of one's checkered shorts, the way the clouds move as if motion were covered by a liability policy or classical physics or the cross, the way the breath of one's one comes upon one's chest, these things are convincing.

One doesn't know in what way to tell of love, of the mystery of the perpetual other, of sexing, of unsexing, of one's love for one's one, of the ways one's one speaks of one, of speaking, of unspeaking. One can talk with some intelligence and confidence of light refraction and shadows, of texture as language, chaos theory and fractals, of halves of glasses of water beside pools or beds, of unbecoming, but one is afraid of encapsulated living, of diminished death, of encapsulating death, or diminishing living. Chimneys fall. They fall, throughout history, upon one's shoulders, one's ideologies, one's pansies and petunias, one's lifted brows, one's *ways of seeing*.

Becoming one to an other, going from other to one, being propelled out of one's happy town, beyond the surf, beyond the crumpling houses into traveling bliss, one's place with one's one, one's other already on the far horizon, one's pencil sunk away in the grass after slipping out of one's pocket (one having failed to keep it tucked in one's cheek near the patch of flannel under one's tongue), one hearing one's mother say "One had a son, one had a daughter, one had a..." while one watches clouds tumble the opposite way as one and one's one sails. One doesn't give up one's sense of oneness, if and when one finds one's one, one's oneness being mostly matter, matter not being subject to one's powers of creation or destruction, without either usurping the other, without either existing or ceasing to exist, without either being either.

VII

So one imagines We are imagined, we imagine one another, we imagine ourselves imagining ourselves, we bruise the words attempting to take them from their shells, we bruise ourselves trying to hammer our wooden points into looking-glass frameworks, we pollute the water with our curled shavings. These things are true. We invest our lives in what can be thought instead of what cannot, and when thought passes away, long after action has passed away, we will be left with something we know nothing of, a broken unbelief.

Out in the fields, whatever cropless fields, with an unconsidered friend, one of one's whenever friends, one spreads one's arms wide and falls into the arms of one's friend, protected from striking the ground by one's friend's sturdy stance, by ordinary decency. One's head is lowered to the clover, one is stretched out under an unspectacular sky, one is wearing a wrinkled skirt and a stained hoodless sweatshirt, wire glasses with someone else's lenses, a ring on one's thumb, an ankle bracelet above old-fashioned sneakers worn without socks, a spray of one's hair tickling one's ear, a good feeling of expanse in one's throat, someone else's taste in one's mouth, one's flannel patch teeming with sensations. Or, the

swooned is one's friend, one catching the limp body before the ground is struck, keeping one's balance through instinctual placement of legs and taut muscles, lowering the fond head to the meadowy grass, the sunlight glinting off of the ankle charm bracelet, one squatting and fingering the charms, a hummingbird, a kite, a bi-plane, a rocket, and one follows the shaved shin up to the scabby knees where the soiled material of the checkered skirt takes over one's mental horizon. And soon one stands and soon one says, staring down at this blouseless doll with auburn hair twisted into distant gnarled trees: "One denies oneself one's unmasking, one's unmaking."

The imaginary we (the we of ifs and wonderings, wandering through stories that trail off, that peter out into thickening brush, that never looked to anyone else like they would go anywhere) imagines an actual we (a we of thens and absolutes, plowing through destinies that crystallize, that gleam on the trophy shelf, that always look to everyone else that they count for something), and the actual we forgets the imaginary we, a mercy forgetting, a gentle slaying, a happy unbecoming.

The doll is not what one thinks it is. The doll is not a metaphor. The doll is not an heirloom. And so we passage our way into a belief system that no longer registers, as we situate ourselves toward a time that isn't a position and isn't a possibility of loss, where all of our time is spent in the hope that nothing will approximate what we know to be. And now the pattern falls into a hope for lessening, for loosening, for slipping away into a place where the doll isn't a doll at all.

The doll isn't a factor, the doll isn't a manger, the doll isn't a fulcrum, the doll isn't one's self, the doll isn't a fallen star, the doll isn't a new belief, or a profound wish, or a feeling of situational gossip, or a pattern of scope lost to all dolls, dolls of foreign make and dolls of fresh light and dolls of sallying forth and dolls of dismissal. And so we go round and round in a plan to negotiate a prime hope for dolls of meaningless meaning, while breathing is still an issue.

It isn't what matters that matters, and it isn't a simple guess or an easy accomplishment. We know this doesn't correspond to anything that matters, and we accept the right to achieve a knowledge of instance and acceptability, and we feel as if time were constraining us as we shift to a horror of everything that bleeds.

We now negotiate the space between trust and non-believability, and we instigate our sense of disgust and our trust that nothing can break down, a network of loss, a network of solvency, and we still feel it must be a delay of time, a delay of motion, a delay of insistence upon everything that molds out of pattern and display, and we follow a situation that negotiates a plan, and we now pulse into a familiar harbor, we now pulse, we pulse.

And so, as a we, two chunks of wood adrift after a necessary running-aground, we wobble toward the maelstrom, along with a wide scattering of debris from many runnings-aground, all afloat on a swirling sea, all being inexorably sucked into the watery funnel, all crucial, all as it must. We bob along in good spirits on the outer fringes of the

churning spiral, content to be going together, one
and one's one, from either one's sodden perspective,
from either side of any threshold, we two, we

VIII

So one says: “When one understands one is going to fail, that there is nothing left within oneself or within the world or within the notion of the miraculous to alter the outcome of failure, one feels resignation and relief. One can shrug one’s shoulders, sigh one’s breast, scuff the sand. It is done. Culpability has pooled into its proper hollow.”

So one hears: “When one comprehends one is about to win, that there is nothing that can go wrong, nothing that could happen within the realm of possibility to jeopardize one’s impending victory, one feels jubilation and disgust. One must accept accolades, field questions, take on challengers. It perpetuates. Superiority has risen to its chosen crag.”

So one says: “Whatever makes failing less scary than succeeding, whatever allows the ego to curl into that protective ball of not-good-enough, never-good-enough, and unball out with that good-enough-to-never-be-good-enough, whatever this element is comes straight from the great failer.”

So one hears: “Whatever makes efficacy more tasty than inefficacy, whatever allows one’s pride to swell into the potency of look-at-this, behold-the-champion, and deflate with that now-one-must-stay-king-of-the-hill, whatever this element is comes straight from the great achiever.”

So one says: “So one hears one telling oneself of one’s inadequacies, one’s devastating shortcomings, the pocks in one’s soul, the scattering of things that make one a loser, and one disremembers them for the sole purpose of hearing them inventoried.”

So one hears: “So one says one mustn’t speak of one’s abilities, one’s redeeming quirks, the flourishes of one’s soul, the myriad of things that make one a winner, and one disremembers them for the sole purpose of hearing them inventoried.”

So one says: “Wherever one goes, across the water or to the closet or into the wasteland, alone or unalone or inbetween, in order to get religion, breed salvation, build a faith, one should take one’s open mind, one’s opening heart, one’s opened doll.”

So one hears: “Wherever one goes, into the glass or along the shoe’s tongue or down the old plank road, halved or selved or doubled, in order to clean, to swirl, to momentum, one should bring one’s close, one’s shutter, one’s spooling.”

So one says: “One finds the doll sitting on the stump, a pebble of pink gravel in its navel. The doll’s eyes are no longer open and one exposed shoulder is scratched from when the fury of the wind ripped off the blouse. Perhaps, one thinks, the scratch wasn’t caused by a button. Perhaps it was a thorn or a stone, although these are unlikely, considering the path of the scratch across the porcelain skin, collarbone to shoulderblade. The stone could have been from the old country. The thorn could have been from a painting. But most likely it was a button, or a metal snap. In the wound (or the scratch, there is no blood, dried or damp, of course) is a bit of thread, a gossamer thread translucent in the afternoon light. And as it wiggles in the breeze, one watches it exclusively.”

So one hears: “One comes upon the doll out on the old plank road, under a blistering sun, riding a dog. The doll’s hair is cropped short, the result, one thinks, of some accident, something like bubblegum gone astray, or wild entanglements with trees. This strikes one as more likely than the consequence of disease or a fashion conclusion. The dog is wearing a collar studded with fluorescent pebbles. They could be from aquarium gravel, or they could be one’s own gallstones come to fruition and squeezed agonizingly out into the conscious world. In the collar, stuck in the adhesive used to secure the pebbles to the leather, is a strand of hair, a lone auburn strand shining in the afternoon light. And as it undulates in the breeze, one averts one’s gaze.”

So one says: “One crumples to one’s kitchen floor, beleaguered by nostalgia and partial memories, polaroid gaps, a manufactured faint for an audience of self. This kitchen, a place of no cooking and little eating, of early evening solitude and deep night doubt, swallows one into its brevity.”

So one hears: “One levitates within one’s room, unburdened of guilt and obligatory dreams, plastic ambition, an organic rise of a hollowing self. This room, a place of no rest and little sleep, of late autumn melancholy and mid-winter shame, absorbs one into its duration.”

So one says: “Ending with what happened, when that should be where one starts, the analysis before the event, the cart before the horse, is one’s mischievous spark, one’s sabotage.”

So one hears: “Beginning with the collapse of the house, even before it is built, before the blueprints are unrolled upon a table, before the lot is leveled, is one’s fetish sorrow, one’s original fall.”

IX

One felt one's spine tighten, an almost imperceptible contraction. Or it might have been the house settling, a subtle shift of air, a whisper of gravity. Whatever it had been, within or outside of self, one sat still, listening, waiting for a reprise, an encore, an aftershock. The house might have been brand new or it might have been vintage; one might have been born in one of its rooms or one might have been renting it without a lease. Either way, the spine tightening was actual, a product of belief, not fantast. It was, one thought, not an isolated incident, even if it had only been the house shifting on its foundation, a thing houses do. One went back to staring at the shaft of dusty light dissecting the room from the tall corner window to one's positioned shoes. One cannot have it both ways, one thought, although one had nothing specific in mind. When the rumbling began, one couldn't tell if it were coming from the ceiling or the floor, the attic or the basement, the chimney or the crawlspace, or one's chest. The house fell as houses fall, structure to rubble, and one escaped through a suddenly shifted shaft of light.

Or, one was bathing in the deepest tub, fancy footed, a rare pampering, under a polished chandelier and a vaulted ceiling, the water silky and velvet, one's skin not wrinkling, one's nostrils flaring to the fragrance of the bubbles, one's eyes shut. Then, a pang in one's spleen, an inkling of claustrophobia, the tinkling of the swinging chandelier, the roof coming down. One submerged oneself. There, in the subterranean gloaming, amid sunken shingles and attic and chimney debris, one became a beckoning skeleton, wearing a bonnet and a sheepish toothless grin.

Or, when the house collapsed, one was caught unawares in one's hiding place in the coat closet under the interior stairs, one's half of a glass of water shaking in one's hand, the charms on one's ankle bracelet clinking together with the bobbing of one's nervous leg. The crashing sounds gave way to a dust storm, and that settled into a hush where one could hear one's lungs, like bellows, fanning the flames in one's grateful heart.

Or, one was out in the fields or up in the hills when one heard the sounds of domicile timbering, the groan of wood and the shattering of glass, the vertical demise of a familial shelter, the end of a household. From a distance, for a moment, one pretended it was someone else's home gone sour, the neighbor's farm leveled by a mysterious wind, the billboard on the road to town brought down by vandals, an unfortunate blimp crash. But one's head fuzzed, one's knees buckled, one met the ground as an unconscious skin.

The house had expected to fall sometime further in the future, under different circumstances, with natural intent, without embarrassing premature surprise. To fail to maintain one's structural integrity, to give into those insidious forces, to chronically disappoint... Now it could not re-erect itself, and soon is never soon enough for a tragedy to become ruins, for the shards to become knick-knacks, for the artifacts to become collectibles, and for the archaeological rarities to become priceless and catalogued and museumed. Or, the house instantly goes from a human habitation to a heap of junk.

One feels one's spine tighten, one will feel one's spine tighten, one's spine tightens and one's house caves in upon one like every house upon every one, like bowers of dead leaves dropping all at once upon drivel and delusions and dung, like the birth of one's death.

:So one says, standing at the sunny window after one's cock-a-doodle-do alarm clock has awakened one [So one hears: "Shout totems, mouth tokens, slur signs..."]: "One went for a walk away from one's house and one's fields toward town, toward a more concentrated population. At first, one crossed fields and slipped through treebreaks and circumvented ravines and the rare fence. Then, one began to follow the telephone poles and power lines that cut a swath between various properties. One strode staring at the lines against the sky and one loved the way they demarcated the blue into identical strips. The sky held no clouds, no vapor trails from jets, nothing but a flat wash of one common color. Once, just one time, a flock of birds passed over the wire and for a moment there was more to the pattern than a row of parallel blue ribbons. One stumbled occasionally, not paying much attention to what was in front of one, especially as now it had opened up into unkempt grassland, and one followed a bit of a dual-rutted path where the lineman's truck could access the poles to make repairs after bad weather. There were more houses now, they were closer together, with gardens, no longer with fields, with sheds and garages, no longer any barns. Then, suddenly, the lines were crossed by a perpendicular set, running off in another direction, and this created squares of blue above one, or trapezoids. And a ground wire, slanting diagonally, caused several

triangles, and these triangles, in their pyramidal beauty, made one dizzy, and one looked to a band of clouds low on the horizon for solace, but none was forthcoming. The most equilateral of the triangles (white, not blue, now that the thin cloud haze had spread toward one) brought one to grief [So one hears: “Stretch logic, scrap sense...”], brought one to exaggerated, unmerciful, geometric grief”:

One burst out of the pile of leaves and startled one’s lookalike neighbor. The neighbor youth squealed, then keeled over into the leaves, laughing. One howled. Patience for the prank had paid off, one having lain in wait among the scratchy leaves for one’s resembled one to pass by unsuspectingly. The timing had been perfect, the good-sport acquaintance had jumped out of freckled skin, the belly laughs unto tears were genuine fun, the threats of getting one back were expected and friendly and flirty and welcome. And so the two of one lay shoulder to shoulder in the autumn bed with hips touching, gazing at the sky.

From across the far field a stranger came striding, confident and troublesome. The stranger didn’t look like one’s father or one’s brother, one’s mother or one’s sister, one’s pastor or barber or mortician or soul, but no stranger stays a stranger for long. This one carried an auburn-haired doll in a delicate hand, wore a bonnet-like head covering, waved with a gesture that was underwater slow, asking if the doll, found in the field just now, belonged to either one or the neighbor youth. The neighbor youth guffawed indignantly, while one only stared at the odd hat. With its bent, cream-colored brim, it made one think of the desert, a place one had never been, not one time, not ever. After chuckling at the neighbor youth’s response, the stranger stared at one’s stare. One flinched, dropping one’s eyes to one’s scabby knees, hearing one’s sister say “You looked like one struck by winter lightning...”

From across the near field one’s brother came strolling, cocky and disruptive. The shotgun was tucked firmly under one arm as if it were a puppy squirming to get down and play. One’s brother smirked at one’s resembled one and at the leaves stuck in one’s hair and produced a doll, found in the field just now, from under the jacket that had once been one’s father’s, saying one must have dropped this out by the old stump. One’s lookalike neighbor tried ignoring one’s brother, who had something going with the youth’s sister, while one only stared at the dog that had trotted up to be near one’s brother’s boots. One’s brother, clearly in one of those moods, held the doll out above the dog and threatened to let it tear it to shreds, teasing. The neighbor youth shouted “Leave us alone!” and pushed one’s brother with surprising vigor for one so slight. The

doll dropped to the ground, and one was rushing to grab it and thrust it into the dog's slobbery jaws when the gun went off.

One's sister burst out of a pile of leaves, startling one. There was a squeal, followed by much laughter and shouted threats, some giggling and throwing of leaves, a flurry of half-serious wrestling. Then, one and one's sister flopped in the colorful leaves and stared at the pure blue sky, panting, recuperating. One glanced at one's sister's profile. The freckled nose, the stirring eyelashes, the pale lips, all quite familiar from mirrors and placid ponds and sunlit car windows, but in this light off the golden leaves one saw a halo hovering above the tousled auburn hair. One's sister turned toward one, chest heaving, still out of breath, flashing the self-satisfied grin of a successful prankster.

:So one says, wristing the curtain aside [So one hears: "One is not responsible if one feels like blaming everything..."]: "To sleep like a log, to be a log, fallen in the forest, to become a log, hollow and mossy, a purveyor of stopping-for-breathers, conveyor of squinted inspections, corridor of squeezed air, trail interrupter, habitat for insects, smorgasbord for birds, harbinger of small creatures (fantasized or genuine) darting out of the open, out of the yellow into the ochre, disperse and hunker, huddle and abide, to be worm labyrinths chewn under bark, a language of bends and splinterings and cul-de-sacs, once dark and mole-like, now exposed as the outer bark cracks and falls away, hieroglyphic, like the tufts of wildgrass around the bottom of stone walls, resistant to cattle and sheep and mowers, the staggering solitude of one alone on a shepherd hill, whether above fallow fields or a churning sea, whether with hair cropped or with flowing locks, as figure or stone or log, to be a log, to have been a log, to become a log, to unbecome as a log, going from flesh to seed to tree to wood to soil [So one hears: "Speech is strained, cross-currented from any smooth flow, a musty sisterbush fuzz, lip split to tongue stain, lick to spit, crude angel to redemption..."], to matter as much as a thermometer pole, a spot to measure temperature, stuck into an earthy orifice, to be the supports of a river trestle, all beveled and angled, the outdoor equivalent to barn rafters, tucked away across a remote canyon, creaky and creosoted, all warped and woofed, a weft of unnatural emulation [So one hears: "A birthmark gets traced with sibling attraction, the lift and the indentation, the daunting hills and the appliance ravine, blending into itself like a world succumbing to its revolutions, its orbitings, the satellite sightings of cowlick hurricanes, the spinning of a bedroom globe, the pole poking out of the poles, affixing sphere to stand, the impermanent gesture of stability, keeping

the molten core contained...”], to become the eaves themselves and not just a lath or a joist, spider-webbed and unfinished, a place where one’s sister would dress in one’s grandfather’s clothes, getting carried away by dusky nostalgia into wispy attic musings of wrinkling steamrolled death [So one hears: “Textured critique magnifies human vision, going somewhere that needs getting to, eyelashes on sunlit metal, cheekbone to warm windowglass, wrists pressed together to feel one another’s pulse...”], to unsee the seen, to keep coming upon bold explorers going the opposite way, all days discharged, all nights safe on the sofa with porcelain knees, ears scrubbed and cold, as if hearing one’s monochromatic monologues, eyes tranquil and unblinking, as if watching the cauliflower tree not grow, to be content with immovability, nothing asked of one except to be what one is, after having been what one was, and to become what one is inexorably becoming, to be tape residue on one blade of a dull pair of scissors, cigarette ash in a dash tray in a rusted heap in a junkyard, a littered bottle cap stuck between boulders in an outcropping of an escarpment of an uninhabited plateau [So one hears: “When visibly old, phantomhood is bedside, a thimble of half water and half air, a sprig of evergreen, a gathering spot for moths hurling themselves out of the shadows, algebraically sure of disintegration...”], to be a—” [“Enough, let go...”]:

One falls as one does not wish to, as one never expected to, as one knew one would, beginning with the spirit, infiltrating the heart, pumped to the brain and the toes, thus the swirl and slippage, the tilt and collapse. It has its sweetness. It has its tone. The sound of one’s fall carries through the ground to all of those one wishes it wouldn’t and to none of those one wishes it would, a wistful sound, without regret or recourse. The sight of one’s fall is cubist, without tears, holographic pointillism, a quick spray of unsalted water dropping to earth on a windless day.

An out the door day envelops one from goldenrod morning to burgundy night. A solitary day outdoors in rural surroundings is enough to make one count one’s lucky— [“Light dwindles fast this time of day, this deep into the year...”]. Hours in the sun, blistering or balmy or winter bright, or under the clouds, thundering or wispy or summer cottoned, bring down self-awareness upon one like a ton of brick— [One only recognizes one’s weaknesses when one is failing and weakening, when one is relinquishing the surface to be strong...”]. Fresh land, open air, flowing sky, rivery horizon.

Or, one spends one’s life inside a tree, hollow and vast, vertical and giving, among loved ones, or a tree inside a tree, chopped into logs or manufactured into panels, chairs and tables, bookshelves and bedposts, domesticated and buried, sprawled or towered, or a tree inside a tree inside a tree, leafed and folioed, surveyed and indexed, crated and

shipped, bottom of the ocean bound, one's time is done instantly and irrevocably, done for the here and the now, whether oned or othered, fathered or mothered, sonned or daughtered, friended or strangered, one will fall, one will fail to stand, one won't be able to get back up and go on, one will stay matter and one will have mattered and one will persist in mattering as matter.

And it comes to pass that one bears fruit, a wooden pomegranate. When it ripens, it drops from one's favorite branch, wobbles down the grassy slope, and is halted by the stack of wood behind a noisy harborside pub. It is inadvertently gathered in an armful of firewood and taken inside to be thrown upon the hearth. As it burns, the most unknown portion of its interior rises out of the chimney and drifts above the hillside park where one who is hungry has done a self hanging with a vine over one's sturdiest branch. From a cloudy perspective, the hung one ripens and is glimpsed falling from the branch and tumbling down the steep slope toward the rear of the pub, a structure about to suffer a chimney fire, a blaze that will spread to the quaint thatched roof and neighboring shops, setting the whole harbor aglow.

One's pomegranate spirit floats deeper inland over the fields and woodlands, the barns and wires, the hills and tarns, above faintings and conflagrations, over cities being razed and old plank roads weathering, witnessing shootings and cradlings, desires and endeavors, failures and regrets, renewals and lov—

“What one knows,” one will say, not knowing what to say “is unspeakable, not because its contents are unmentionable, not because they're coupled, but because it doesn't translate to the tongue, what one knows, what one thinks and imagines, what one dreams and believes, what one says or hears or *does...*”

So one does What one does, trusting the doing, thinking the doing pure and obvious, doing what comes to one to do. One wakes. One goes to the window, lifts the curtain aside, gazes out into the brightening day. One dresses one's self in a hooded sweatshirt, a checkered woolen skirt, or perhaps a pair of old jeans. One leaves the house for a reflective walk, taking one's doll or half of a loaf of bread for company. Or, one's clumsy shotgun and a fresh paper airplane. It is forever post-harvest. The weather broods. One is creased and folded and thrown above the land, only to lodge in the crook of a tree. There, one surveys bark and leaf, rustle and sway, wishing to

eventually come undone and glide to ground. Or, one is sun dried and segregated, concentrated and ringed, witness to a swoon. Or, one hides in the toe of a worn farm shoe, burrowing into the leather to wait for a future day to come loose and be a bother, a reason for one to sit upon a fallen log and air one's toes. The day progresses, twilight whispers, night falls. One finds oneself alone on a crag in the moonlight, or across from no one at one's table in one's kitchen light. Or, one becomes a bird among many birds, a flock lifting from a field in a voiceless surge after a dog comes barking and before a shotgun blasts, a flurry of wings, a thumping of one to the ground. Or, one is a pellet, violently propelled through the air in a trajectory of damage. As a pellet, one doesn't lodge in a wing or in feathered warmth, but plugs in untilled dirt at the edge of a shadowy copse. And it is here (in amongst the debris of branches and twigs brought down by the wind of a past storm, a blustering not unlike the one now mounting on the southern horizon beyond the treebreak) that one stumbles upon one's—

“What one does,” one will say, not knowing what to do, “is as forgivable as motion, as wishy-washy as half air and half water, as half-brother and half-sister, as unforgivable as certainty, as tenuous as conviction. Things get done. Doing takes place. One is undone.”

To say one is more than the sum of one's parts is to speak of dissolution and faith, to promote distrust for the tangible and the inbetween, to cliché the empirical and the remembrancing and the spiritus and the soulful. One might as easily say that something is more than meets the eye. Or, that one and one is not two, but one and one.

And so one's passing comes to fruition, a simple death. One slips from a skirt pocket into park grass, one is shattered by an errant stone, one is spilled across a bedside table. Events in one's existence, marked by reverence, marred by lightheadedness. From a wilderness stance one topples into the suburbs, bumping topknots with one's self as milkman, as mailman, as curb painter, stunned upon the mown lawn, electro-

shocked by the welcome mat, ding-donged by the round glow of the doorbell, lit even in the daytime, one prone and alone in the shadow of a fake chimney, one that will fall as one chunk upon one's self-construction. One dies into perspective, a widening vanishing point, expanding until it is beyond anyone's peripheral vision, even one standing on an undaunted hill or perched upon a coastal crag.

One passes one's life as a tree, or as a wooden screw on a metal shelf, or as a dowel in the shoulder of a ventriloquist's dummy. One is grown and harvested and carved and fitted. Thus, one fulfills one's function. Then, one erodes away into the parts of one's sum, dissolves into the essence of one's substance.

Then, one—["One doesn't know what follows such a then as that..."]. So, one—["One is talking science fiction..."] steps out into one's yard and imagines it opening out into plowable fields, with barn and silos, treebreaks and bird flocks, seasons and heartland responsibilities. No plastic pool, no deflated pink ball, no chain-link fence, no iceplant, no pornographic dumpster—["For every wide-eyed romanticization, there is squinted exaggeration..."].

One crumples to the baked dirt of one's backyard after a trainwreck heart attack. This happened once upon a time, when one was another, with another's voice, another's thirst, another's hand reaching for the glass of water, while thinking *One is afraid of one's irreducible oneness, one's distinctly reducible oneness, and the onenesses of one's one, one's other.*

"We follow faith down the drain into the sludge, tubercular oath, suffocating need for higher authority, blackened tongue, whitening eyes, plugged nostrils and bleeding ears. We row a skiff down a sunny river, singing songs of bliss and affection, sleeves rolled to elbows, flicking bread to fish, splashing the sky.

In the forest, deep and wide, without shoes, pulling teeth, evergreen needles between our toes, humming pain through caked noses. In the meadow, buzz and bloom, without shirts, sucking air, sour grass between our lips, touching joy with dirty fingertips.

Toward the moon we drink and howl, our skirts in tatters, ankles rubbed raw, chests heaving like tugboats in front of scows. Toward the valley we whoop and holler, our shirrtails flapping, ruddy cheeks damp, necks taut like rope moments after a public lynching.

Out of focus, out of our minds, out of pocket, we scooter to the malt shop, we cycle to the quarry, we cruise to lover's leap, hearts in throats, throated doubt, speech of weeds. Out of bounds, out of our league, out of luck, we scamper to the morgue, we

pogo-stick to the crypt, we shilly-shally to the maggots and the worms, hand-in-hand, palmed dreams, clasp of clouds.

We bird ourselves, skinny shaven legs and fluffed breasts, roosting in silent hedges, flutter and preen, coo and warble. We fish ourselves, refractive scales and shuttered gills, darting in shallow eddies, flicker and bubble, surface and gulp. We cat ourselves, we dog ourselves, we dung beetle and praying mantis ourselves into foreign behavior, an extraction of self from self, selves from selves.

We follow belief up the flagpole, odorous credo, strangulating hope for community fidelity, split tongue, peeled eyes, flared nostrils, ears abuzz. We float in a balloon over downy land and roiling sea, whistling tales of soon and forevermore, bare arms in the air, imitating birds, salting the waters..."

The stranger crosses the field, or will cross the field, the near field from the far field, as if with purpose in mind, intent shoved into pockets. It is a day, it will be a day, that one wishes, that one will wish, one had gone, one will have gone, on a stroll toward town, perhaps following the power lines, the opposite way from this stranger, this not-a-stranger-for-long stranger, this other, this distinct other. One stands in the shade of the big oak in front of the house, a delicate paper airplane held gently in one hand, watching the approach of the loping figure. One will stand in the shade of the big oak, half of a loaf of bread held tightly behind one, at the small of one's back, out of an instinctual desire to not share.

One's sister came running from the vicinity of the old stump beside the rutted road, auburn hair wild in the sky, blouseless and looking like a boy from chin to navel, rushing for shelter from the storm's sudden fury. The wooden water tower, empty and rickety, had begun to teeter in the howl. The house groaned as if considering laying itself down under the sturdy branches of the swishy oak. One watched, along with the resembled neighbor youth, from the bed of one's brother's pickup.

The paper airplane, after a lift and a loop and a wobbly glide, comes to rest against the shoe of someone one didn't notice come into the yard and whom one doesn't know. As the stranger stoops to pick up the plane, one feels a pebble in one's shoe, under one's heel, and while staring at the stranger's unusual hat, one oddly wonders at the pebble's color, secretly hazarding a guess, suspecting it to be aquarium gravel and not farm dirt.

One's brother came running from the vicinity of the old stump beside the rutted road, flannel shirt untucked and fluttering, shotgun held outstretched in one hand, as if it were too volatile to let go of and too dangerous to hold close. One of the

dogs had staggered into the yard moments earlier, its flank bloodied, seriously wounded from the accidental blast. It was worrisome to one, watching from the barn loft along with the resembled neighbor youth, that because one's father and mother were in town for the day, and one's sister was bedridden in the house, there was no one else to tend to the dying dog, to provide the mercy blow, to spare one's distraught brother the odious task.

When one found the soiled bonnet under one's snowscape covers, amid the tangled rainbow sheets, one's heart nearly pounded out of one's boyish chest. One had never worn a bonnet, so this odd one could not belong to one, one could not be responsible for its position down in the shadows against one's bare calf. When one pivoted to show it to one's neighboring sleepover friend, one knocked the friend's glass of water off the bedside table onto the wooden floor, where the water seeped (was soaked up) into the undamaged wing of a half-crumpled paper airplane from the day before.

One tells the story of the time one of the dogs bit one's sister's hand, not enough for bloodflow, but enough for tooth indentations in the skin, slight puncturings, reddish marks of betrayal. One's brother would ask one's sister what was done to provoke the dog, and one's sister would say, glancing at one with a mischievous glint: "It was all that stranger's fault." When pressed by one's folks for the whole story, one's sister would wince and say: "There's no such thing."

One spins the tale of the time one ran a stratospheric fever, thrashing about the bed in a delirious fit, nightshirt wet with sweat, head ablaze, mind skittering down a spiral fright. One's brother, unsolicited, brought a cool damp cloth and wiped one's neck and cheeks and eyelids and brow, saying in a cooing voice normally kept rare for the dogs: "Settle down, shush now, all's soon well." And one's loyalty blossomed for half a season and a day.

So one loves What one loves, trusting the loving, thinking the loving pure and obvious, loving what comes to one to love. One wakes. One goes to the living room to sit beside one's porcelain self on the cozy couch. The room is pleasantly still. One excuses oneself and goes and brushes one's morning teeth. When one comes back, nothing is different, or nothing that is easily witnessed or discernible or attested to, and one and one's painted pumped self are content with that, loving the cauliflower tree and the skittish dog, one

placing one's bold hand upon one's shy knee. Or, one loves the one, the freckled southern land, tawny in summer and brunette in bed, the unbelievable truth of the crucial one. Or, one loves the absent friend, the dry elegant coastal husk, the matching bookend on the vacant shelf, the wry complement. Or, one loves the adjective over the noun, the noun over the verb, the verb over the adverbs and articles and conjunctions, all these and everything else over the pronoun. Or, one loves the mortar giving way around the bricks, the tension of the chimney too much for its structural integrity, the lean and the waver and the topple, the flowerbed destination. Or, assuredly, one loves the surrender, the bowing to gravity and the kowtowing to time, the superiority of merge and the relinquishment to current, the fake faint, the permanent vertigo, and the most unique of swoons.

One constructs a fiction about the time one's mother got lost in a snowstorm, having left the security of the house to search for a missing child, a neighbor youth who resembled the supposedly safe and sleeping one in the upstairs bed. One's father stood beside the hearth most of the night in stock-still heartburn indignation, hands ashake and lips taut, having told the stubborn woman it was none of their business and the pranking youth would be found hiding in some overlooked nook of the neighbor's farmhouse or barn. One had lain awake in one's room, having heard their argument and one's mother's leaving, having felt the hours trickle along, having watched, unnoticed from the top of the stairs, while one's father stood unmoving beside the hearth, having stared at oneself in the wintry window beside one's bed, trying to conjure the resembling youth or the resembled mother.

One concocts a lie about the time one's father came into one's room for a tuck of the covers and a peck on the cheek, not on the night of one's mother's mouth in snow, but on the night of one's father's hands on linen. One's mother had already kissed one goodnight, after humming a sweetening melody and smoothing one's hair away from one's eyes. The lamp was flicked off, the room was left darker and lonelier. Then, what dim light came from the hallway outside one's room was blocked by one's father's bulk in the doorway. One lay still, pretending to be asleep. The floorboards creaked under the

mud-caked post-harvest workboots as they neared one's bedside. One felt the blankets being adjusted and the barley lips upon one's cheek, and from under one's squinted lids one saw that the biggest hands in the world were clutching a bonnet they had sewn for one as a gift.

One steps out into one's square of yard, *thinking of farms and flying saucers, one's one's skin and one's friend's whereabouts*. One's daughter's plastic toys are strewn about the yard, chewed upon by the dog. One's son's wooden toys are piled in the open toychest on the porch, chewed upon by one's son. The sky is smoggy and flat, as is one's memory, as is one's chest. One unlatches the gate that leads to the alleyway and to the community dumpster, where one tosses the bag of garbage one was carrying, *hoping for blackening snow or a soul razing seizure or a tidal wave*. One of one's shoes is untied, the laces dragging in the dirt, disrupting one of the pervasive anthills. One of one's eyes is blurry, watering from the scratch one suffered from a stray wood chip while working on a dollhouse for one's kids in one's garage, the saw having abruptly stuck on a nail lurking within an old two-by-four, one having absent-mindedly failed to put on safety glasses. One follows the alley to the street and then the sidewalk down the block to a thrift store. There, with one's pride back at the bottom of the dumpster, one purchases a painted metal dollhouse in bent condition, outfitted with a dog and a doghouse, a smattering of furniture and accessories, a porcelain figurine in a demure sitting pose, perhaps *dreaming of rumpled clothes and mussed hair, reddened skin and swollen lips, furious hayloft abandon while one dreams of obscure trees, out of the way crannies, knotholes to disregarded closets, empty screw holes after the wood has untwisted and rolled away, dusty ledges above obsolete transoms*.

It isn't ours to know, it isn't ours to understand.

Our joys are measured in bursts of surprise.

Anything that comes our way, even the smallest of things, is more than we deserve, more than we have any right to expect.

The world withers under the approaching scorch of false entitlement.

When one is given the gift of an other, and given as a gift to an other as an other, whatever one's fathomable appreciative knee-bending thanks, one must know and cannot know one's new status as ingrate.

One is worth dozens of sparrows and half of a lily.

So one moves About one's places of movement, ambulation seldom taken for granted, motion confessed to and absolved of, restlessness an accepted malevolence as one is incapable of embracing a holy here and now. One moves with the confidence of a glacier, making it to the window, lifting the curtain to stare outside at the inside of one's hollowed tree, or at the square patch of one's baked dirt yard, or at the requited love of one's hallowed fields. One moves with the double will of a tide, toward and away, bring and take, with equal verve, to the daunting hills, back to the flatlands, out to sea, back to port, across the mustard carpet to the window, back under the covers of one's bed. Or, one moves (is moved by) one's hope to the hilling horizon, that healing hope.

One is approximately symmetrical to oneself, which is to say one isn't symmetrical to oneself at all.

Whenever one falls flat on one's face, in the briny gloom of one's April, in the crumbing leaves of one's November, one feels the very beginning of one's subsequent fall.

The world winters one into premature blooming.

Whatever we have, have ever had, will ever have, was never ours and will be ours forever.

Our despair is displayed with graphs of predictability.

It isn't ours to embrace, it isn't ours to discard.

Cactus water on the tongue, canvas shade upon the shoulders, crow's feet sunlight beyond one's homemade canopy, the expansive bliss of replenishable mirages, the likelihood of reclining skeletons, the melancholy whistling of warm wind through skull holes, through

*ribs and hips and one imagines. The old plank road traverses a young wasteland. The tenuous wheels of one's wagon stutters along the lashed planks, the buckled boards. One of one's bare legs dangles over the wooden edge and accepts the brunt of the sun's slant. One's blouse is unbuttoned, a prudent enough condition when moving through such unpopulated heat. One has cropped one's auburn hair with a pair of dull scissors. Clumps are still matted together with tree sap from a far off verdant place. One's toenails are unpolished, one's lips pale, one's nipples alert. The odds of stumbling upon someone, a very specific someone, a twice met sandy stranger, in this expanse of uninhabited desert, poling one's wagon along this unmaintained plank road, drinking what moisture one can squeeze from sporadic plantlife, are long. One's prayers evaporate out of one as diminishing perspiration. *A saltine sea, saltwater sexing and unsexing, salted memory.* One gazes across the unreal shimmer that stretches to the horizon, holding one's hand above one's eyebrows as a sun shield. The wagon has shed a wheel. The wheel has wobbled down into the dry wash below the wooden road, mocking one's imaginary progress. One will perish, *becoming a bleached sentinel for future seekers, one's skull to become a planetarium for scorpions, one's spirit to become a warm wind whispering around the edges of treeless trailer parks.**

One fabricates a myth about a lanky odd-hatted stranger, a kerosene-winged paper airplane, a pink pebble in a shoe and an unbloused doll in an unknown hand. Where the truth becomes make-believe, that is the transitional zone one favors, the margin where one wishes to abide. The pebble is wedged into the doll's molded navel as playfulness. The flaming paper airplane lands atop the dry silo roof. The soiled bonnet is found by one in one's bed, down in the humid shadows, inbetween rainbows.

One manufactures a fable about a tarnished shoehorn, a rusted ratchet and a naked spool, with no ending, happy or sad, and no moral, pithy or wise. Objects stay put until moved. A simple act of rigid discipline. A stubborn adherence to location until a stronger will is encountered. Then, a delicious shift of space or rearrangement of matter, sweet dispersal of being, perpetual becoming, constant unbecoming, the universal swirl of static change.

And the recovery, the coming to, a fluttering of the eyelids, a confused glance around at one's surroundings, an unstiffening of joints, a deliberate swallow to taste the moment, a clenching and unclenching of one's fingers and toes, a disoriented attempt at speech, a sitting up, a getting to one's knees, an awkward

*squatting, a getting to one's feet, an endearing wobble,
and one's one is there to brace one with a sturdy shoulder
under one's arm, or a steadying grip upon one's elbow,
a murmur of encouragement, a nervous smile of
wonderment, one's one not comprehending these
fainting bouts, this preponderance for temporary fade-
outs, and it bewilders one's one, this one of ones who loves one so*

:So one says: "One's mother, not in a dream, not one's sister or brother or father, not some loping stranger, cradles one in stiff aspen arms and carries one, as if one were a doll, through the snowstorm, through the rising drifts, the whiteout becoming the world [So one hears: "One was clutched to one's mother's breast, one's frozen body chilling the chest more than the chest warmed one's body, one's nose pressed against the wool of the inadequate coat, smelling the motherlife as it drained away, one's teeth chattering, one's glasses missing..."]. The lenses were someone else's [So one hears: "The snow fell as if angry with one's mother for taking on the solitary task of finding lost children in a winter's storm, and a blast of wind swept across the fields, targeting one's burdened mother, who dropped as if shot..."]. One wished for the fathered house, for the stoked hearth and the snoring dogs, and for the bedroom at the top of the stairs where one's bed accommodated one's feverish desires, under the snow-covered blanket, one's scabby knees rubbing together to create static electricity" [So one hears: "And in the shade of a cigarette billboard, off on the shoulder of a country highway, one's pounding head in one's mother's cottony lap, one listening to one's father grapple with the stalled station wagon's cantankerous engine, to the bees buzzing the clover, to one's mother's stomach gurgling with midday travel hunger, to one's bloodstream, and as the sun scorches one's outstretched arm from elbow to fingertips, and while one's mother hums melodies of strangers and faraway harbors, one listens to one's brother's disembodied voice tell one about one's, show one how to, blush one with words of..."]:

:So one hears: "Trees, common and groved, filled one's sight, deep summer lush. They spoke to one in a language one would have thought dead, if one had been capable of thinking of it as language, if one had known one's navel from one's— [So one said: "One climbs a tree, not to scrape one's bare knees or tear one's skirt, but to listen to the quickening heartbeats of birds and to glimpse the pigment blanching of leaves. Above the fields, above the stumps and the dogs and the ground-level mullings, one ponders happy landings..."]. Into the dappling, into the rustle and swish, one moves, as

if one weren't expecting to find what one found, as if one weren't looking for anything but darker air and cooler skin— ["One chops down a tree, not to clear the land or out of need for lumber, but to feel it timbering and to hear its absence. One appropriates its fall because one cannot go from erect to prostrate with such violent stiffness..."]. There, amid the fallen twigs and blown leaves from a prior storm, a storm having passed some time ago while one slept, a furious weather front, yesterday's or an earlier day's, one of bluster and blunder, one discovers one's other's truest merit, the way the other maneuvers one's, the forgiving manner of the manipulation of one's, the motherly manifestation of one's— ["One plants a seedling, not to watch it grow into a tree and spray oxygen into the world, but to raise a loyal and sturdy horizontal limb where one could strap and dangle a rope any day one wished..."]:

To be the marionette *and* the ventriloquist's dummy, simultaneously or sequentially, or sequential unto simultaneous, in a switchback with one's one as rapid as the flutter of a hummingbird's wings, so fast that one might as well be the other at the same time one is one, as some molecules can't keep up the pace and are left behind, or some can't hold on and are flung off, so that one and one's one begin to exchange particles until the marionette and the ventriloquist's dummy are two cups of the one stew, like two breasts on the one chest, sharing blood, nutrition, sucklings (potatoes, grease, meat).

To be the earth, the air, the tendril, and the mouth, saliva and swallow, pollen and bones. A passion for the process, an arduous journey around to its origin, the child is the mother of the woman, every each thing is an everything. Milk flows uphill.

"We dividend our goals, we pasteurize our deeds, we flagellate our fears, we tremble our love. One sip and the glass is dry. One tug and the bed is stripped. One swoon and the cock has crowed.

The difference between the horrible and the terrible is negligible, leaving us only rock-and-hard-place options. The difference between the wonderful and the wondrous is the marvelous, curiousing us a cherry-on-top awe.

Into the scrim the colors seep, thread by thread. We fabric ourselves into a checkered skirt or rainbow sheets, and onto the mattress or over the hips we are pulled. There, the colors come loose and go where they will go, the shimmering caverns, the secret grottoes.

Text covers the cave walls. Torchlight gleams off of our teeth and the whites of our eyes. We tiptoe our way into the darkest corridors of the labyrinth. There, where any

light is ineffectual, even the flaming hearts of gods, we run our fingertips in vain over the unrendered surfaces.

When our spirits fail, when we throw up our hands and quit, having sought to no avail, not knowing what we were seeking, seeking the unseeking, we are discharged with all that is obsolete.

We reprimand our wounds, we cauterize our regrets, we correlate our tears, we resemble ourselves. One chop and the tree is down. One puff and the house is gone. One sigh and the swoon is done..."

:So one says, fading in and out of wakefulness, in and out of slumber [So one hears: "Soon enough now one must bow and disappear behind the falling curtain, even if the bowing is to an audience of one's one and one's other, or, as a cast of one to an audience of none. When one's spirit fails, when one throws up one's hands and quits..."]: "What one remembers of an event is, in and of itself, an event, and must be remembered as an event. It is memory *as* event. If one forgets to remember, then the forgetting is eventful":

As the stranger approached one, out under the wires between fields and houses, on one's way to town, one tried to go and one tried to stay. One could do neither, of course, so one fainted. When one unsubmerged, one was cradled in the delicate arms of a cheekboned stranger who was bonneted and skirted, and who carried one toward a shady grove with difficulty, almost stumbling. A storm had begun to sputter in the southern distance. Treetops, those of the grove where the lessening stranger was heading, were still sunlit, but aswirl with the rising breeze. One smelled smoke and one heard the loud poppings of a house and barn engulfed in flames. Or, one thought one smelled smoke and heard the panting of the stranger who was beginning to falter. One was lain shy of the grove beside a fresh stump, upon one's back, in the dry dirt, one's eyes watching the sky go from blue to gray to black. When the raindrops began to fall, one sat up just in time to see lightning strike the old wooden water tower, scorching it from shingles to sunken posts, igniting a blaze that would prove undousable, even by the sweeping soaking squall.

One peels off one's dayclothes, slips into one's nightclothes, and slides under a blanket of snow. Or, one stays out of clothes and slides between rainbows, where an odd hat lurks. Or, one stays in one's dayclothes beneath the covers and waits for the house to grow silent, so that one can sneak out for a tryst with the neighbor youth. One's hands at one's flanks flutter like leaves. One's limbs turn to sticks. One's torso trunks.

Then, the sap, and one's sister has knocked over the half-watered glass, and the dogs are barking in the pent-up viciousness they reserve for intruders, and the spool in the closet is motionless.

On bright days, a properly thrown clean paper airplane could make the sky stark and unbearable. On cloudy days, it could white on white and woo the loving eye. On summer evenings, after supper, amid the fireflies and vaportrails and rising moon, it sends one beyond the daunting hills to places lonely and other and strange. This is how it happens. This is how one leaves home, watching one's carefully folded effort loop away through the falling night.

One stood in the middle of the field, in the middle of the cataclysm, wet to one's marrow, dry as tinder in one's heart, the fire raging as if it were an exaggerated stage performance for the benefit of a loved one in the deepest balcony row. To one's port stood one's sister, as if one's sister were a sacrificial maid, hands folded at gownfront. To one's starboard stood one's brother, holding, in unflanneled arms, an unrecognizable charred corpse. To one's bow, the conflagration. To one's stern, the copse and one's— ["Matter vs. space, memory vs. time...when one was a child, one was seldom coy or intentionally vague, believing in honesty as wonder. Now one thinks of wonder as truth..."]. One imaginatively set sail for that happy, chimney-toppling, grassy-hilled harbor. Or, one went back to the arboretum bench and the bending palms. Or, as the flame-gutted structures were about to collapse upon themselves, one fled to one's dollhouse with one's doll (incompatible with any house) tucked under one's arm like half of a loaf of bread.

So one creates The squandered moments and folds them into virgin paper sheets, measures them halfway up a movable glass, arranges them around the revolution rings of a venerable stump, merging air, water and dirt with lift, settle and glow, convincing action into spray, sound into particles, light into intoxicant while one destroys insatiable convictions and sews them shut behind one's lips, under one's tongue, into one's flannel patch, buries them in cemeteries without bodies or graves or ghosts, screws them into tight holes without screws, disperses them through the unmoistured clouds shifting across one's bedroom ceiling, stuffs them down the barrels of an otherwise fatal shotgun.

So one destroys What one already destroyed, reversing the irreversible in order to echo the unrepeatable, to utter the unspeakable, a receptive pit for a stem and a husk, a bargaining table for bloodflow and bile, a shadowy corner for ejaculated prophecy, whispered testament while one creates penetrative vision and depth of field, layers of translucent barriers, liquid sight and stacked arrays of vanishing points, one discerning one field from another, one hill from another, one sibling from another, one harbor as one's own, one doll as one's own, one stub of pencil as one's own, one inflection as endemic, one wish as pathetic, one death as inheritance.

:So one says, one's thumbs pressing deep into one's sockets [So one hears: "Neither *create* or *destroy* in the past, present or future tense..."]: "One makes making, and then the making makes unmaking, and then the unmaking makes one, and then one makes making, and then— [So one hears: "Mercy isn't evolutionary; mercy isn't extractable from cancerous doubt or babbling tower presumption..."]. Tenderness should stir the mouths of indifference, unravel the thread from the lips, invigorate the tongue, wring out the saturated flannel, dry it in the sun, and send it to one's one or one's other or one's friend or one's—":

The stranger followed one around the cauliflower tree and past the cowed dog (tail between legs) toward the open door of the dollhouse, a structure still in the initial throes of buckling, the fallen skyscraper weighing heavy on its metal roof, the cauliflower tree musing, perhaps, on why buildings fall and what, beyond gravitational stress, makes them relinquish their vertical integrity, knowing that itself, as a rootless artificial arboreal fake, was just as prone to lying down as any forest snag or architectural blunder. One led the stranger through the dollhouse's groundfloor living room and out into the backyard. There, one pointed to a shallow grave dug into the wood of the tabletop. Adjacent to the oblong hole, a pile of splinters and chips and shavings waited to be shoveled back, if such shoveling were ever to become appropriate or desired. One threw a hopeful glance at the stranger, who just stared at the blood-blisters on one's palms and one's sawdust coated checkered skirt. Then, one showed the stranger the barbecue woodstove on the patio, as if suggesting an obvious alternative. The stranger grinned and indicated one's porcelain skin, essentially nixing the oven option. One scowled down at one's scraped knee and its genuine beginnings of a scab.

One's sister follows the stranger up the stalk of the cauliflower tree and through the glassless upstairs window into the bedroom where one slumbers between one's after-rain sheets. Awakened, one notices one's brother's hunting bonnet atop one's sister's

head, hiding the bundle of auburn hair, except for one wayward strand curled around an unpierced lobe. One's sister undresses rapidly, jumps under the covers beside one and, placing the bonnet at one's groin, is unable to stop laughing.

One's brother will follow the stranger into the shady grove, beckoned and lured by the stranger's discovery of a dead dog (possibly a labrador, possibly a doberman), the frightful victim of a brutal shotgun. The stranger and one's brother will eye one another uncomfortably, neither wanting to consider the blouseless and shoeless and bonnetless doll flopped at the dog's flank, nor the spring afternoon storm rising on the landscape's southern end, with purpose but without intent.

One's mother might follow the stranger down to the frozen stream, the snow falling ridiculously thick, as if dumped upon them from a stage catwalk, burying stumps and filling pockets. One's mother might have thought the stranger was the resembled youth, or one's sister, or even one (who was supposedly safe, home in bed), but the stranger was none of these. Tripping on an object covered by snow, one's mother might have gone sprawling down an embankment, striking head into unconsciousness against a tree trunk, the unwarmed soothing mothermouth gathering thousands of fluttering flakes.

One's father would follow the stranger up the farmhouse stairs to one's bedroom, the worked hands nervous, the gait worried. One would be feigning sleep, trying to concentrate on the objects of one's closet floor, or those in the drawer of one's bedside table, or those in the pockets of one's skirt that lay crumpled in a heap of dirty clothes beside one's dresser. At one's bedside, the stranger (doctor or shrink or butcher) would initially touch the spectrummed topsheet and peel it back, exposing the fabric of one's gown to one's father's fingers, to the stranger's countenance.

One followed the stranger into the woodshop out back of the barn, down by the weedy ravine, a claustrophobia-inducing shed one had never liked to go into, not since having been stung there by a wasp, stung once in that dusky hollow between one's collarbones, below one's adam's apple, that spot where some people allow their necklace pendants to hang, those who don't mind clasping and unclasping every time, considering a shortened chain can't fit over just any head. One's whole throat had swelled. Now, stepping from sunlight into shadow, one was unable to see the woodworking machinery, the saws and lathes and sanders, but one could smell the fresh aroma of cut wood and feel one's throat tightening. The stranger spoke to one as if in awe at the obsessive endeavor on display in the shed. As one's eyes adjusted to the dim light, one began to notice the marionettes, some crowded together on dusty shelves, some hanging by

their strings from low rafters, all of them in varying unfinished conditions, all of them resembling the resembled youth.

:So one hears, plucking one's wilted tongue from one's mouth [So one *hears*: "One is creating destruction, destroying creation, firing a shotgun at a paper airplane in flight..."]: "We seek love of other on days we should be seeking love of self, and we seek love of self on days we should be seeking love of other, and we seek as if seeking were either forgivable or unforgivable [So one *hears*: "Mercy is observation; mercy is the absence of an absolute perspective..."]. Grace should water one's tongue, restore one's language, provide us with ground for interpretations, air for broadcasting our various magnificent failures":

Therefore, one tries to rise, to surface out of the auditory fiction into the optical fact, to wake and to stand, to stop speaking and to stop listening, to *look*. One lies on the pavement beside the arboretum bench, the aromas from the spice garden having stirred one's olfactory curiosity, the granularity of the cement bothering one's shoulder and cheek and temple, the taste of one's outdoor nap still stored under one's tongue. One glances about for one's friend, and one's friend is located twice, once asleep on the bench, mouth open, terribly vulnerable, and once bending amongst the lemon sage, rubbing thumb and index finger upon a leaf to capture scent upon skin, the white shirt almost too bright in the sun for one to bear a lingering look. One stares at the apricot sky, smogged and palm-fronded and suddenly pigeoned as a flock scatters from the roof of the bromeliad building.

One half sat, knees bent, hands clasped at one's shins, breathing conscientiously in an attempt to reconcile the split manifestation of one's friend. In the pocket of one's shirt (beige, not white) one felt the cardboard stiffness of one's admittance ticket to the arboretum. It was goldenrod today. It had been faded green yesterday. It had been lavender the day before. And sometime last month it might have been ivory, the color of one's friend's shirt on this day, this friend who wasn't one's one or one's other, but a resembling friend, a resembled friend, nobody's one, no one's other, not like one's one or one's other, unlike one as one to one's one.

A scrutinization, the kind that can be exacted only upon an object or a sleeping loved one, will now be at one's disposal, although one will be aware of an aspect of one's friend watching one from the herb garden while one studies another aspect of one's friend, slumped and slumbering on the bench. The sunlit hair, curled and delicate,

thinning. The pale lips and the paler mouth, resistant to superfluous words. The weaker chin, the flushed cheeks. One will resist objectifying this actuality of one's friend, and one will shy away from fetishizing the open mouthed daytime snore, opting instead to gaze upon the actuality of one's friend among the low plants across the asphalt walkway. One's friend will stoop to touch some rosemary or basil or mint, the immaculate trousers wrinkling at the back of the knees, and when making motions toward standing straight again, one's friend will dissipate and flicker and fall away into the thyme, or the water-liliated pool, or one's dubious memory. Then, one's friend will stir on the wooden bench, waking with a slightly embarrassing jerk, squinting meek eyes against the glare, swallowing away the nap, granting one a weak smile, still informed by the unsemened little death, still laced with unconscious vacancy.

*So one sees All that one has heard and said come into being,
created by the spoken word, brought into existence
by the spermed sounds of an ovary voice, fleshed and
dimensioned, dilated and penetrable, temporal and
sprung. One spyglasses the leeward shore in search
of a mooring spot out of the incessant wind, beyond
the reach of aroused waves. Or, one binoculars the
rolling hills for one's self as lost sheep, searching for
steam rising from dung, proof of the faintest bleat.
Or, one telescopes the harvest moon during a lunar
eclipse, holding one's breath as the Earth's shadow
passes across Mare Tranquillitatis and slides toward
Mare Foecunditatis. Or, most naturally, one envisions
tree as body, bark as skin, log as skeleton, stump as
headstone...*

One salts one's tongue, rips it into bites, eats it with half of a stabbing toothpick.

One goes to one's favorite shade tree to piss away the day.

Substance becomes idea quicker than idea becomes substance.

The porch gives way to the yard, the yard gives way to the field, the field gives way to nostalgia, nostalgia gives way to continents, continents

give way to white elephants, white elephants give way to documents,
documents give way to termites, termites bring the porch down upon
one's awareness, one's hurt mind.

When we faint, all of us, as if gassed, we will become parchment for the
indelible recording of history's ungranted wishes.

One splashes water upon one's death.

Little green sentences of cynicism and faith grow from one's grave,
out back of the dollhouse, uprooted by the skittish dog on southerous
nights.

If we were to build a house together, not out of straw or sticks or bricks,
not upon rock or shifting sands, not divided or white or representative,
neither poor nor ill-reputed, it would be a structure of bower and air,
leaf and modest vista, juiced roots and dampened cherry stems (oozing
red sentences of terror and love).

:So one *hears*, while standing with another on a porch at three in the morning,
after round-the-clock exchanges of westerive vim and easterant vigor: "Now becomes
then sooner than soon becomes now, southern rain turning to northern snow, the
present folding into the past as the future wrinkles into the present, near lengthening
to far faster than far diminishes to near, the shift from other as an other to other as one
resembling the shift from matter to what mattered to what matters":

X

And so, with muddled voice and darting eyes, one would tell the story of other, of strangers and siblings and parents and friends and animals and objects, as if one understood any of it, as if one could pretend to be omniscient, or even authoritative, as though one would be willing to sacrifice diversity for contentment, bewilderment for lies. 'Once upon a time...' is as spoiled as 'One nation, under God...', as bloated as epics of natural disasters, global conflicts or sexual dysfunction, as stale as 'That was the way it happened' or 'My side of the fence.' But one, even without one's tongue, will have stuff to say, prescient stuff, indicative and moving moments about audacious acts of motion and subsequent pardons.

An other goes for a walk without one. Out into the fields, early morning, autumn. Eating half of a biscuit, melted butter. Wearing a sweatshirt, hooded, and a skirt, striped. Carrying a doll, prim, white bonnet, whiter blouse, blonde curls. Or, just as it was told before, loaf, checkered, auburn. The details are, with regards to accuracy, inconsequential, this not being a murder mystery, this being as much fabrication as testimony, as much mood as account. While strolling along a rutted road, while passing an old tree stump, the other faints. And this swoon is causal. The grass bends, the trees sway, silos and water towers spontaneously combust, billboards and buildings fall, hills and mountains tumble to the sea, and one reels in one's kitchen, open to the sky, now that the roof has come down about one's shoulders and shoes. When one's other, any other, falls, one also falls. This is the new rule of human endeavor, human survival, human folly.

Across the fields sweeps the rain, soaking the ground, irrigating one's laugh lines and worry furrows. Or, those of the other, as it is the other who has fainted in the field, not one. One might *feel* as if it were one, but it is other. These storms always arise suddenly out of the south (or, out of the north, it doesn't really matter, as long as it is persistently mono-directional), running amok with ferocious winds, making one

or other quell under such fierce skies, believing, as eternal children, in unexplained retribution. Upon waking, to leg cramp or dog breath or clearing heavens, one senses one has either erred or been victimized, one either apologizing into the ether or shaking one's entitled fist at the air. When the trailing lightning strikes, after one has stood, post-contrition or pre-complaint, one feels one's place in the scheme of things enter one's heels and exit one's crown, a message of entreaty, galvanizing one's coordinates. Again, lest one forget, this has all happened to other, not to one.

The other widens out into the future, faints on behalf of one, is more other than one is one, is one unfleshed. Binary horrors, grotesque dichotomies, two-by-two up the ramp into the ship of fools. One drowns in one's swoon, one *drowns*.

A different field, a different day, a different one...

Summer languor dulled the land that fell and loped away from the back of the low slung house where one spent one's last August. Bugs were busy amid and above the navel-high wild hay, and cows from the neighboring farm, a tended and worked farm, munched their way down the slope along the half-in-ruins stone wall that bordered the property. If it were dawn brinked or twilight edged, the heat was a presence. If it were anytime from mid-morning to mid-afternoon, the heat was a force, and the cows would be prone in a glade. One slept through the heat of the day, or half-dozed, half-languished, as sleep was persistently shallow, whether one was nude in the porch hammock or on the kitchen daybed within the hushed house. At night, when the intense heat subsided, but only to a lesser heat, nothing remotely approaching chill, one knuckled under to insomnia. The drone of insects, one's hands at one's flanks or draped over one's loins, sweat without exertion, one's skin crawling with one's consciousness, a whippoorwill's cry lingering in one's ears as if it had been a banshee's wail from somewhere across the stultified countryside, or from

the neighboring farm, or from one's too isolated self. One had degenerated into an exaggerator. At one end of the house, watchable through the screenless square bathroom window, the terrain rose gradually toward the sky, a tawny hill of motionless grass, the green having been sucked from it back in July, the rare evening breeze never enough to sway it visibly, the cows not able to access it because of a barbed wire fence in insufficient disrepair to allow a breach. One scrutinized this lift of land as one might examine one's own midriff or sloped thigh while soaking in the tub. One began imagining a stranger come striding, rising over the horizon at noon and descending the hill toward the house, a rural mirage. Skirted, bloused, lithe and other. This farm had provided one with a summer's plate of solitude, what one had sought, but now one stood at the window and attempted to coax the vision past the barbed wire fence. To one. Other to one. To no avail. The stranger, as image, would not engage. One would stand in the bathroom, staring out the little square window, conjuring. Some days one saw nothing, manufacturing nothing, not the gait nor the bonnet nor even the most crucial sensibility of strangerhood. Once, one cut one's palm when grabbing the sill to glance out at an oblique angle. Out of the bottom of the windowframe, emerging from the paint flecked windowsill, an odd wooden screw protruded about the length of a finger joint, odd for its mahogany woodiness and for its head being hidden within the sill while its pointy end stuck straight up as a hazard to skin. One tried to figure how this came to be, if it were a construction goof or if at one time the screw held some decoration in place, a swan or a gargoyle or a pomegranate, the ceramic or wooden object having

been twisted down upon the screw. Now, on this hand-cutting occasion, one watched as a droplet of one's coppery blood slid down the screw's spiral until it pooled upon a flake of white paint. Then, one waited, poised with the patience of a praying mantis, for the day to tire sufficiently so that the afternoon sunlight could slant across the sill, and the up-till-now shaded blood, liquid from one's interior, would suddenly brighten.

The nights wear one down, the sleeplessness, the thick air, the mosquitoes. One lies atop the unsheeted mattress, projecting one's self as the stranger, approaching the neighboring farmhouse, strolling with casual insistence, sweating under one's blouse. The farmer glances up from the work at hand, and the look upon the farmer's face (or perhaps it is the farmer's wife's face) halts one's progress, freezes one in one's, stops one dead in one's, one feeling the uncut hay against the backs of one's knees under one's skirt, one feeling the blood from the unhealed wound in one's palm trickle down to one's fingertips before dripping to the earth, one feeling the eroticism of difference, one's blithe fascination with discernment...

One was visited only by the neighbor's cows and the neighbor's dog, a black dog of indeterminate breed, at once friendly and aloof, responsive and unneedy in that animal way humans cannot duplicate. The dog would come around to the back porch where one would feed it popcorn, a cinematic gesture not lost upon the dog, who appeared to appreciate the compositional affectations of its shiny coat against the sweltered landscape, the uncut grass and dusty tree backdrop, juxtaposed with one's fleshed frailty,

one's somnambulistic shell. The dog liked its popcorn carameled.

When summer is gone, when August dusk gives way to September dawn, heat to chill, oppression to melancholia, one won't have been awake, won't have slept, not for a season of seasons and seasons, and one would be a fool, a bonafide fool, to sit upon the edge of the lonely dock of another's harbor waiting for one's ship to, for one's fortunes to, and when all is said and done, when all that can ever be said has been said and one isn't undone, when one is done undoing one's self, bonnet to brogans, mousy hair to molded toes, singular perspective to common particularity, one will admit one has been snookered and hoodwinked by one's perennial making, one's inability to disengage as one or as stranger, one's one and one's other tethering one to substantive living with remarkable and recuperative love.

But the dog days haven't yet succumbed to the initial hints of leaf change, and one stands again at the bathroom window, that square of inhibited space, provoking a stranger out of thin air, the way trees come into being, the way tenses merge. The dark dog is curled upon the pale tile at one's feet, the coolest corner of the house, the dog lightly snoring, one having let it in the back door hours before and it having quickly tired of one's vigil, this hallucinatory fixation, this figmentary failure. Out of the blue one hears the within-shouting-distance blast of a shotgun, the neighboring farm youth out hunting, and a downed bird has improbably struck the wide-as-a-field windowsill, impaling its cream-colored neck upon the wooden screw, its wings

still believing in flight, the dog startled awake and now frantic, its bark out-noising the futile flapping struggle, one's shirt spattered with birdblood, one catching a glimpse of one's stunned expression in the distorting medicine cabinet mirror, as if it were a stranger's violent grimace, and one knows that such moments are relegated to suspect memory or morning dreams or literary pretension, but when one tastes the blood, porcelain fingertip to flannel tongue, it is similar enough to one's own for one to snicker, and dissimilar enough for one to confess indifference, to profess inadequacy, to witness independent death.

As one feverishly surfaced, surfaces, will surface, one planked one's push across one's pull, trying to skirt paradox, one folds one's paper ambitions into aerodynamic embarrassments, and one will plead one's case to the cut fields of one's spatial now, one's temporal this. One bootstraps. One has final work to do. One is about told out.

One went to one's father to speak of one's mother, one went to one's mother to speak of one's father, one went to one's resembled youth to talk about one's sister, one went to one's sister to talk about one's brother, one went to one's brother to talk about a stranger, one went to a stranger to talk about one's resembling youth, one goes to one's other, one's friend, to speak of one's one, one's love, and one will go to one's one to vent oneself, to irradicate one's self. It won't work. None of it. So one goes to the hills in supplication (it doesn't suffice); so one goes to the glass, half-filled with water, for immersion (nope); so one goes to the shotgun barrels for annihilation (never); so one becomes the undampening cherry stem...

One should frontier one's heart, wilderness one's mind, outpost one's spleen, domesticate one's spirit. One quarantines one's soul in a low slung farmhouse amid the rolling farmland, in a thriftstore metal dollhouse atop a table, in the hollow of a tree of childhood invention (adulthood rendition). And it is here, in one's cozy fort, carved out of the belly of a grown redwood, containing bed (with woven spinny coverlet) and cartography table (with hidden drawer for the white rope and the wooden marble) and reading loft (with knothole views of collapsing cities), that one chronicles other as one. One tells of events and emotions, of logic and absurdity, the diminutive and the

panoramic, aware all along of one's paranoia of sequence, one's phobia of alignment. Other isn't one, one swore, one still swears, one will swear to one's grave, but other isn't strictly other either.

:So one should have said, while about one's business as raconteur, before one stopped one's orating [So one could have heard: "Protect one's backside from one's frontside, one's upside-down side from one's downside-up side, one's outside from one's inside..."]: "We count what cannot be counted, grains of sand and hairs on head and pi places and galaxies and shortcomings...One was laid to rest outstretched in the middle of a sparkly day field. One could tell, simply by staring at sky (not at land, not at trees, not at one's skin), and neither smelling the air nor listening to birds or machinery, that the season wasn't summer or winter, nor crispest autumn, nor virginal spring, but early September or late May, a gorgeous afternoon of solitude. While one absorbed the dominant blue and the subservient white (with its unthreatening gray), one felt the ground tremble, as if it were a grumbling stomach or a shuddering chest, and at one's nape, and against one's lower arms and palms, the soil turned to corduroy and then to flannel. One swallowed one's taste of self. Afterward, one was covered by a sheet of many colors, followed by a blanket of unfallen snow. One knew one wasn't dreaming because one knew one's dreams (although one gave fresh thought, for a moment, to the silo and the copse ravine), and one knew one had not gone mad because— ["One was still hearing voices..."], and one knew one wasn't dead because one had memory of the shot bird, the inverted wooden screw, the barking dog, one's aspect. Thus bemused, one lay, comforted by the rainbowed and snowy weight upon one's body, a tiny edge of the fabric tucked under one's chin, one watching as clouds obscured the sun and the field fell under shadow. Refusing to shiver, one whistled. When a shaft of light broke through, all of the paper airplanes one had never folded were like dust motes in the air, caught in the light, fluttering far above the textiled winter landscape. One's arm was falling asleep, and when one jerked it toward one, one knocked over the half-emptied water tower, flooding the field, submerging the old stump with its graveled rings, whelming the blouseless running doll in midstride, floating one toward town as if one were a cork. Toward evening, after the water had evaporated or sunk away toward the water table, one lay sprawled in the mud on the shoulder of the road to town with one's head cradled in one's father's lap, hearing one's mother say: 'Ever since you were born, ever since you were just our passion for one another, we....,' one's father digging and brushing the muck from one's nostrils and mouth, one thinking of one's own daughter or son, far horizoned, contingent, unlikely, or one mulling what one's very next word

would be after one's father had managed to clear one's windpipe and one had inhaled and figured out how to enunciate without a tongue, or one considered that if one were a ventriloquist's dummy it would all be taken care of, as someone else would speak for one while one stared off into the distance to one's heart's content, or one rewound and replayed in one's mind the falling of chimneys everywhere, or one longed for parallel stance with one's friend or perpendicular assembly with one's one, or one delighted in the way the moisture upon one's eyelashes refracted sunlight into one's peripheral vision, invigorating one's sense of field, or one felt one's father's lips upon one's eyelids and one's mother's lips upon one's dirty palm, or one rolled over into one's unmaker's arms and reached for one's voice, one's perspective, one's sleep, one's—”: