VERGE

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I

When one's father resembles one's son, who looks like one's future, not one's past, and one resembles one's grandfather, whom one met as a curiosity, and one's mother resembles one's daughter, who looks like one's youth, not one's promise, and one favors one's grandmother, who took after moths, one ought to admit one sees what one wants to see without ever witnessing irreducible truth. One's grandfather was not an insect. Nor is one's father, nor one's son, nor one, nor one's son's son, who is yet to be anything, as far as one knows, one's own son still unspermed, one's daughter unbulbed, one's children having reached the middle of their youths as one has reached the middle of one's life and as one's untesticled father and one's unbreasted mother stroll down the curved slope toward broad middling death. One's grandmother resembled a girl from one's boyhood, a downy towhead who lived in the steep-roofed house across the street and who had cloth cheeks that might've fit snugly in one's palms. One constructs a landscape of orchard and ocean, dirt roads of crushed shells and fruit tasting of brine. One fiddles with substitution.

As one steps out of one's bungalow on a summer's night, the light from its doorway throws one's shadow across the clovered yard toward the orchard dark. Among the trees, insects hover. Beyond the orchard, the surf breathes. One's orchards—be they pistachio or pomegranate, citrus or stoned fruits, gridded and tended or haphazard

and neglected—hide a bevy of soft-chested girls and a swarm of stingered boys. On stultified mornings, one wanders one's orchards, gathering fallen shrunken fruit and carving gargoyles from them to frighten off pixie and hag, ragamuffin and prune, waif and sage. On seabreezed nights, one stands upon the bungalow's stoop, watching the treetops digest the moonlight, or, if in starlight, attempting to see what one wishes to see. When looking at something, when trying to grasp that thing without hearing or touching or smelling or tasting it, whatever it happens to be, whether it is in motion or stationary, whether one is in motion or stationary, one's landscape of focus is too dispersed, one is unable to visually detach the thing from its surroundings. One could squint through one's curled fingers, as if one were making a telescope of one's hand, in an effort to isolate the object, to block superfluous optical stimulation, but one's arm shakes, one fails to blink away eye fatigue, dimensionality suffers. One finds solitary perspective bothersome, desiring depth of field to heighten width of acceptance. To walk around the object, to comprehend its untouched mass, to understand its internal cohesion, to be suspended above it as an independent object, a subjective entity, a bird's fluster, a leaf's flutter, a passing event—one seeks the narrower vista, the merging of element and incident.

At one end of the bungalow a wide bed sags. At the opposite end an exposed toilet squats beside a busted sink. Along the rear wall is an outdated but functional kitchenette—oven, rangetop, refrigerator, cutting block. Smack in the bungalow's gut, three ladderback chairs corral a rickety table. Beside the bed a wooden orange crate supports a globed lamp, and from the cracked ceiling hangs a chandelier sporting three candle-shaped frosted bulbs. Outside, beside a hummingbird infested bottlebrush bush—the red blossoms as fecund as anything within a day's hike—a stand alone shower, without curtain or partition, drips persistently upon a square slab of cement, the water trickling into an aqueduct-like sluice. One studies the hummingbirds, with their sharpened beaks and rapid hearts, while one showers in the open air, one's skin salamander-like against the backdrop of orchard bark.

One sleeps in the pit of the wide bed, and the cooing of doves under the eaves of one's bungalow—throughout a sweltering night, accompanying the static from one's transistor radio—can be enough to make one vomit. One wakes early, often before sunup, one's fallow viscera twitching, one's castrating hands clenched at one's flanks, one's sallow lips pursed. The room is squandered. One picks one's breakfast from the orchard's trees, eating in the shade beside the dirt road that leads to the beach, a road

one has littered with shells from one's pockets on broken walks back from shore to bungalow. As the heat of the day encroaches upon one's landscape—on the days one stays away from the populated beach—one burrows into the shade of the oldest orchard, where a creek moves through on its twistings from hills to sea.

One goes to the beach—dressed in loose pale cotton clothing from throat to wrist to ankle, wearing a brimmed cap to protect one's brow—to observe four houses. They're clumped together in a row along the dunes, with vacant lots as bookends. One house is white with a blue roof. One is cream with a green roof. One is dun and brown roofed. One is white and red roofed. All are wood with pitched shingling. All are double-storied with porches and balconies and outside stairways. All are on stilts with cement platforms for parking cars or motorcycles or bicycles or scooters or prams. When one isn't ogling nubile smudges—splashing about in the waves or sunning themselves on laundered towels—one watches the four houses and their occupants. The houses, with the fearful symmetry of their windows, stare back.

While strolling the orchard rows, in search of rot or intruders or misalignment, one evokes one's crumpling father, one invokes one's unfolding son. One steamy day, one comes upon a trampled pathway between rows of trees, a pathway that's curved slightly, although some days before it was rigorously straight to the eye. One stands with hands on hips, befuddled. Checking the paths between the rows on either side, and even those on either side of those, one discovers them bent, every one. As one strides up the path, one is stymied by one's sudden fear of curvature. As a child, one was captivated by the notion of a gleaming rush of ginger ale rain, and by progressions, say, river speed, water rise, lake recovery. Now grown, one is perplexed to find oneself momentarily paralyzed by a horizontal arc. A bird screech (or an insect whir) snaps one out of it, and snatching a piece of fruit from a low limb (for scrutinization back at the bungalow), one hustles home. The next day (or the previous one)—nearly every day being as hot as its cousins on either side of it—one seeks the cool of the creek. But the creek, being natural, not aqueductal nor irrigatory, does a bit of bending and curving itself, and so when one squats at its moist bank, having splashed one's cheeks with its water, one's discomfort swells. Scenic range, spiral surge, vanishing point.

Spray from one's showers drifts across one's landscape, imagined or experienced. One stands naked in the sunshine, browning as the summer intensifies. The water supply, as far as one can tell, is inexhaustible, and one stands under its pressure for half-hours at a time, enjoying the sounds of the splashings and drippings from one's body

onto the slab of cement. Not letting up on their sorties upon the bottlebrush bush, the hummingbirds take no notice of one's vulnerability, one's soft spots, one's lewd gestures, one's meditative stupors. Some nights, when the heat is relentless, one goes straight from the shower to the valley of the bed, without toweling off, one staying cool on the damp sheet just long enough to sink into shallow sleep. Some nights, the absolute worst, when one wakes nauseous, as if drowning in a puddle of self, one showers in the dark yard—the mosquitoes steering clear of the flying spray—and then positions oneself back on the mattress with tenuously balanced insect repellent candles burning beside one's shoulders and hips and ankles, one staring at the blotched stains on the ceiling from ancient rains.

At the beach, sitting on the boardwalk bench, one's back to the water, subverting the bench's ocean-gazing intent, one's ribs pressed against the wood, one casually observes the four houses. One has three benches to choose from when one comes to the beach to watch these houses. The choice bench puts one directly across from the cream-colored green-roofed house. Another places one across from the empty lot flanking the blue-roofed house. The least desirable of the three sends one down across from the far end of the vacant lot beside the red-roofed house, although this provides one with an angled vantage into its rearmost rooms, a fruitful perspective at twilight when the interior lights are lit but the blinds and curtains aren't closed. Or, occasionally, deep into the night or early dawn when the inhabitants forego privacy (purposefully or absent-mindedly) for breezes or sounds of the surf or ambient light. And, when there is a nite-lite, or the need for a glass of water, or a child's bad dream, or bedside reading, one is granted a moment of transposition.

Amid one's summer of solitude and failure, one's act-of-god inconsequence, the modification of one's language, the bending of one's landscape, one's patriarchal lineage grafts itself onto one's shoulders. One's father's dead father and one's father protrude above one collarbone, one's son and one's son's hypothetical son stick out above the other, one's daughter permanently stuck in one's throat as if one had swallowed a moth, one's lepidopteral grandmother and mother and spouse fluttering in the night waiting for one to shine the tiniest light. One day at the beach, while glancing away from the houses and scanning the shore, one thought one saw a girl (towheaded, lithe, oblivious) that one felt was one's father (goateed, baboonish, tender) in disguise. When one brought the piece of fruit home to the bungalow after picking it from the newly curved row, one cut it open with one's pen-knife and it bled into one's lap as one ought to have known

it would. One ate its flesh without using one's teeth.

From the red-roofed house emerges a frumpy woman and two swimsuited boys. The woman wears a horizontally striped black and white blouse and lime green shorts that suit her unflatteringly, but one likes her hearty laugh and the way she engages the boys as they pass the boardwalk on their rush to the waves. The woman sits by herself on the sand while the boys engage the ocean with the fresh squeals of vacationers. When the squeals escalate into screams, one doesn't think shark, but jellyfish, and sure enough one watches as the boys rush out of the water and point toward what resembles the top of a bald head floating in the froth. The robust woman is shaking with laughter even as she tells them to be careful not to touch jellyfish but to not fret about them either, that the ocean wouldn't be the ocean without jellyfish, and one suddenly knows this isn't their mother, this isn't one's mother, this isn't anyone's mother.

One wishes to refract. Light bending in water. The tempering of experience. One cups one's hand over one's flashlight to glimpse one's translucence, the pinkly shining around the bones. At home in the bungalow, sitting at the table at night, staring at one's hands, one criss-crosses one's life, crossing out what can't be erased. Sometimes, when one sits upon the unsequestered toilet, as one sometimes must (although one enjoys shady orchard nooks when one goes daytime reconnoitering), with the relative whole of the bungalow's interior visible, one imagines sharing this spartan space with one's father disguised at the towheaded girl. The sink, being busted, forces one to go outside to the shower when one's hands or one's clothing or a piece of fruit needs washing. Or, one could simply ignore the water pouring from sink's crack onto the warped and mildewed floorboards. If one is feeling energetic, and the moon is out, one could excursion to the creek, where the light bends selfward.

Fruit picking is hard work. Ladders, sticks, insects, crates, snakes, sunstroke. One does it sporadically, not as a naive attempt to keep up with the ripening, not for meager fruitstand profits, not out of obligation to the orchard or the orchard's originators or the planet's scurvious poor, but from a perverse desire to harvest without purpose. One can't possibly eat all that one picks. One has no urge to plant. One picks throughout a scorching day, not stacking the crates so that the bugs and birds will have easier access to the quickly rotting fruit. One has a father. Throughout the history of fatherhood, very few fathers have been towheaded girls. Throughout the history of womanhood, very few grandmothers have been moths. Throughout the history of straight orchard rows, very few have become inexplicably bent.

II

One is a child, growing up on a curved and sloped street, shaded and venerable, with sidewalks lifted by tree roots, and steep-roofed houses with wrought-iron gates and secluded lawns. The street twists toward the sea. The chimneys are manifold and elongated and one envies them their lofty sights. Streets like this no longer exist and never did. Intelligent wealth. The street has gone from rutted dirt to cobblestones to asphalt. The sounds of trolleys haunt its sewers. One's father isn't a baboon, isn't a girl (towheaded or brunette or redheaded or blonde). He's an angular lightning rod of a father, conducting fatal energy away from one and one's mother. He's one of the neighborhood chimneys, alert and prominent, drawing smoke and cinders out of one's sheltered world. One's mother, sparrowish, is worthy of his care. One's son is a twig of a man, elderly, enfeebled, dying in a fouled gutter.

Across the street (broad and unhurried) lives a tomboy (barefoot and sundressed) whom one borrows and takes with one into one's tub. She wouldn't agree (or be allowed) to go as flesh, so one settles for her as thought, the eleventh percent of one's brain devoted entirely to this wicked bird. On the Saturdays one's father works, one's mother drives one to the beach (one clad in one's out-of-fashion plaid swimtrunks), and the girl is often there with her mother, who only casually knows one's mother. The girl, with her tangle of white hair and her sun freckles and salmon-colored lips, stares at one as if one

were a beached jellyfish. One time, on a day when the coastal clouds obscured the sun long enough to chill the swimmers out of the surf, the girl let boredom seduce her into building a sand castle with one, while her mother and one's prettier mother babbled. One stole glances at the girl's collarbones and jawline and ears while digging the moat or patting down the ramparts. Then, one's clumsiness flared, and with one awkward adjustment of one's elbow, one razed a significant portion of the castle, including the tower of torture (her conception). The girl's lower lip twitched, as if one had wounded her grandmother, and she sprung with fisted fury. In the lopsided fracas, one strap of her swimsuit snapped loose, and for several moments before the mothers tugged her off of one, her breast brushed one's cheek, a breast, by the way, that was almost indistinguishable from a boy's, there being barely enough of a lifted bud to constitute anything but nipple—but it is in all *almosts* that existence is measurably enriched.

As a father, one unsons oneself, thereby unfathering oneself, orphaning oneself. The son passes away, oozing down a drain. The father blossoms into a bird whore. Lineage is a sphere, and from any given point the visual planes overlap, history and destiny becoming one horizon. One's son unfathers himself before spurting into the unfathomed moth of his choosing. These attempts at casting off, disassociation, unraveling, come to naught. Integration is undefiable. One partakes of one's father's and one's son's lonelinesses by cheshiring in and out of the thinnest airs. One supplies cautious hunker to the vertical terrain of moneyed houses. One's grandmother lurked amongst the dresses in one's mother's closet. One's grandfather tinkered with mechanical friction in one's father's trunk. The girl across the street possesses knobby shoulders, and one considers them whether they are exposed by a sundress or hidden by an autumn sweater, sweaters with holes around the collars, eaten into the fabric by tiny mouths. One's mother makes charcoal sketches of men impaled upon clock hands, or one makes crayon drawings under one's bed of one's mother making charcoal drawings of boys impaled upon clock hands, or one imagines coals of long exhausted hearths gripped in the girl's hands as she renders splendid fathers towering above one's humbled crouch.

From one's upper-story windowseat—one's anatomy pillowed, one frozen in imaginative incident—one observes as the neighborhood dogs wag their slobbery selves into the girl's lap, her voice lake-bottoming with gentle assurance, the watery resonance of a youth who learnt to swim early. Her yard isn't as shady as one's, her lawn isn't as green, her gate not as easily shut. One's father brings home his earned certainty, and sometimes plain cardboard cartons of vanilla ice-cream that one spoons into one's

mouth with appreciative glances at one's father's shaved neck. Furtiveness seldom brings expected rarefied surprise.

One is once lifted from one's bed and carried downstairs, out into the garage, and put into the backmost seat of the family wagon, the seat that faces toward the vehicle's tailgate, one having to twist in the seat to glance frontward toward the steering wheel and the dash, as one might twist on a boardwalk bench to look away from the surf at a row of beachhouses that have caught one's fancy. As the wagon (in neutral, without engine noise) slides out of the garage into the streetlight morning—sun unrisen, birds unwoken—one's as unable to slip back into sleep (although one has been provided with pillow and blanket) as to wholly wake, feeling, as long as the vehicle's in reverse, that one is alone watching an odd home movie. One has never before sat in this rear third seat, a seat usually hidden in its flattened position to give more room to the family dog, a frenetic collie. He, the dog, is not in the station wagon on this occasion, and now that the engine has been cranked and the vehicle has begun gliding forward, one sees him sitting on the ambient lawn by the gate with his head cocked. One's father is driving, and he is following the road that bends away from the undrinkable ocean toward a lake of fresh risen water.

One's son, denied access to this elegantly steep-roofed world by timing and circumstances, having sought shelter behind people's toasters and woodpiles and bathroom space heaters, disappears into sewer failure. All it takes to implement genealogical falls from grace or sudden rises in fortune is the assembling or crumbling buffer of a single generation—one, as father, believing in bootstrapping, upholding blank slate ascents, individual lifelong bivouacking. Situational ethics dictate that one's mother accentuate her hips and breasts, or hide her navel and knees, or oval her lips or glove her hands or tower her hair or perfume her cycle—under one's bed one crayons one's mother into submission.

If you can forget how to ride a bicycle, you have had a good teacher. A coy aphorism—a perspective preserver—that buoys one, keeps one afloat beyond the breakers of one's mother's scope. The towheaded girl—calves taut, hair blown—rides her silver bike around these streets of chimneys and fathers. Although one dislikes wheels and objects of balance, one learns to ride by watching her from one's bedroom window, from behind one's gate, and after one's birthday delivers a shiny bike of one's own, one ventures out after her down the inclined street and around the loose bend. One relishes the small of her back, the tapering to the hips, the way she never coasts downhill but keeps

pedaling. One day, when she and one are older and not old enough, she rides to the beach with one following soft behind, one wondering the whole way when she's going to flip around and speed home. But she doesn't. When one locates her silver varsity locked to the boardwalk railing, and after one has spotted her wading in the low surf (shoes held in hands), one dares to smell her triangular seat. Then one's banana seat. The same anal aroma, the same odor of black molded plastic in the sun.

One hears one's father's humming above the drone of the station wagon's engine. One feels one's sun coming up in one's lungs. The vehicle smells of collie. The morning's haze makes the country highway look emptier than it is, makes the woods along the lake shore eerie in the earliest light, makes one think of the steam rising from one's evening aquamarine bath—one's mother having festively dripped blue and green food coloring into the suds and water to create an equatorial island effect. Now the upholstery glistens with dog hair, one's father's nape is unshaven, one's musty mouth tastes of one's whitewashed dreams, a fond chewn bone pokes at one's ankle, one's father is steering the station wagon onto a dirt road.

If to metamorphose into one's sibling—brother or sister—necessitates a faint, or to transfigure into a prostrate *other* demands a swooned *self*, then to transpose one's son and one's father with girls and moths (winsome and fragile) requires skewed parallels, a bending of will, sacrificial expectations. One supplants and surrogates, switching unswitchables, not the mutability of matter, but of perception. Nothing need be fixed (nothing is broken, nothing is out of place). When one was a child, one knew one would become an adult. As an adult, one knows one hasn't stopped becoming a child. *Becoming*, as a unit of active language, is the father's wrench, the mother's crutch.

Under one's bed—one's bed of retrieval and dominance—with a thousand colors of crayons at one's disposal, one draws orchards by the sea, modest dwellings without chimneys or garden walls, aquatic systems of canals and rivulets flowing to and from tree shrouded lakes, dirt paths twisting from the lakes—through the orchards—to the ocean, to the waning and waxing resort towns. One sketches the legs of the girl across the street, applying oneself to the territory of the knee—when bent—the hollow between calf and thigh, kneecap and kneepit, where one could gather one's spillings, the juice from one's squeezed crayons, the crescent moon clippings from one's fingers and toes. This hollow, whether hers or one's, like a moon crater, is most fetching when half in shadow, half in light. Beside one's sketch pad, under one's bed, one keeps a sock stuffed with peach pits that one has been told contain extractable poison.

One shouldn't fall (or leap) from one's upper-story window without a pillowed destination, or without a way to fly or glide or slow one's descent. One shouldn't mock one's family to strangers. One should never instigate hate. One shouldn't pull one's teeth out when they aren't rotten. One shouldn't fantast to someone's image without that someone's implicit permission. One mustn't poke one's father with a toy bayonet while he sleeps. One's but a visitor in one's body.

When one invents one's world—like all inventors, significant or run-of-the-mill—one builds upon previous breakthroughs. Structures, gatherings of trees, bodies of water, landscape relief, collective individuals, clay. Progression, regression, navigation, sinkage. Pattern development, raveled sleeves of care, shruggings. One grants oneself imaginative sovereignty. The aggression of the prey, the passivity of the predator. One's world, if it's to support semblant life, needs one as sun, needs one to shine with constancy. One can't go dark upon every hemisphere of one's world at once. Outside of the rare and brief eclipse, one's world, except in story or memory, won't survive the loss of its sun.

As one's father slows the station wagon toward stopping, one hears the road's gravel—tossed up by the braked tires—striking the vehicle's undercarriage. After the engine is cut, one hears a coot's cry (or a loon's) out across the lake. One hears one's father's sigh. One hears one's father's door unlatch and open, and his seat squeal as he slides out into the air. One hears his sighing. One attempts to turn one's father into the girl from across the street, but he won't revolve. He's unwilling to contribute to grief. He stands with his hands on his hips, gazing out across the placid water, as if waiting for one to awaken. One's awake. One's trying to bleach his hair, to slim his legs, to flatten his stomach, to tighten his buttocks and unmuscle his arms. One shaves him, to no avail. One's father, catching one's stare, motions, with his unique gentleness, for one to join him outside. It is only then, as one climbs out into the earliest lavendar light, that one notices the canoe strapped atop the station wagon.

In the summers of one's childhood house, air-conditioning isn't necessary because of the house's lofted architecture and one's grandfather's fans. One surrounds oneself in his flutterings and spinnings and oscillations. Although he is dead and lived elsewhere throughout one's youth, he understood wind current, wing beat and skin temperature, and his placement of built-in fans keeps every room in the house—except the bathrooms—comfortably cool. One's mother, to her husband's mother's delight, can splendidly imitate one's grandfather's pontifications on the pleasures of sultry bathrooms in summer, frigid bathrooms in winter. One's mother, outwardly unmarred by most of

her living, once lost a finger to one of the primary fans when she put a hand through its protective grate while engaged in amorous wrestling with one's father.

One's family (one's father, one's mother, one's father's mother, the collie and one) take a trip to a vineyard amid the hills beyond the cluster of lakes outside of town. One rides with one's mother in the back seat of the station wagon (one's grandmother, prone to motion sickness, must ride shotgun, as far away from the dog as possible), and while the landscape scrolls past, one keeps one's mother's profile in one's peripheral vision, as if it were the map to the headwaters of one's hopes. Yet one slides downstream. Her nose is vanilla slag, her eyebrows escarpments, her lips strata, her throat a sandbar. One floats on one's raft toward the crayola delta. One's grandmother coughs. One's father ponders roadmarkers at a crossroads. The collie pants happily, tail busy, anticipating open spaces to romp and frolic, perhaps creekwater and meadowgrass. One's mother slips one a stick of gum.

One floats in the canoe with one's father. A lumpy burlap sack lies on the canoe bottom between one and one's father. He, one's strong father, hauled the sack out of the wagon with enough effort to harden his biceps, and now, with the rowing he has done, veins have lifted in his arms and one eyes them as if they were waterlillies about to blossom. The sun is risen above the trees. A tiny spider tickles one behind one's ear, and in one's attempt to flick it away, one scratches one's neck with a fingernail in need of trimming. One needs to pee. One's father's jaw is tight as he surveys the shoreline. One needs to pee, but stays silent, not knowing what one's father would do if provided with such information at this time and place, one's father having stopped rowing now that the canoe is out in the middle of the lake, one not wishing to stand and spray over the side of the boat—as would likely be the proposed solution. When the burlap sack hits the water's surface, the resounding plop makes one think of playing in one's tub with a washcloth wrapped around a nude plastic doll.

One's street potholes, albeit infrequently. Once, before one learns to ride one's bike, one observes from one's windowseat as the towheaded girl hits a hollow in the asphalt with her front tire and somersaults over the handlebars. One understands that she's hurt, that she's landed on hard pavement and is crumpled motionless in the gutter, and that one is likely the only one to have witnessed the event. Nevertheless, one waits a cherished pounding of one's heart before sounding the alarm by dashing down the stairs in search of one's mother, screaming with all of one's might. Even after the girl is carried to her house (she's moving her arms and legs by the time one's mother reaches

her and sends one to fetch her mother), bed-rested and recovered and out riding again on another day, one persists—with one's memory—to hold onto the moment of that solitary heartbeat when one could testify to something current and crucial about her which no one else knew.

At the vineyard, one is told to keep an eye on the dog, to keep him from sniffing himself into mischief. One feels as if the hills are velour animals, as if the rows of grapes could be combed into fresh patterns, brushed against the grain. The collie laps at a muddy puddle, nuzzles the cuffs of a touring foreigner, trots to an outdoor vat and marks one of its posts before one is able to grab his collar and tug him back to the dirt parking lot. The sky is cloudless. The dog looks up at one without devotion. One has never tasted wine but one has tasted one's own blood.

As a child, one knows under half of those who claim to know something about one. As an adult, one discovers one knows nothing about children, that one knows no children, that one has children and is childless. One's father's grandson shrivels into a sweaty palm. One's grandson's father coughs up stomach lining behind a dumpster. One cradles one's son in one's arms as one held one's collie when it was a puppy, when one was a boy. When ascertaining time, one falters, one burgeons, one recedes into renewal.

One's father sips wine like it's hot liquid, careful not to scald his tongue. One's mother treats it like syrup, dipping the tip of her pinkie into the cup. One's grandmother, the true impetus behind this vineyard excursion, tastes the wines with her wrinkled eyelids toward the sun. An ant is crawling up one's shin, and it tickles. One resists brushing it off, but tries to get it to crawl onto one's hand. One notices one's fingernails are filthy. Then, before one can react, another dog and one's collie are in a fight, locked in a vicious struggle, jaws to throats. The commotion and its effect upon the dozen people in its vicinity is immediate, people shouting and stumbling out of the way, one desperately wishing one's father didn't have to be among the men trying to separate the dogs by grabbing their tails to elevate their hind legs. One wants one's father safe at home, scooping vanilla ice cream from the depths of the huge carton, alternating hands to scrape the bottom clean, some sticking to his hairy wrists.

One seldom falls while learning to balance upon one's bike, to pedal and turn and stop. This, despite one's suspicion of circularity and equilibrium. The dismount is difficult, as one's legs aren't long. It's upon one of these attempts to get off one's bike that one stumbles and brings the bike down hard upon the curb edge. One stands and

surveys the damage. One must now go tell one's father one has broken one's reflector. One must now go tell one's father one has bent the spokes of one's bike. One's mother, pursing her cheeks, won't believe every spoke could be unstraightened by a solitary meeting of bike and curb. One's father, to one's satisfaction, shakes his head in patient disgust, citing one's resemblance to one's grandfather as not extending to mechanical inclination, to the love of cog and fulcrum.

These happenings of one's life—dog fights, bike mishaps, canoes and station wagons and lakes—fissures and threads, shoddily remembered, mostly concocted or borrowed, constitute a fraudulent biographical heimlich maneuver, a revisionist's resuscitation. Memory—inherently fallible and malleable—when rid of conscious lies, is perfect, is imagined.

One's cousin, from one's mother's brother, comes to visit one summer—a peevish girl with almond eyes one doesn't like. This is the summer after the April day in school when one wet one's pants because the teacher wouldn't let one leave the class to go to the bathroom. One spent the afternoon smelling of one's urine, at a desk that smelt of one's urine, one's classmates making whispered fun of one while the teacher pretended not to notice one's condition. One doesn't know why one didn't just bolt from the classroom to the bathroom without permission, why one suffered one's teacher's authority, why one suffers one's cousin's petulance.

Marbles, to most kids, are to be collected, stockpiled, won and lost, traded, treasured. When one is given a bag of marbles—by one's uncle—one sends them away, one by one, without exception. Above one's unscreened window, a rain gutter follows the steep eave to the edge of the house and to the downpipe. By squatting on one's sill and reaching up with one hand (while holding onto the window frame with the other), one drops a marble over the lip of the recently cleaned gutter and sends it rolling to the downpipe, where it plummets toward the ground and out the bent spout that allows rain water to flow away from the house. Once there (after one corrects the angle of the run-off pipe, after one's initial attempt skitters onto the lawn), the marble shoots down one's driveway, out onto the asphalt, and follows the slope and bend of the street out of sight.

On the drive home from the vineyard, after the fight has been stopped and apologies exchanged between the people belonging to the two dogs, one's mother rides in the rearmost seat—having been converted, by one's father, from its usual flatness—with the collie's head in her lap. The collie's neck has been wrapped loosely in a strip

of cloth, as there is some superficial bleeding from fang wounds. One's mother's skirt is stained. One sits alone in the backseat—now the middle seat—thinking that this is the way death will come to one, or to a loved one, unexpectedly, out of nowhere, right in front of one's eyes. One counts telephone poles, waterfowl on the lakes, one's grandmother's coughs, passing time, winding the way home.

She, one's cousin, unlike the towheaded girl across the street, intuitively recognizes one as alien, and treats one as threat. She, the neighbor girl, sees one as an ordinary tree on a street cluttered with trees and ignores one as having poor tree fort limbs, as being unlikely to fall and crush her house, as being nowhere near tall enough to climb to the clouds. She, one's cousin, has never watched birds fly over trees on a rainless day with vacant feelings in her chest. One's cousin is the kind of girl who matures into a woman of topical influence and who avoids men of melancholy bent, knowing them to be a blight, a hindrance to a tangible life of children and acquisition.

All across one's neighborhood, when one is a child, the dream is of the status quo, the perseverance of the reasonable, the preservation of successful measure. Eccentricity, like that manifested by one's grandfather, lives elsewhere, and is celebrated from safe respectable distances. One's grandfather tells his story in starts and stops, the one time one meets him, out of curiosity, the summer of his death. He speaks as if thresheld, as if his voice has been caught escaping the room. One doesn't like him, or his story, but one likes how his hands flutter when he talks, like one's grandmother's hands when she is silent—only *her* nails are chewn. One's father's father's story, told in tangles and knots, eddies and cul de sacs, makes one think of one's pitiful drawings—of unaccomplished men—crumpled and stuffed into the springs under one's bed.

One's cousin, in a sundress, with her chestnut back and fleshy shoulderblades, is nothing like the towheaded girl, who's all tawn and bone and flaxen. One's cousin's face—a pinched anvil—isn't unpretty, and if her neck were longer, she could resemble exotic birds of dark temperament. It's her unyielding and public allegiance to her own wants that makes her annoying, and even more so, her incessant whining when matters don't go her way, as they seldom, if ever, in the end, do. One's mother takes one and one's cousin to the beach, although one's cousin insists throughout the drive that she needs a new swimsuit, that her stodgy mother doesn't understand fashion, that one's mother—her aunt—lovely and elegant, would be kind to stop at a department store on the way, that she has her own money to spend, that the suit she envisions won't be too revealing. One glimpses one's mother—in the rear-view mirror—rolling her eyes and

half-smiling. Nonetheless, she capitulates, allowing one's cousin to go into an expensive boutique along the boardwalk, perhaps assuming the prices will be too daunting. But one's cousin emerges with her precocious teen cleavage prominent—the lowermost curves of her grown breasts exposed—the iridescent blue top essentially a fabric patch covering her aureoles and nipples—and her bikini bottom showing enough belly below her navel to prove she premeditatively shaved that morning. One's mother, jaw firm, grabs one's cousin by the wrist and makes her go back inside and exchange the suit, and when one's cousin emerges—wearing her old one-piece—one knows from her fist-tight face that one's mother will never be forgiven. What one doesn't know, and what one's mother and one's cousin don't know, is that the day, this very day, holds unpleasant surprises for one who's selfish and for one who's weak.

As a man, one childs oneself into love and humiliation, affection and regret. The simplest mistake is magnified, the gravest wrong redeemed. Energy converts sons into fathers, gnarls fathers into grandfathers, dusts forests with the dead. One cannot unbead oneself once one is strung and one's son and one's grandson are strung behind one. The clasping is quicker than the slippage.

One's father takes one boating, one early morning in the summertime. One's gentle father, a canoe, one brightening dawn. Or, one goes bike riding by oneself, leaving while everyone in the house—even the collie—is still asleep. One pedals toward the ocean, peeling off on a narrow county road to follow a creek until the road climbs to the top of a rise. There, amid fog that is beginning to dissipate, one follows the creek with one's gaze as it twists through straight-rowed and ungated orchards. Off in the distance, the shore is visible, and the towheaded girl, who is surely in her bed or in her bathroom or at the breakfast table with her mother, is witnessed by one as she plays alone in the surf. This, then, is the moment one comprehends one is untrustable and chronically potent. One wasn't the maker of one's world, one isn't the maker of one's world, one is a maker of one's world.

One's grandfather, with his hackneyed, half-absent voiced, hour and a half long autobiographical tirade, convinces one that eccentricity, like conformity, is emphasized beyond its merits. His story, laced with anecdotes and non-sequiturs, is too reminiscent of one's daydreams for one to be either at ease or charmed. Only when he speaks of machinery, his frenetic hands gesticulating marvelously, is one mildly intrigued. One, not being apparatus inclined, listens to explanations of device and system as if they were fairy-tales. One's grandfather's fans, his theories on air circulation and temperature

swirl, his modifications of fiberglass blades, keep one sitting at his bedside awhile longer than one planned. But, just as sudden as an oscillation, he's speaking again of his childhood—not in the present tense—and one's eyes glaze.

After the incident at the boardwalk boutique, one's cousin stomps and sulks the day away, along the shore and on her vast beach blanket under the umbrella, while one tumbles in the waves with one's mother. She, one's mother, delights in what she calls *woppling*, allowing the surf to batter her, her legs and arms cartwheeling through the spray. One has seldom heard her laugh this heartily. It's during one of these spells of laughter—as she steps away from the waves to the wet sand, trying to catch a breather (she's been somersaulted underwater by the ocean's churn)—that one's dizzy mother stumbles back into the path of a bicyclist—a bicyclist, one remarks to one's father that night, resembling the towheaded girl across the street, except that he, the bicyclist, is older, and a boy. One's mother and the boy and the bicycle go sprawling. The boy and the bike are unscathed, with one's mother suffering (apparently) only a bruised rib where the handlebar struck her. One's cousin, wanting to flirt with the boy, or feeling this a good opportunity to make fake amends, or because she was finally bored with herself and her isolation, dashes down from the umbrella to see if everyone's okay. As the day deepens, after the boy rides off, after one's mother has sat and caught her breath, one and one's cousin and one's mother begin casually playing with a beachball, passing it to one another while treading water between breakers. One sails the ball (accidentally) over one's cousin's head, and instead of immediately retrieving it, she complains that one isn't playing nice. The ball, instead of floating toward shore, bobs just past the surf, and toward it one's mother swims. While one's cousin berates one, and one (after initially apologizing) shouts back, the riptide carries one's mother, normally a strong and able swimmer, out to sea.

When one's uncle gives one the bag of marbles, four days after one's mother's encounter with the bicyclist on the beach, one takes them to one's room and imagines a way to dispose of them, one by one, without exception. By squatting on one's windowsill, one is able to reach one hand up to the rain gutter (while holding onto the window frame with one's other hand for balance) and drop a marble over the gutter's lip. The slant of the eave carries the marble to the downpipe, where it plunges toward the ground and is spat out of the bent spout at the bottom. One's first attempt results in a marble on the lawn. But after a trip downstairs to adjust the spout's angle, every subsequent marble shoots along the driveway, out into the street, down the gradual slope and around the

soft curve of the bend. One watches until the marble is out of sight before dropping another into the rain gutter, enjoying the gleam of the rolling glass as it moves from shade to sunlight across the asphalt before disappearing from view. While crouching on one's sill, waiting for the dropped marble to emerge from the spout, one glimpses the towheaded girl observing from her yard. She doesn't wave, but bright with delight, she watches as every refracting little sphere goes by in the sunlight. And perhaps from her vantage point—since she keeps watching even when the marbles have vanished from one's sight— she is witness to their destinations. One is hesitant to drop the last marble, knowing the light show and the girl's pleasure are coming to an end. Once it is gone, one shrugs one's shoulders, she waves and goes into her house. If one could live one day again, this day would be the one.

III

One's father comes to visit one. He brings vanilla cookies, softened from having been carried under his shirt. One watches him emerge from the orchard as a corpulent certainty, not as a daisy wisp. Lumbering across the clover yard, he stops to frown at the outdoor shower, upset, one supposes, by its constant drip, one's father never minding waste, but not liking shoddy workmanship or gadgetry in disrepair. Poking at the showerhead with a stubby thumb, one's father's frown becomes a scowl, and one deposits him upon one's stoop as a pouty scamp, towheaded hair in braids.

One takes a walk around one's bungalow nearly every morning, because if one is to reconcile one's coordinates, one's limits, one needs to begin someplace. This ambulation is done in humility, one knowing one's existence is as much accident as vivid fact. Clockwise, counterclockwise, this isn't a matter of necessitude or superstition or properness, but simply preference, generated by whim. Nonetheless, one's direction of walking, one's pace, the width of the margin between one and the bungalow's walls, these factors result in a uniquely observable landscape each time, every time. One resists attempting this twice in succession on the same morning because one understands the seduction of variable repetition, the lure of the loop. One doesn't wish to live one's life in a day, even if this process would be as fulfilling as any other, as far as richness, available landscape, and sensate logic go. These morning circumnavigations (horizontal

oblongations)—expending as much time as a straight walk to the edge of the orchard would—confirm to one that empirical fact is infinitely contained. If one were to stumble, as one has done a time or two, though the plane of experience shifts dramatically for a moment (or for a few moments if one were to actually fall), this process is adaptive, as fluid adapts to the introduction of a solid into its mass.

When one lurks inside the blue-roofed house (one has never been inside the blue-roofed house), one gazes out its windows into those of the green-roofed house, one choosing to ignore one's own unthreatening presence on one of the benches between the houses and the beach. On one occasion, while slinking about within the vacant blue-roofed house, one stares through the windows of the darkened cream-colored house into the lit windows of the dun-colored house beyond, the interior cross-section of the green-roofed house acting as a distortion lens into the brown-roofed house, one looking through a total of four windowpanes (uncurtained and unblinded). What one witnesses, neither murder nor tryst nor illicit substitution, rivets one. There, two houses away, while one watches—one as projected one, one not within vantage of one's perch on the boardwalk bench (moonlight on the breakers behind one)—a boy builds himself a midnight-snack sandwich on the kitchen counter: slice of bread, slices of meat, slices of cheese, slice of tomato, leaves of lettuce, sliced pickles, mustard dollop, mayonnaise dollop, slice of bread. As one observes, a surveyor of process, the counter where the boy is busy at work begins to bend, concaving him.

One's father, as girl, explores the orchards as if they were his mother's throat, one's grandmother's mothy hands. Or, as if the trees were the whitish hairs around his girlish wristbones, or the sunbleached unshaven hairs above his ankles (ankles of a girl, of one's unblooded daughter, of the neighboring fascination of his youth). When she (one's father, as girl) is at home and must sit upon the toilet, she insists one leave the bungalow, whether it is day or night, rain or shine, blustery or mosquitoed, hazed or twinkling—one's promise to faithfully turn one's back or bury one's face in one's pillow being unacceptable and rejected. She does, however, trust one enough to allow this when she is changing clothes, and one is worthy of her trust, placing one's gaze upon whatever of the bungalow's knotholes is opposite of the pointy elbows and knees and slight rustlings of fabric, keeping one's gaze there until she says okay in her renewably appeased voice. But, when she showers outside on the cement slab, exposed and knobby, she does so as if she were alone in the world, as if one were a hummingbird in the air or a rotting pear on the ground. At these times, one sits at the weak table in the

sparse bungalow, observing her through the doorway, as if a vertical oblong of space—an unscreened portal or threshold—equals discreet perspective, offers gentlemanly distance. When one is at home and must employ the toilet, one waits until one's father, as girl, is sound asleep or off wandering the orchards. When one must strip or dress, one notifies her to look away and she reliably does so, one studying her from behind even as one rushes to shorten the awkwardness. She never peeks. When one showers, one's body neither flabby nor fit, she often observes from the stoop—demeanor darkening—as one works toward cleanliness.

One eats the soft vanilla cookies one's father has brought while one sits on the bungalow's stoop, dipping them in the milk of one's black metal cup, watching one's father do battle with the shower's persistent drip, one's father wearing only his boxer shorts and sweating visibly in the midday swelter, his hairy shoulders making one think of him peeling peaches on vacation mornings to put upon one's cereal. One's father wields purpose and a wrench, but the shower wields gravity and pressure and a warped shim beneath a slipshod weld. After one's father succumbs—relenting to the water's will to leak, one's father resembling, at such a moment, one's son—he slumps beside one on the stoop, smelling of failed effort, asking for a cookie. Across the yard, unabated, the showerhead drips upon its square of cement. Then, one fetches one's father a cup of milk, listening to his throat gulp, listening to him spin honest anger. One's father lays a gorilla hand (moist and weary) upon one's shoulder (dry and isolated), and one passes him another cookie.

One inserts oneself into the red-roofed house, to lie beside the frumpy woman who has never done much of anything this deep into the night but sleep alone. She wears a lace nighty, obsolete and frayed, but her breath, despite her slight snoring, isn't unpleasant. One apologizes for barging in upon her as projection, as uninvited thought and light, but she doesn't wake, her dreams moist and salty. Across the room from her bed, atop a bureau, there's a display of sanddollars, and one wants to imagine her as a girl (independent and hearty) gathering them when this beach bustled, but one suspects she grew up inland, landscapes away from any seaside town.

One insects oneself into the brown-roofed house, porch to sitting room to kitchen, baseboards to cabinets, along the curved counter and into the pantry among the room temperature goods, the boxed cereal, the plastic bag bread, the wilting cookies. One seeks sugar and expediency, although, like most everyone, one is willing to trade simplicity for complication, implement for mechanism. The intoxicant nature of gears

and hinges and motors, of moving parts (thorax, abdomen, jaws), isn't lost upon one.

To sleep beside one's father (one's father, as girl) is curious and weird. All is aggravated by one's ravine of a bed, one's rusty springs and diluvian mattress creating a ditch. Sleeping in a crevice alone is manageable, but with anyone else—one not one's lover—it's severe and awkward. Initially, she clings to the elevated edge like a sloth on a limb, but as the night cools imperceptibly, she slides down beside one and throws a wiry leg across one's waist. By dawn, the moisture from one's sweat (or hers, or a combination of one's and hers) that has collected between skin and skin, trickles across one's midriff or one's tailbone onto the sheet where it makes a wet spot. Every morning, one allows this positioning to linger—for an instant of recognition—before lifting her leg off of one, waking her, so that one can go out into the early light to shower while she does her private bodily business.

At supper, she cooks for herself. One cooks for oneself by not cooking, by eating only dried fruit and nuts. The air cooks one's hesitant exhalations. The bungalow's tin roof cooks any thoughts able to rise from one's skull. The cement slab out in the yard—the recipient of the constant drip from the showerhead—evaporates the water on the edges of the splashings and cooks the fallen twirls of one's body hair, the lighter twirls of her body hair, rootbeer to platinum. She, as bird witch, stands at the rangetop, white hair aswirl amid the steam as she stirs noodles. One takes her dirty dishes and utensils to the creek to scrub them down, to scrutinize her teeth marks in a leftover nub of bread before tossing it to the martens or wrens. Sometimes, against one's better judgment, one licks her plate clean, scouring it with one's rough tongue.

The girl—one's father—spends most of her days deep within the orchards, wandering, pruning, plucking, cajoling. One day one realizes it hasn't rained all summer and one hasn't watered the trees and they're all dead, every one. One day one can't get out of bed, and it curls shut like a flytrap with one caught inside, the girl having been a fabrication. One day one passes one's memories into the spacious soil. One, now and then, glimpses the girl's white mop moving between the future tinder and kindling of the orchards' trunks. These orchards will perish. One's father will perish, as will one. One's father, as girl, will persist and perpetuate imaginative grafting, improvisational planting. She will mulch herself. By crossing one's eyes, one superimposes the blue-roofed house over the green-roofed house, or the red-roofed house over the brown-roofed house, creating ghostly structures for one to inhabit. Or, one blends the green roofed-house and the brown-roofed house into a sentimental blur, a holographic space for transparent

yesterdays. Outside the dun-colored house, a painter's truck has stopped, and one hears them speaking of ladders and white. One hopes this doesn't indicate the dun is to be covered by white, one liking the red- and blue-roofed bookends of whitewood with the cream and dun filling. The painters mount the stairs to the door, and after a brief conversation with the inhabitant, they descend the stairs, get into their truck, and drive off. One waits the balance of the day for them to come back and alter the world of one's row of houses, but they don't. One doesn't visit the beach for three days, but when one does, one sees that the dun is intact, and that it is the red-roofed house that has been freshened with a new gleaming coat of white.

One teaches one's father to body surf—or what one calls *woppling*, allowing the surf to pummel one. At the beach, one's father's never a girl, his primate shoulders bare to the whole shore, his good gut bulged and bright. He likes being tumbled by the waves. He likes poking jellyfish with a stick of driftwood. He likes sand in his suit. When one's father sits on the blanket beside one, his chest and belly and back reddened from scraping against the sea bottom under the churn of the breakers, one likes his broad smile and labored breathing, one likes his loud sighs of full pleasure, one likes the way he fiddles with the flab of skin under his chin. One is fond of him beyond compare, of his patriarchal vulnerability, of his zest for failure.

One's father, one thinks, makes a comely girl, even if one knows one mustn't touch, one shouldn't gaze. Nevertheless, one stands near the slab of cement, at sunup, looking down at her where she sleeps—in modified fetal position—wearing only her sweatshorts. The finest droplets from the shower—one imagining the leak having worsened from a drip to a trickle (with a vent of spray)—glistens on her back, bladed and tawny. The night before, hot and moonless, one barricaded the bungalow door so one could have the bed to one's self, so one could sleep without her next to one as a summer furnace. One wasn't able to sleep as one waited. At last, she tried the door, tried again, knocked, waited. One lay still, knowing she knew one wasn't asleep. She knocked again, softly, as if trying not to wake one, if indeed one were asleep, but to get one's attention, if one were awake and there were some mistake. She spoke in a gentle, genuine, conciliatory voice. One lay still, relishing one's elbow room. She knocked one more time, a single bewildered rap, and one heard nothing more from her the rest of the night, one sleeping fitfully despite being able to spread and stretch and sprawl—to the extent the trough-shaped bed would permit. Now, she is stirring, without waking, while one watches her, one's eyes lingering upon her sunny thighs.

One morning, one tries to trail the girl, to surreptitiously shadow her as she moves through her day of wandering the orchards. The almond belongs to the peach family, but one's father, as girl, is an apricot. One's father, as one's father, is a plum, and it's toward the plum grove she goes, one keeping track of her by her white locks against the dark bark. If she were one's father, as one's father, one wouldn't follow him because one would feel shame if caught. If one is caught by one's father as girl, one will feel mere embarrassment, a squeamish silliness. This, one knows, is the difference between what is without one and what one makes without one. She peels off her clothes when she reaches the creek. One winces and backtracks to the bungalow.

The four houses on the beach never switch positions. They don't tiptoe on their stilts into odd configurations, nor do they cross the boardwalk to scuffle sand, nor stoop to glare with their windows into tide pools, nor wade into the roiling sea. Except for minor cosmetic changes, and what vehicles are parked on the paved slabs, and whether the trash is streetside or not, nothing obvious shifts in the tableau. One notices alterations: picked flowers, blinds angled anew, morning newspapers unclaimed. One notices alterations: her eyes fluttering in her sleep, his coffee less sugared, this bedroom smelling of clay, that bedroom smelling of wet dream, a cardiac atlas stuffed into a purse. One could ravage one's orchards with a twister, but one won't move even a cookie crumb in any of the these houses.

One's father asks one to go for an inland stroll with him, past the orchards, past town, meandering with the creek away from the ocean toward a lake nestled against hills. One's father, as sweaty lunk, in checkered shorts and a white sleeveless t-shirt, outstrides one with ease, and one must struggle to keep pace, out-of-breath and over-dressed for exertion in summer heat (one's ankle-to-neck beige outfit). From a rise above town—the road taking one and one's father above the creek—one glances back at one's orchards. The bungalow and the clovered yard look lonely, until one notices the shower blasting—with firehose pressure—upon an alabaster-haired girl. Off in the opposite direction, one's father points out the lake, and a corrugated-roofed house on its far shore, and the aspen grove surrounding the house. One feels fidelity rising for one's bungalow, for one's fruit and nut trees, for one's father as girl, and gasping for breath, one speaks one's refusal to go another step.

The toilet clogs. One spends half of one's afternoon getting it to flush. One's father, as girl, has gone to the lakehouse. One's father was built for oceans and paddles on ponds. One's father, as girl, is concocted for salvage and spares one sloth. She chews

on bark, like one's grandmother chews her nails. This, in a roundabout way, forces one to tinker with the toilet. Thus, in an indirect way, one's as intimate with one's father, as girl, as one was with one's son, one's daughter, when they were new.

A sparse house—even a sparse room—one with no unnecessary objects, can lift one's spirits. Bare floors, bare walls, surfaces swept and wiped and vacant. One surveys one's bungalow's interior, now that one's father, as girl, is absent. A rectangular haven for one of solitude. One keeps one's spare clothes under the bed. One keeps one's food in the old rounded refrigerator. There are no papers or books to clutter the table. One keeps one's black metal cup beside the faucet of the cracked sink. The broom stands in the corner with the mop. One's plates and pots and utensils are put away in the cabinet under the cutting block. The bungalow door is wide open. A fly loops through the room's air. One is tranquil, and as satisfied with one's interior cavity as one's exterior scape.

Honeybees have hived in a rotten apple tree at the edge of the bungalow's yard. When one sits upon the stoop, the sounds of their buzzing, the thrum of hummingbird wings, the hum of the refrigerator, blend with one's circulation. Although one isn't deaf, one feels sounds as much as one hears them. Although one is sighted, one tastes what one sees. Although one is tactile and texture oriented, one smells trouble when one's father, as girl, as prodigal daughter, comes back to the bungalow one evening smelling of lake.

One can't simultaneously be within and without the bungalow. The girl, one's father, fresh-watered, feisty and controlling, is outside the bungalow one moment, inside the next, with the door shut and locked and barricaded, while one stands bewildered in the yard, having been sitting upon one's stoop in sunset contemplation a blink before. One—stunned by one's sudden exile—roams the yard, at a loss as to what to do, tears in one's eyes. To avoid mosquitoes, one spends the night under the running shower—prolonged baptism and water torture. When one wakes at sunrise, one's skin is sore from the spray's affection. One's eyes are swollen from crying. One hates the singularity of one's scope, one wishing to be inside the bungalow, to be upon one's benches by the sea, to be wandering within the four houses, to be where one is, on the slab of cement, water stricken. One lacks spiritual dexterity, astral moxie, but one has will.

Into one's bungalow one puts oneself. One's father sits in one of the chairs, his hairy arms folded upon the table in front of him. One sits on the shower slab—one stands near the busted sink. One's father's countenance is subterranean. As he has

done for one throughout one's life, one places one's hands upon his shoulders and gives them an encouraging squeeze. This unexpected attention, one knows, might start him shuddering with delusions of unworthiness. One's father gives himself away to one, not because one needs him more than he needs himself, but because he's generous with whatever he possesses, treasure or junk. When one's father becomes girl, one takes away one's touch, careful not to brush her unpierced earlobe with a stray fingertip, one content to be alone on the slab with the shower dripping upon one's brow.

One imagines the orchard rows bending until they form circles, as if the bungalow were a stone dropped into a pond, sending alternating rings of trees and dirt paths rippling toward horizons and eventually meeting themselves, asserting the clover yard as one pole of a sphere and its opposite pole as its recollection. One's world is a revolving object of projection and memory, resulting in curvature so tight it eliminates duration, time so bent it omits distance. One wishes to circumvent appointment and destination. The shower pole is a stem.

At the creek, one submits to the likelihood one won't vacate the bungalow, not this day, not at the end of the summer, not at the end of one's life. Unless the creek and the shower go dry, unless the orchards burn or wither, unless storm surges claim the four shore houses, or unless one spends whatever money one has left and someone comes to repossess and subdivide the land, one is at home, one's resting place. The girl—one's product—can't evict one. One's father—one's son's resembled grandfather—won't disown one. One extracts a crawdad from the creek's stony bottom, to take to the beach, to throw to the gulls.

At the beach, one submits to the likelihood one won't abandon self, not one's shell, not one's individuality, not one's spiritual glob of mud. Unless one could become everyone, unless the collective is the singular, unless through dispersal one finds purpose, or unless one expends whatever energy one has left and another absorbs and recycles one's substance, one is identity, one is oneself. The frumpy woman—one's heroine—can't subsume one. One's mother—one's collie's death—can't unravel one. One peers far into the windows of the houses, to eradicate particularity, to celebrate particularity, to merge and unmerge.

The bungalow is deserted in its midday hunker and staunch when one seeks its shelter. And, come evening, when one steps out onto one's stoop before crawling into one's bed, the orchards are quiet, the stars are dull, the girl is truant. One imagines her at the lakehouse, cooking an intricate meal, humming unlike any bird—food and melody

for one's father. There, the stars are sharp, the taut surface of the lake mirroring them without mockery. One's ceiling stains partake of mere cartography. One's candles dense the air. One conceives one's mother—as one does most nights—into one's palms.

One paces the boardwalk in front of the four houses past a moonless midnight, one's thoughts upon interiors and slumbered breathings. The surf's up. The beach is unpeopled. Streetlights shine for nobody. One understands one should want what one has. One understands one gets what one needs, not what one wants. One knows one must meld one's needs and one's wants into a gallstone and pass it—in agony—into the sewer, into the earth. One wishes to be within the four houses. Not as a body, and not one at a time, but as a wholly simultaneous concept. A patrol car is easing along the beach boulevard. One wonders why one is never approached or addressed by the occupants of the houses, or why the shore security ignores one. One is as much a threat as a lamppost, only alluring and fatal to moths.

One and one's father arm wrestle at the bungalow's table, one's father—as girl—watching and monitoring as judge. One's father's arms are beautiful, white-haired and brawny. One's arms are the color of souring milk, puny and hairless in comparison to his. The girl takes her task seriously, cupping her sticky palms upon one and one's father's joint clasp to verify its vertical equality. Then, letting go, she triggers a short-lived struggle with its inevitable end. One stares into one's father's eyes. Magnanimous as they are, they leak no mercy now, telling one that one is the weaker and that one's flaws are irredeemable in such unbalanced contests of strength, that one shows more idiocy than pluck, and that one should stick to observing. When he slams the back of one's hand to the table, a blood-vessel is broken, the girl claps and chirps, one is bruised for hours.

The girl comes to one while one is sulking in the plum grove to tell one she no longer wishes to be one's father. She is shirtless, with her arms crossed at her chest, her feral hands clasping their opposite shoulders. One looks at her ankles, wishing one were braceleted. She goes away without one's consent. One's father comes not long afterward to say he refuses to be a girl, towheaded or not, that it's time for him to be moving along, perhaps to the lakehouse, perhaps to town. He also points out that one should exert less of one's valuable—obviously limited—energy at the beach and do more tending to the orchards. One's world, he suggests, is beginning to putrefy. One reminds him one is an observer—classical and disciplined—but he wiggles his wizened baboonish hand as if to say one is merely a hobbyist. After one's father has lumbered

off, one zeros in upon the bungalow by following the network of dirt walkways between rows of trees, spiraling toward the yard by passing from plum to peach to apricot to lime to orange to pomegranate to pistachio to apple to clover as if one were a marble in a spinning bowl that's gradually coming to a stop. When one reaches the clearing, one is surprised to witness a chestnut-haired, freckle-shouldered woman showering on the slab, a mature breasted and fully shaven female, a woman who resembles one's cousin of old, an ankle bracelet gleaming in the wet sunlight, a tattoo blotch on the ankle itself that one remembers as a rocket. One bee-lines for one's benches by the sea.

From the red-roofed house, the frumpy woman emerges and sits one bench down from one. She gazes out to sea and sighs what could be happy exhalations, or simply ones of relief. She begins talking to herself and one eavesdrops upon the conversation. At first, one hears only her half, but eventually one blocks out the surf and the gulls and the beachgoers and the boardwalkers and one's circulation and one is able to hear the tone of the internal voice. The woman slides from being argumentative to supplicant to submersing herself in tears. One tries massaging her slumped shoulders without one's hands, without touching her flesh to flesh, imagining *her* enjoying one's orchards and one's outdoor shower. She gains control of herself, wipes her nose on her blouse sleeve, chuckles, and goes back to staring out to sea.

One wanders one's orchards one morning with a homemade slingshot, assisting the riper fruit's fall to ground. One shoots peach pits, not those from one's childhood, but those harvested midway through one's summer at the bungalow. When one exhausts one's supply, one resorts to stones. The chunking sound of rock against bark is appealing, so that one tires of aiming for fruit stems and—after gathering a pile of stones—one sits against the trunk of one tree and flings the stones one by one, without exception, at the trunk of another tree. Chunk. Chunk. Chunk. This brings one pleasure, this tension and release, this rhythmic sound, and for the duration of one's pile of stones, and a subsequent gathering of stones and the diminishment of *that* pile, one forgets one's dilemma, one's muddle, that the woman who was one's cousin is sleeping in one's bed.

One imagines one's father in a canoe out on the lake. Early morning. The crack of dawn. A burlap sack lies on the canoe's bottom. Everything appears as if seen through a lavender filter. The towheaded girl lies in mock-fetal position in the sack, pretending to be the collie of one's youth. One's father stops rowing, squints at the shore, stands in the canoe with considered grace, hoists the burlap sack with a grunt and hurls it into the water. The splash creates a rippling through one's perception.

One's cousin—as grown woman—is fabrication, is elsewhere. One won't accept her corporeal truth in one's orchards, on one's toilet, under one's shower's drip, under one's shower's stream. The woman must be a stranger, drifted over from town, or a vacationer from shore, like a cloud resembling a pelvis, like gulls moving inland to avoid a storm. One will ask her—politely—to leave, to vacate one's premises. She is pretty, one will admit, but skin depth isn't enough for friendship—or even cohabitation. One will give her a basket of fruit and shoo her away. When one enters one's bungalow—with resolve—it is uninhabited. The freckle-shouldered woman is nowhere about the place.

Light bends across one's yard from the lowering sun, penetrating the bungalow through the open doorway and shimmering on the wall above the cutting block. The shimmer comes from a sole glass of water on the table, still exactly where one's father put it before leaving one's company for the lake, or for town. One eats a hard vanilla cookie one hid in the refrigerator's tight freezer the initial day of his visit. On the floor beside the bed are some dirty clothes one's father—as girl—left behind when she trundled off with him. Although one's solitude conspires with the midsummer heat, one gathers dry crates from the orchards and builds a bonfire in one's clearing, a little ways away from the shower slab, and one sits under the comforting drip watching sparks rise and dart into heavens dark.

IV

One's son comes to visit one—as the boy that he is—excited and anxious to be traveling on his own across a landscape not of his choosing. The infectious lad arrives at twilight, emerging from the fruit trees lugging a suitcase swollen with unnecessary garments. One watches him cross the clover yard with the confidence of someone who has been taken care of, loved, properly mothered. He stops at the outdoor shower, setting his suitcase down on the dry edge of the cement, and by cupping his hands under the drip, slakes his thirst with slurps one hears from one's chair at the bungalow's table. One's heart goes out to him (one can't turn one's son into a girl), knowing how unpleasantly mysterious he will find the orchards.

One seldom leaves one's son alone, fearing one will discover him on the stoop in tears—although this never happens, not one time. One gives him the bed, while one sleeps upon his pile of sweaters and trousers and dress shirts on the floor. One cooks for him, making him dishes deep in nutrients and flavor. Every morsel gets eaten—with only crumbs and stems and puddles of sauces left—and one sends him out to the shower to rinse his plate and cup and silverware, and to scrub the pots, observing him from the doorway, fond of his earnestness in doing a menial task thoroughly and properly in the stiff sun or in lantern light.

At night, when the heat is less vicious, one goes for walks with one's son in

the orchards, following the bent paths between the trees, occasionally stopping to pick out stars through the dark foliage, or to stare at the moon, when moon there be. A coastal breeze diminishes the mosquitoes, clears the air of dust. One's son's nostrils flare, smelling water—one's son claims he even smells water on the moon. One morning, he expresses enough curiosity about selenography that one shows him the road to town and gives him a tin of money, and by noon he crosses the clover yard carrying a telescope in a strapped leather case over his shoulder, as if it is a quiver holding arrows he will shoot at the lunar surface.

The row of four houses beckons, and although one has no qualms sending one's son to town unescorted, one won't leave him alone at the bungalow just to go to one's benches by the sea. Eventually, one takes one's son with one, not to explicitly observe the houses, but as an ocean outing. One's son, who, among his mountain of clothes, brought nary a swimsuit, wears sweatshorts one's father, as girl, forgot to take with her when she left for the lakehouse. When he takes off his shirt—before walking down to put his toes in the water—one gasps to see his emaciation, despite one feeding him as if he were a pig on slaughter row. While he swims, never letting the surf climb past his shins, one steals peeks at the houses.

One's son says he hears whales out in the ocean. One's son says he hears one's circulation and it keeps him awake nights. He gets stung on his elbow by a honeybee, and although he doesn't cry—even when it swells and is painful to the touch—he holds one's hand much of the rest of the day and falls asleep in the evening with a slight fever and with his unhurt arm draped over the bed so that he can hold one's flexed bicep while one lies staring at the ceiling, one's hands behind one's head. Several times during the night, one's son wakes, fussing that the sound of his fever rising keeps waking him.

One's father and one's son—although they share one in common—have never met. One considers fetching one's father, as girl, from the lakehouse, as a playmate for one's son. She could show him the orchards. He could show her Mare Serenitatis. But one can't get oneself to go. The hike along the creek road, the noise through town, the settled odor of the lakes—these weary one just as concepts. One will escort one's son to the oceanside, in hopes of glimpsing the towheaded girl who resembles one's father, in hopes of a serendipitous meeting, a destined tryst.

One's son asks why one has three ladderback chairs when he and one make two. One speaks—in tones of evasive urgency—of his grandfather and a towheaded girl, of trinities and the lateral reliability of tripods, of one's bygone grandfather and

his (one's son's) potential son. One's son asks why one refuses to stop the shower leak, and why one lets most of the fruit rot on the trees. One moves one's hand away from one's eyes and tells one's son about one's grandfather's calculated fans, one's mother's finger accident, bubble bath foam on one's father's wrist while he checked the water temperature when drawing one's bath. One's son is unsatisfied. One mentions shims and washers and warpage, the unavailability of pickers and ladders and crates, the hoist of burlap sacks and sinkage. One takes one's son to the creek to show him crawdads.

Out past the breakers, above the horizon joist of sea and sky, clouds drift—clouds that resemble one's son's ribs at the pinnacle of inhalation. They slide across the blue frame as they background themselves into deeper and deeper focus. One's son's screaming. He's brushed against a jellyfish and been stung on the ankle. One hustles to his aid, and one's son gazes up at one as if to ask why one allows one's son to be harmed by the creatures of one's world. One lifts one's hands to one's eyes to envision the clouds as they coalesce and fleshen.

While the green-roofed house sweats, the blue-roofed house estivates. The empty attracts one as much as the spartan and the straight and the vaguely asymmetrical. The cream-colored house teems, the dun-colored house rumbles and squeals, the red-roofed house hums, but it's the blue-roofed house, with its swallowed hush, that engages one's fancy. Summer life. Kids out of school at the beach with family and laughter and bickering. Three houses embrace this model. The other—the fourth—the one roofed to rival sky, reveres silence and critiques endeavor with its mute skin, its mute marrow.

One carries one's son home to the bungalow from the shore. It's too far for one to manage without overt clumsiness, ugly stumbling and cursing and frequent stops to set him down and pant and spit, as if hearing doves in some dark heat. One's son's ankle is already the mass of an orange, and one's son's lip is bleeding from biting it to be brave. Along the dirt path from orchards to beach is a working brickwalled well, with wooden bucket and chilled fresh water. Too far from the bungalow to be as handy as the creek, it nonetheless serves one marvelously this day for quenching thirst and as a cold poultice. By twilight, when one and one's burden reach the bungalow, one's sweat (or his, or a combination of one's and his) that has collected between skin and skin—one's son's brow pressed against one's throat while one cradled him—trickles past one's sternum and one's belly, dampening the waistband of the briefs under one's trousers, delivering an instant of recognition.

One helps one's son construct a sturdy tripod for his telescope out in the

clovered yard on the spot where one once built a bonfire. The tripod, made of carved wood—one being an accomplished whittler—supports the telescope in grand fashion so that one's son can sit in the third ladderback chair—the one that is currently superfluous around the table within the bungalow—and gaze at the moon or the heavenly bodies of his choice. One teaches one's son optical facts, pretending to be an authority, explaining that occlusion affects planetary rotations and orbits, that not only tides, but also light trajectories, are altered by lunar topography, that depth of field—as lack and as excess—is related to dementia and infertility. One's son—an intelligent and schooled lad—looks at one with a squint and a fond smirk.

Although one's son won't go back into the surf—even after his jellyfish sting is healed—he agrees to accompany one on beach trips to spend hours on a blanket on the sand under an umbrella furnished by a boardwalk cafe. One positions oneself on the blanket so that beyond one's son's shoulders one can keep an eye on the roofs of the four houses poking out above the dunes. One buys a bag of marbles from a boardwalk shop and gives them to one's son. He spills them out onto the sand beside the blanket and arranges the solar system, using the large shooter as the sun and placing the planets by color since the marbles are all more or less identical in size. On the cloth bag itself are printed the rules to a simple game, a game one's son wishes to play, asking one nicely if one would care to play with him. One humors him, drawing an oblong within an oblong in the sand with one's finger. One's son points out that the shapes are supposed to be circles, but one insists the game will work just as well, and be a greater challenge, if played within oblongs. The marbles are divided equally between one and one's son, and one and one's son give up two apiece to be the ante in the *approximate* center of the inner oblong. One's son's fingers are beautiful, slender and composed. His thumb flicks the spheres with elegant velocity. One's fingers—adept with a knife—get tangled in games of adroitness and strategy. At one point in the match, as one is about to fall behind beyond recovery, one notices a pair of legs in one's peripheral vision. One of the tanned girlish ankles is braceleted, but neither is tattooed. A red-haired, freckle-shouldered youth stands watching the end of the marble contest, her eyes intent upon one's son's successful technique.

When one's son sits on the toilet, one busies oneself elsewhere. When one's father—as one's father—was visiting and sat on the toilet, he insisted one pay no nevermind. He would keep the conversation going and even comment upon his activity. When one needed the toilet when one's father was present, one retented until one was

alone or until one could get to the orchards. One's son asks why one doesn't just fabricate a screen or some sort of partition. One shrugs, citing one's hatred of fanatical privacy and bodily decorum, the overemphasis in contemporary society to shun scatological truth. One's son asks why one eats only dried fruit and nuts, although one cooks him fresh meals of fish and garden vegetables and fancy fruit desserts. One tells him one's stomach stays happy that way, and the following morning one takes him to town and buys him a bicycle.

One moves the red-haired youth—a bracken day-land girl—into the wellhouse that stands up the slope from the dirt-path well, midway between orchards and surf. She joins one and one's son some nights for supper, when one thinks to invite her. At other times, she comes strolling into the clearing with expectations of playing marbles with one's son. When he assents, they conduct their match atop a dirt patch in the shade of the apple tree nearest the shower. They inscribe the circle within a circle with a stick and a string and a stone. The youth brings her own bag of marbles, and they play for keeps, one's son's jaw tightening as he concentrates, the youth's spinal cord—exposed by the one-piece swimsuit she always wears—looking—as she kneels and bends to shoot, as if it is strung with marbles under her chestnut-splotched skin. After she has won every last marble from one's son, she hints one ought to purchase him another bag if one wishes one's son to hold onto her companionship.

The moon and the night sky divulge themselves to one's son. He sits for hours—not minding the mosquitoes—peering through the telescope's eyepiece. One watches him from the bungalow's stoop, one's insect repellent candles twirling smoke into the sultry air. These night mosquitoes, one thinks, must die, and one wants to kill them, one by one, without exception. One finds oneself, unlike any moment thus far in one's bungalow summer, longing for autumn and a shift in weather, hoping one's son will remember his time with one fondly and associate one with lunar clarity and stellar awe. One's son. One's one son, the father of one's future grandson, the great-grandson of one's past grandfather. There he sits, one's son, a slight and thoughtful boy, out in the dark yard, under the firmament, being bitten by bloodsucker insects, the bats and the night birds not doing their jobs, their frantic hunting on the wing being insufficient to spare one's son those inflamed and itchy bumps.

Falling down often, but crying on only one occasion—after a sparkly reflector shatters when it slams against the stoop—one's son teaches himself to ride his bike. Across the yard, around the bungalow, down the dirt path toward the wellhouse, he

pedals and coasts and falls. He scrapes his elbows, the heels of his hands, his knees, even his shoulders—but he never quits. One knows he's his own good teacher, and that one of these days one will have to let him ride out of one's sight. That day comes when one's son makes a solo grocery trip to town.

One night, when one's son shares one's insomnia, one's son says he hears the red-haired youth breathing in her sleep on her cot in the wellhouse. He says he hears her rapid eye movement and her wet swallows. One's son says he hears bird hearts and insect mouths in the orchards. He says he smells lake bottom. One makes him a cup of warm milk, sings him a song about a blue train and a girl of hope, fans him with a flap of cardboard, and tells him of his mother's love for him—the static from one's transistor radio putting out its nightly white noise, a poor substitute for the sounds of tumbling waves.

One's son won't venture into the orchards by himself—day or night—so one instructs him to tend to the garden—now in bright vegetable bloom—while one dispatches with the work of the orchards, mostly constituting quick jaunts to the creek for water and privacy, one not willing to leave one's son alone for long. One's son asks why one doesn't just hook a hose to the busted sink—the spigot works, afterall, he points out—and run it to the garden through the doorway. One applauds his ingenuity, telling him one is proud of his industrious thinking, but one cites the stripped threads on the spigot, the lack of a long enough hose, the already weakened pipes leading to the sink, the insidious frettings of water pressure...and that evening, while one's son showers before bed, one wiggles into the bungalow's crawlspace with a lantern and cranks shut the faucet to the sink, erroneously thinking this would have no effect upon the toilet.

Food staples (flour, sugar, salt, noodles, milk) run low, and one invites one's son to ride his bike to town and do the shopping. One's ankle, one fibs, is bothering one, a slight twist upon a lifted root while washing pots at the creek. To facilitate his task, one fastens a crate to his handlebars with wire and rope. One gives him a scrawled list and a tin of money, telling him to buy himself some sweets, and one watches as he wobbles down the widest path through the orchards toward the paved road to town. One's son disappears from one's eyes before fading from one's ears (one's son having stuck playing cards in his spokes—as one suggested—so that pedestrians could hear him approaching and step aside, the bike not being outfitted with a bell, and one insisting he stay off the streets and ride on the sidewalks while in town).

One ought to be suspicious of time travel and verification, spirals and parallels,

quicksand and flytrap logic, planning and spontaneity, clover honey and orange juice and supercession and supplantment, freckles and pores and orifices and scabs, wealth and poverty and piety and abandon, memory and imagination and all of the senses and every meaning of sense, one's fear of one's father and one's care for one's son, one's fear for one's son and one's care of one's father, one's self and one's opinion of one's self and one's suspicion of one's opinion of one's self.

After one's son has pedaled off to town to shop for groceries, one goes to one's benches by the sea. One has missed—from the moment one's son arrived at the bungalow—giving the four houses one's undivided gaze. One must divide one's gaze amongst the four, of course, and subdivide it amongst the windows of the four, but one has grown comfortable with this kind of fracturing. Sitting today on the bench across from the cream-colored house, one is content. The houses are themselves. If one of their colored roofs were to smoke and flame, one would put out the fire by denying it one's oxygen.

The toilet is broken. After flushing, the water hasn't been replenished, and won't replenish when one presses and jiggles the handle. One is an observer, not a plumber. One has nothing but disregard for failed gadgets. One has orchards to nurture and a son to feed. Also, one has no intention of crawling back under the bungalow to undo a done deed. One tells one's son he must go into the orchards from now on—a prudent distance will suffice—to do his bodily business. One's son suggests they keep the toilet tank filled by hauling water in a pot from the shower or the creek—considering the toilet works on principles of gravity and displacement, and that running water is a mere convenience, not a necessity. One throws a scowl at one's son, believing, for the moment, that failure is hereditary.

One's son, essentially successful on his solo grocery trip, did forget butter. Although one failed to put it on the list, one shouted it to him (along with a couple other items) as he began to ride away, and he nodded. He remembered the other items, but, unfortunately, he forgot the butter. Angry with himself, he volunteers to ride back to town the next morning to fetch a tub—whether one's ankle is feeling better or not, the swelling having apparently gone down. One assents, aware that for successive days one will be allowed to sit in front of the four houses, accept the sea breezes, perhaps hover beside the frumpy woman as she reads a book in one of the rockers on the downstairs porch of the red-roofed house. But, as one is striding along the dirt path past the well, one is hailed by the red-haired youth. She has complaints about the wellhouse, the

horrible cot, the odor of tar, the bugs, the lack of a kitchen or a toilet or a shower...One tells her about the toilet at the bungalow no longer working, invites her for supper and a shower, apologizes for the conditions of her existence. One cites the bountiful well and the ocean's proximity as blessings worth counting, and nods to leave. She says she wants to be towheaded, flatter chested, not so peevish. One assures her one will give it thought, but one must be hustling along if one is to have any time at the beach before dashing back to the bungalow ahead of one's son on his bike. She breaks down sobbing. One doesn't leave her. One never makes it to the beach that day. When one's son crosses the yard with butter in a sack in his bicycle crate, the towheaded youth has already bounded off into the orchards to explore and frolic.

On clear nights, two chairs must leave the bungalow for the clovered yard. One observes from the stoop while one's son and the youth hunch together around the telescope's eyepiece, one son's cropped colorless hair and the youth's flamboyant white locks blending in one's vision. One's son, night by night, with whispers and tender humor, is giving her the moon. She adores its melancholy emptiness, the extravagant monikers of its craters and mounds, its darkside mystery. She says she wishes she had a marble that resembled the moon, so that she could hold it in her palm, take it indoors, roll it around in her mouth.

When the youth showers, one and one's son play speed with cards at the table, one hauling her chair into the bungalow for one's son to sit in with his back to the doorway and the yard. One's son brings in his own chair from the telescope—it'll be needed at the table come breakfast—but it stays unoccupied throughout the showering and the card playing. One and one's son concentrate on the frenzy of the game, but there are lulls, and one's peripheral vision encompasses the youth's actuality. Her chair still carries her aroma, and one's son, while he and one play, looks mildly drunk, although he still wins every match, one's dexterity lagging far behind. The towheaded youth enjoys her showers even more than one's father—as girl—once did. She twists and twirls in the moonlit spray like laundered cloth on a windblown wire. Her cot is now positioned on the opposite flank of the bed from one's floor palette of one's son's extraneous clothes. She has been offered the bed by one's son, who sleeps on the creaky cot. Lying between one and one's son, in one's cavernous bed, in the close fleshworld heat of the bungalow, she thrashes and whimpers and swallows audibly in her dreams.

The towheaded youth attempts to show one's son the orchards, in the daylight, as reciprocation for the splendid moon, but he stays resistant. She cajoles, she teases,

she even pouts and stamps away—exhibiting traces of her old red-haired self—to no avail. One's son will go to the creek—reluctantly, when accompanied—via the widest paths, and he will pass through the orchards on the way to or from town or shore, but he refuses to stray or be led into orchard depths during hours of sunlight, not shy to confess his irrational and indefensible fear of concentrated shade, of bowered dark. At night, as long as one holds his hand, he loves strolling through the trees with his eyes to the sky, seeking the sunlit moon or the pinpricks of stars.

One worries that one's son—with his eccentricities—is as fabricated as the youth—with her traits. One's father exists. One's grandfather existed. One's grandson is supposed, as one admits. One's son, who resembles one's father, not one, isn't one's daughter, who resembles one when one was young, and who's with one's spouse, whom one resembles now that one is plateaud. One sits up to watch one's son as he sleeps. To do so, one must look across the concave bed that holds the youth. She sleeps in one's son's pajamas, although they are too small for her and make her look like a scarecrow. Her ankle bracelet catches the candlelight. One's son has a mosquito on his cheek. One slips around the posts of the bed and scoots down the slight gap between the cot's foam pad and the bed's saggy mattress. One blows the mosquito off of one's son's skin and brings one's palms together with a clapping violence. Neither one's son nor the youth wake. One feels something warm on one's palms. Holding them to a candle, one is witness to smudges of one's son's blood. One wonders if one ought to consider this verification that one's son is genuine. The youth is drooling onto her pillow. One touches the wet spot with one's fingertip. One knows—as her maker—that she's not authentic, but her saliva is as palpable upon one's skin as one's son's blood. When one lies down again upon one's son's clothes, one suffers momentary vertigo, as if the oblong room were beginning to clinch, as if the bungalow were bending into the shape of a boomerang.

One wishes to believe in patterns and forgiveness, event and supposition, rolled-up-sleeve routine and knees-to-floor randomness, manufactured truth and creative paradox, temporal folds and spatial loops, labor and prudence and sloth and risk, mastication and salivation and digestion and dirt, one's stem and the bruising ground, perpetual transference and chronic identity, one's son and one's son's companions—be they flowered or stubbled or muscled or ripe, one's father and one's father's companions—be they girl or canine or mother, and one and one's companions—be they moth-like or imaginary.

The youth, one feels, is trustworthy enough that one can go to the ocean for the day and leave her to watch over one's son and one's orchards. Fog greets one as one

nears the boardwalk. The breakers are visible, but nothing beyond them. One's benches are damp and one must resort to wiping the boards of the one that one wishes to sit upon—the one across from the empty lot beside the blue-roofed house—with one's cap. A man sits on the upstairs porch of the green-roofed house while his two daughters draw on the wooden planks of the downstairs porch with colored chalk. Their voices cut the dreariness of the fog. One mulls progressions, say, semen, molasses, tar. Or, plotted truth, organic fiction, salted reality. A boy and an elderly man have emerged from the brown-roofed house to take their daily shell-collecting walk. The younger of the girls taunts her older sister and their father shouts down to hush them. The two boys from the red-roofed house hose the sand from the day before off of their styrofoam surfboards. One puts oneself into the emptiness of the blue-roofed house, into a hot and stuffy bedroom, the windows having stayed closed for at least a fortnight. One explores the carpet and the musty closet and the desolate spaces under the bed—an observer's paradise. Suddenly, there's commotion at the water's edge. The elderly man has been struck by a bicyclist. One grasps the opportunity, rushing across the dunes to be of assistance and to claim the reckless rider as one's son.

When one arrives at the bungalow, one listens as the youth attempts to excuse herself by claiming one's silly son wouldn't go with her into the orchards and must've ridden off in search of one at the beach and there was nothing she could've done—her breasts enlarge subtly and her hair chestnuts before one's eyes. One banishes her to the wellhouse, thinks better of it, and sends her to town to live with a jolly and disciplined aunt—someone like the frumpy woman of the red-roofed house. One expects to never hear from her again—as cousin or youth or tattooed stranger—but as with most aspects of one's unfolding life, one is mistaken.

That night, one's son—unhurt by the mishap between his bicycle and the elderly man—drags the ladderback chair—the one no longer needed at the bungalow's table—to the spot beside his telescope, and resumes his affair with the moon's facade. In the morning, one hauls the cot and one's son's pajamas to the wellhouse, and padlocks its door. One strips one's bed of its sheets and washes them at the creek, beating them dry on an unshaded boulder. One's son watches without lending a hand. One tells one's son that one has spoken with his mother and one's mother and one's father and it has been agreed upon that he will join his grandfather at the lakehouse, an inevitable meeting that needs to take place soon, considering one's father's health. One's son wrinkles his nose in displeasure—something he picked up from the redheaded youth.

One's insomnia worsens, as does one's son's, and one and one's son lie and listen to one another's breathing, the whine of mosquitoes, the cooing of doves under the bungalow's eaves, the radio's static. One's son says he smells water in the sun, hears the freckle-shouldered youth's ovulations, feels his grandmother's cancer spread, has visions of his grandfather in a canoe stuffing him into a burlap sack and heaving it into the lake. One tells one's son that one thinks he—one's son—might be imagined, and that all these sensations, except perhaps water in the sun, are products of one's fears and memory and fantast. One's son chuckles—enough to shake the bed—and accuses one of joking with him to lighten the air.

On the morning of one's son's departure for the lakehouse, one cooks him a huge breakfast, packs him a snack for the road, and sews a hand-drawn cloth map (of the way through town to the lake) onto the outside of his shirttail. One's son straps his suitcase to the handlebar crate, slings the sheathed telescope across his shoulder, gives one a perfunctory hug, mounts his bicycle, pedals one revolution and crashes to the clover. He tries to ride away again and again, with identical results. At one point, he catches himself by grabbing onto the shower pole, but as soon as he pushes off, he loses his balance and falls. The bicycle's spokes are bent. One's son's trousers are torn at the knee. With tears in his eyes, he unstraps his suitcase, sets it on the dry portion of the slab, stumbles over to where one stands by the stoop, gives one a lingering hug, and then, grabbing the suitcase as he walks by the shower, strides across the clearing and grows smaller and smaller until he disappears down the widest path through one's summer orchards.

V

One's grandfather and one's grandson come to visit one, telling stories of one's great-grandfather and one's great-grandson. Their stay is truncated by a slight ground tremor, a fledgling earthquake that upsets the unborn and the dead, making their time with one at the bungalow brief and agitated—although not uneventful. One grew accustomed to sleeping on the floor during one's son's visit, so it's easy to go back to its hardness, even though one now lacks one's son's pile of clothes. One's grandfather is granted the bed, all things considered, and one's grandson stretches out on the three ladderback chairs shoved flush against one another in a row, as if at the back of a rural church. One considers—and then unconsiders—hauling the cot within the padlocked wellhouse back to one's bungalow for one's grandson.

When they arrive, appearing in the middle-of-the-afternoon, having caught no train or bus and driven no car, having ridden no bikes or walked any road from town, one is sprawled in one's underwear on the cement slab with one's mouth directly under the shower's drip, letting the droplets land against the back of one's throat with enough impact to nearly gag one, one having barely enough time between drops to swallow and open one's mouth to catch the next drop. One's grandfather coughs politely to let one know they are there, and one's eyes squint against the glare until one's grandfather's head blocks the sun, his unkempt mop of hair looking angelic, one's grandson, standing in

one's grandfather's shadow, looks like a sack of coal.

The orchards are thirsty. One hasn't watered them all summer. Rain is unlikely, as the swept-sky weather persists day after day. These conditions suit one. The fruit dries by itself in the trees. It falls, and one gathers and eats as one strolls, one's grandfather and one's grandson tagging along. One's grandfather and one's grandson are neither intrigued nor repulsed by the orchards. They've come to smother one with stories of the long-gone-by and the yet-to-come, whether one wishes to hear them or not, whether one attempts to unlisten or not. One's grandfather lies in the bed—one's grandson on the chairs—and they talk the night away in voices of compassion and wonder and mockery and stealth. One no longer needs radio static to mute the doves. These two speak incessantly—one of his father, one of his son.

One has taken to riding one's son's bicycle. One pedals the perimeter of one's orchards, as a substitute for walking the exterior of one's bungalow. Making a complete loop every morning, one convinces oneself one is managing one's property, one's trees, one's duty. One's grandfather and one's grandson—although one leaves them asleep in the bungalow—follow one with their voices, leaky faucets of chatter in one's ears. One feels empathy for the trees on the outside rows, those closest to the perimeter path. They're vulnerable, exposed to stranger's glances and picking hands, to alternate perspectives and unencumbered countryside. One rides to the beach, leaning the bronze-colored varsity against one of one's benches. One fills the handlebar crate with shells. When one rides home, one scatters the shells along the way to keep the path whitened.

One's grandfather shows one the unique air circulation of one's orchards, the movement of sea breezes through the concentric circles, the sway of the crowns, the imperceptible polishing of new fruit, the dispersal patterns of one's shower's spray. One's grandson digs for worms in the damp soil beside the shower's slab and shows one his every find. One has stopped harvesting one's garden, and despite the summer's drought, weeds have sprung up with virile tenacity to choke the vegetable plants. One's grandfather tries to prove to one by elaborate scratchings in the dirt beside the stoop—his hand clutching a stick resembling a diving rod—that if one were to shift one's bungalow toward town the length of a prostrate man, and angle the bungalow away from the slab of cement, one might cool the interior by a whole fahrenheit degree, and the resultant beeziness would deter mosquitoes.

One learns that one's great-grandfather was the town librarian and that one's great-grandson will be quickened. One's great-grandfather, before becoming a librarian,

sung baritone in a traveling quartet, until suddenly losing his voice, a discouraging fall from grace. One's great-grandson never married or sired a son, dying in his youth, ending one's lineage. Then, one is told one's great-grandfather wasn't a lover of books and one's great-grandson drowned in a winter's pond, with no knowledge of one, or of one's father, or of summer orchards by the sea, or of any girl's knobby shoulders, or of teaching himself to ride a bicycle.

When one wakes in the middle-of-the-night—one's hipbone sore against the hardwood floor—one's ears buzz with one's grandfather's and one's grandson's voicings of history and discontinuance, their tellings of elsewheres and othernesses and happenings beyond one's kin, beyond one's palmheld sphere. One marvels at such generosity, their constant sharing, their supplying him with coordinates for self-placement, the magnification of one's bearings. One's grandfather wheezes, one's grandson coughs—they go back to talking in their sleep. One feels encapsulated, encompassed, embalmed.

At the beach, the summer is on its downslope, schooldays loom above a not-so-distant horizon, the water's at its warmest. One's four houses stare out to sea as if in search of the earliest stirrings of the hurricane season. One attempts to become a structure—white-roofed and coated beige—to insert oneself between the green-roofed and brown-roofed houses. One wishes to middle oneself, to be the hinge of a doubled way, the coming into going. One verges upon going into becoming. One is the center of five, the center of three, the center of seven and nine and eleven…or one is next to last, the penultimate son, the final father, and one's grandson's stories are hallucinatory, one's grandson being nothing but an empty coalsack.

One's grandfather and one's grandson don't eat or shower or change clothes or employ the toilet (if it were working, which it isn't). They sleep, speak, and follow one through one's days as if they were grafted onto one's shoulders. One wonders, were one to wish them away, were one to bid them gone, if they would go. One doubts one's slipping control, one's ability to hold one's landscape in frame. One considers not eating, not changing clothes, not shitting or showering—not sleeping, nor speaking. One supposes one will breathe and one will drink water (from the creek, from the well) and evaporate one's liquid waste through one's pores. One will spend one's nights untelling stories in voiceless subtraction.

One attempts to become the orchards, to become as plural and as singular as an aspen grove, one's roots intermingling and intertwining so that a tree at one edge of one's orchards could share its partaking of a glorious water table with a tree at the

opposite edge—a tree with no access to any water table whatsoever, glorious or not. In this way, one's persimmons could take on a touch of lime, one's oranges could twang the pistachios. One, as collective, could heal a lone ailing tree, could straighten one's rows with internal discipline. One chooses not to apply the *One bad apple spoils...* maxim to one's constructed world.

At first, one's grandfather and one's grandson don't (as figures or voices or growths on one's shoulders) follow one to shore. One's position as observer develops into a haven from past and future, from work-ethic librarians and frozen children. One watches the four houses without babble in one's ears. The dun-colored house has emptied, although there is no hint of autumn in the air, no days of lessening light melancholia to speak of. The two boys from the red-roofed house play in the waves with a take-it-for-granted nonchalance, the fervency of the last days of summer not yet upon them. When one returns to the bungalow after a tranquil stint upon one of one's benches, one finds one's bungalow empty, one's grandfather and one's grandson busy in the orchards picking fruit, stripping the trees—one by one, without exception—of their shriveled shame.

One begins to develop a cough, like one's grandson's at night, like one's grandmother's of old. It feels as if something is lodged in one's lungs, not liquid, not tubercular or bronchial or pneumonic, but gossamer, of substance and transparent. One coughs and coughs, whether on one's son's bicycle, on one's benches by the sea, at one's rickety table, under the spray of one's shower. The cough, one understands, isn't imagined, even if it's fabricated. One's rib muscles hurt. The pain—as far as one knows pain—is genuine. One's grandson squints at one as if one is mocking him, but as one's cough progresses, he gazes at one knowingly.

Eventually, one's grandfather and one's grandson (as voices, then as banshees on the beach) stay with one on one's strolls to the ocean. One shows them the wellhouse, hoping they'll prefer its coziness to that of the bungalow—not taking into consideration how the two of them would share the single cot. One insists they cup their hands and drink the wellwater from the freshly raised bucket. One sits on one's benches with one's back to the houses, not letting one's grandfather or one's grandson witness one's obsession with the four facades and their interiors, one's compulsion to observe without intrigue. One scans the shore and surf, thinking one might spy the towheaded girl one saw earlier in the summer, the one that one felt was one's father in disguise, although one was aware this couldn't be so, considering one's father's bulk, the girl's frame, one's father's temperament, the girl's containment. One's grandfather and grandson, taken

together, could constitute the girl—one's grandfather's hair-color and self-assurance, one's grandson's wraith-like gait. They walk the beach, these two, as if they were the elderly man and the boy from the brown-roofed house out on their daily hunt for shells. One searches the shoreline for an oblivious bicyclist, reckless and speedy, one who isn't paying attention to sand-gazing pedestrians.

At one's weak table, in the evenings, one tries to teach one's grandson to play speed with cards. One's grandson's fingers are clumsy, as if made of licorice. One isn't accustomed to winning parlor games, or games of any kind, of dexterity or prowess or strength. With his gnarled hands, one's grandfather is even worse than one's grandson, and one tires of easy victory. One asks them to try harder, or to leave one alone, or to tell one about lateral transcendence. One sits, arms crossed, glaring at them alternately, old man to young lad, projection to memory, death to idea. One's grandfather wheezes, one's grandson coughs, setting off one's cough, undecking several cards from table to floor, one's grandfather volunteering to tell one's fortune with the four fallen cards he gathers from beside one's grandson's shoes.

The day before the earthquake (a slight rumbling of the land), one catches one's grandfather and one's grandson attempting to set the orchards ablaze. They had stacked broken crates around a trunk in the plum grove, and were hunched over a pile of dry sticks and leaves fiddling with a box of one's kitchen matches when one came upon them by accident—one having wondered where they were when one woke and one having mistakenly thought one could escape them best in the most distant orchard. One's grandfather made a noise that was more a chortle than a wheeze, and one's grandson burst into sobbing, and one concentrated on merging them into the towheaded girl. They resisted, not wishing to participate in grief. One's grandson's sobs grew worse, and one's grandfather squatted beside him and stroked his temple and shushed him tenderly, eyeing one as the culprit. One, as orchard, is not afraid of one's grandson's tears or one's grandfather's gaze, but the box of matches clutched in either of their palms gives one plenty of pause.

One, as orchards, clears oneself of people, excluding oneself. One, as person, spends the afternoon wandering through oneself as botanical and spatial collective, unaware of self as other than self. One, as orchards, observes oneself as fleshed figure, feels oneself as ambulatory construct. This split weakens, like a hurricane making landfall, when one, as person, kneels at the creek bank and thrusts one's cupped hands into the water. One is a mid-life rumpled man, not an orchard or a clump of trees.

One's grandfather lays the four cards out upon the table, side by side, in a row. The outermost cards represent one's circumstances. The innermost, one's volition. One stares at the cards, trying to discern meaning from them. The two outside cards are deuces, of clubs and hearts. The two inside cards are a three of spades and a four of diamonds. One's grandfather embarks on an elaborate telling, a baroque explanation of suits and positions, numerology and symbolism, the gulf between one's heart and one's head, one's understanding and one's imagination. One points out the similarities in the values of the cards, that they came from the sequential nature of the game of speed, that they fell off of the table together, and that they're not sufficiently random or personalized to reflect one's fortune. One's grandfather smacks his lips as if to say one is a rank amateur, with opinions of no merit.

The night before the earthquake, one listens to their (one's grandfather's and one's grandson's) weavings of them (one's great-grandfather and one's great-grandson)—warp and weft—and one mulls oneself into a stupor, stunned on the muddy banks of one's lineage. One has the sensation of a keen wire being pulled through one's chest, connecting one to others—a day's catch of fish. One's great-grandfather died clutching the hem of one's great-grandmother's skirt. One's great-grandson loved animals of make-believe (phoenix, pegasus, griffin). One's great-grandfather liked hot lemonade. One's great-grandson smelled violets in his mother's hair. These particularities flood one, relentless, unverifiable, rise and surge. One puts one's fingers in one's ears, but as one suspects, this has no effect on the two voices—if anything, it concentrates their syntax by blocking out the sounds of the shower drip and the mosquito buzz, and the faint swoosh of breaking surf. One tries to slip off into a dream, but one hasn't dreamt or nightmared since the summer rose.

The day after the earthquake and the day before one's grandfather and one's grandson leave, one pokes around one's bungalow to assess any structural damage it may have suffered. This activity, this circumnavigation, for the purpose of sniffing out cracks or foundation sinkage, makes one miss one's father—one's father as father, not one's father as girl. One's grandfather and one's grandson, shaken by the previous day's tremor, are in bed (one's grandson has joined one's grandfather) with wet rags draped across their eyes. One accused them of melodrama, of overwrought histrionics, of tacky exaggeration, but they stayed blanched and bedridden. One's laked father... One discovers only a bulge at one of the bungalow's corners that has likely been there longer than a day or a summer or one's son's lifetime.

All four houses at the shore weathered the groundshake without difficulty. This isn't surprising—the earthquake was minor, of no significance. One might've even imagined it—it might've been imagined. The frumpy woman rolls the trash curbside. The dumpster is bigger than she is, but she handles it without wavering. She does favor one ankle—wrapped in a beige stretch bandage, easily visible to one above her sandal—but this doesn't curtail her chores. She washes and waxes her vehicle on the cement slab under the red-roofed house. One hears her sporadic whistle—a melody unfamiliar to one—as she buffs the hatchback with a chamois cloth. Then, somehow noticing one observing her, she gives one a friendly wave.

The bulge is a cocoon. One deems it a cocoon. Not for alien or beast, not for dun-colored moth or resplendent butterfly, but for girl, towheaded, from one's childhood. A girl who must be capable of teaching herself to swim and ride a bicycle. One presses the soft spot in the wall with the knuckle of one's thumb. The plaster indents under one's pressure. If she were to hatch this day, or perhaps tomorrow, one wouldn't feel the intense loneliness one is certain to feel once one's grandfather and one's grandson are gone away—as they've threatened to do—taking their steady drip of voices with them. One knows, however, that if one were to take one of one's whittling knives and split open the wall to extract the girl, the timing might be wrong, her hair might not have sufficiently lightened, her limbs might be stunted, she might not recognize one. Putting one's cheek against the bulge, one whispers encouragement, putting patience into one's voice, affection into one's words.

The day of the earthquake—hours before the harmless rumble (harmless, except for precipitating one's company's early departure)—one rides the perimeter of one's orchards, wobbling upon one's son's bicycle, not liking the inbetween sensation of being neither reliably balanced nor altogether fallen down. One feels a raindrop on one's arm. One searches the sky. Although there are some clouds, none of them resemble thunderheads or have much gray in them, and one is bathed in midday sunlight. One feels another drop, this time on one's cheek. Then another, and suddenly big plops are striking the road's dust. This lasts half of a minute and stops. Rare fresh moisture in the air. Rain out of a clear blue sky. The potent force that keeps most people sailing along with their lives is mere failure of imagination. One leans one's son's bike against a tree trunk while one still occupies its seat. One tilts one's neck until one's brow touches bark. Although one believes one can hear the tree's internal systems at work, the tree has nothing to say to one. The orchards are quiet, apple pervasive, inclined toward autumn.

One tentatively waves back at the frumpy woman—one is tempted to glance behind one to see if she were waving at someone else. As one lowers one's hand to one's lap, one comprehends that something has gone awry, that this exchange of waves has altered one's role as observer. She won't tolerate one's constant (frequent) presence without pressing for engagement, either with her or with the authorities. If she witnesses one, others might also, and one's anonymity is compromised, one's phantomhood with the four houses is kaput. One wonders if one could come to them from one's bungalow's table, without making the walk along the shelled path past the well, without any walking or cycling whatsoever. If so, one could also travel to the lake to visit one's father and the towheaded girl without unattending one's orchards.

The night after the earthquake—the night before one's grandfather's and one grandson's leaving, one having spent the day alone, their bedridden silliness having shut down their storytelling, their parallel monologues, their two grooves through one's thoughts—one stands under one's shower with one's eyes and nose and mouth taking the brunt of the spray. One feels the tiny streams of water merging together against one's skin, and one imagines oneself gone to mud and being washed away into the clovered yard. One sees the frumpy woman waving over and over, in slow motion or sped up ridiculously, colored red or split into multiples, one not able to wave back or acknowledge her in any way, her not knowing one as the recipient of her wave. One coughs. One listens for voices. The bottlebrush bush beside the slab is done blooming and the hummingbirds have taken their sharpened beaks and staccato hearts elsewhere. One's skin isn't mud. One's grandmother isn't a moth. One's orchards have been misused.

One ceases one's excursions to the boardwalk benches, one's shore visits, one's observations of the four houses. The cocoon becomes one's focality. With one's grandfather and one's grandson gone, with their tales of one's great-grandfather and one's great-grandson absent, their echoes fading, the bulge begins to show itself on the interior wall of one's bungalow, in the corner between the busted sink and the kitchenette. One slides one's bed to an angle where one can watch the bulge while not sleeping, one's candles providing just enough light. In this way, one hopes, if the bulge were to breathe, or if a struggle for air appeared to be going disastrously, one could witness the event and be available, with one's knife, to assist.

The night of the earthquake, an hour or so before the land's trembling, one squats in the dark of the apple orchard, releasing one's body's poisons into the ground.

One's grandfather's and one's grandson's voices—soon to be hushed—blend with the crickets and squeaks of bats and the drip of the shower and the mosquitoes. One is content. One is the center. One coughs up one's sun, burying it with one's waste. The night is warm. One smells a portion of one's internal energy.

One lies upon one's floor. One's grandson chatters from the chairs, one's grandfather mutters from the bed. One's thoughts spin around the four cards one's grandfather placed on the table, their near symmetry, the haphazardness of their choosing without one's input (not counting one's cough as the catalyst that sent them flying off the table), one's grandfather's convoluted interpretations, one's discomfort with having one's future analyzed and explicated, the conventional separation of heart and head, one's grandson's disinterest in sensibilities and events that shaped his past, one's inability to honestly wave it all off as arbitrary and contrived. Then, one's chandelier—with its three unlit frosted bulbs—begins to sway, the bungalow vibrates, the floor ripples, one's black metal cup clatters into the sink basin from its position beside the faucet. One's grandson shrieks, one's grandfather sits up in terror. The tremor has already passed, although the chandelier still pendulums, its candlelit shadow careening across the ceiling and walls. One tries to calm one's grandson and one's grandfather by telling them it was only an earthquake, a small one, of scant concern, and that the aftershocks, if there were to be any, would be of increasingly lesser strength. They're unconvinced. Their pallors stay bleached. Their voices have been silenced.

One gathers mud from one's creek bank and hauls it in a pot to one's shower slab, building a model of one's bungalow on the dry end of the cement, away from the drip. With one's hands and a spoon and a flat stick, one sculpts an exact replica of one's bungalow (minus furnishings—one will whittle those out of seeds and wood), complete with mysterious bulge. One walks around one's bungalow maniacally scrutinizing every detail. And then one examines one's model, painstakingly making the necessary alterations to insure one is satisfied with its authenticity and accuracy as a representation. As the bulge changes daily (and eventually hourly) one keeps that corner of one's model wet with shower water, and adjusts the size and shape of the replicant cocoon to mimic that of the actual one.

One washes one's bedsheets, eliminating one's grandfather's odor from them, hanging them on a wire strung from the showerhead to an apple tree limb above the bald spot at the edge of the clearing where one's son and the redheaded youth played marbles. One wipes down the three ladderback chairs (using, as a rag, the sweatshorts

one's son wore to go wading up to his shins in the surf, the sweatshorts one's father, as girl, forgot to take with her when she left for the lake, or for town), and one positions the chairs around one's table, as if one were expecting company, although one isn't. One gathers a potful of fruit pits and stems and twigs, and with one's confident knife, one fashions diminutive duplicates of one's furniture, specific and fanatic, down to the crack in the sink, the crawlspace plumbing with the handle one cranked to shut off the water, one's crate nightstand and globed lamp (the filament of its bulb long ago severed), the table and chairs, the refrigerator and oven and cabinet and cutting block, the waterless toilet...One makes little sheets for the little trough bed from a pair of one's son's white briefs one discovered while shifting the angle of one's bed to better keep an eye on the bulge throughout one's sleepless nights. One sits on one's stoop, gazing across the clovered yard at one's model of one's bungalow on the cement slab, one (carved from the handle of one's homemade slingshot) sitting on the model bungalow's stoop staring across the clovered yard at one sitting on one's stoop staring across the clovered yard...

A weather shift, a chilled inland breeze, and one suffers one's only dream of the summer. The frumpy woman comes to visit one. She arrives sweaty and worn out, limping across the clearing with her ankle so swollen she's unwrapped the bandage and converted a broken branch into a cane. The cane is towheaded. The woman collapses upon one's stoop, feverish. After stripping her down to her underwear—peeling away her sodden striped blouse, tugging off her lime green shorts—one lugs her bulk to one's shower, holding her under the healing spray. She turns to mud and is quickly washed away into the yard. One is horrified, but one sleeps one's deepest sleep that night. In the morning, one wakes to discover the woman has become one's mother, moping one's hot brow with a stained rag once wrapped around a wounded dog's neck. One hides one's sorry head in one's pillow. One's mother flushes the toilet without telling one what of one's she's flushed. One panics with thoughts of the cocoon, thoughts of a burlap sack, thoughts of one's childhood drawings of one's father and men of failure.

One wakes to discover it rained in the night and became autumn. Although the sun is peeking above the trees, one's bungalow's eaves are dripping and all across one's clearing the clover glistens. One's dead grandfather and one's unborn grandson are two days gone. One's son and one's father are historical, memorable from long before the summer set. One's great-grandfather and one's great-grandson are apocryphal, outside the bounds of consideration. The redheaded youth is ensconced in town, within a regimented home in a loving and disciplined neighborhood. The frumpy woman is

where she belongs, in the white red-roofed house, at the shore, rocking on the porch, looking out to sea one last time as her vacation ends. The collie and the collie's sirings are dead. The towheaded girl is ripening in the wall of one's bungalow. When one looks to the corner, to the space between the cracked sink and the cutting block, one's heart flutters. The bulge is burst open. One knows, even before checking, that the cocoon is empty, that whatever was there is now off exploring the orchards. Outside, on the slab, the eaves of one's model bungalow drip upon the cement. One is surprised to find the model's bulge intact, but as one watches, as one stands and coughs and observes, a rift shows itself in the substitute cocoon and widens to allow three or four wasps out into the world.

VI

One's grandmother and one's mother and one's daughter and one's spouse come to visit one, filling the bungalow with vibrancy and feminine verve. One is sick, bedridden, coughing up one's planets, apologetic for lack of accommodations, one monopolizing the bungalow's sole bed. One is told to rest, to not worry, they've brought a tent for four and have erected it in the clearing. One asks if it is burlap. One's daughter giggles. One's spouse shoots a nervous glance at one's mother. One is told it is canvas. One asks for a drink of water. One's daughter is sent to the well with one's black metal cup clutched in her swannish hand. One resumes thinking of one's thirst.

Across one's orchards word is out that the women have come, that four hammocks have been hung in a huge tent in the clovered yard, that one's summer of solitude is unwound. One imagines several generations of unpenised people attaching colorful ribbons to the shower pole and skipping around its tether while tossing leaves into the air. One's spouse crawls under the bungalow and restores the water to the toilet and sink. One's grandmother mends the crack in the sink with industrial caulking. One's mother fashions a screen out of crates and canvas to visually sequester the toilet. All of this is accomplished in an energized day.

One's grandmother flies into one's flames and is charred. One's spouse is blonde-haired and green-eyed and her breasts are endearingly lopsided. One's daughter's hair is

asphalt black. One's mother mops one's skin with a dripping washcloth brought straight from one's sink. What one wants is the assurance one's imagination is beneficial. One wishes one's world viability, a concentrated ethic of purpose, long life, bursts of quality. One's mother hushes one's mumbling by pinching one's lips together with her forefinger and thumb, her nails not chewn like one's grandmother's—this not being the hand that's missing most of its ringfinger.

At night one refuses to sleep or dream or doze or disengage from one's prone place in one's bungalow bed. One listens to their chatter in the tent, their laughter and noises of delight, filtering through the canvas and the bungalow wall. One hears their serious tones, too, their authentic worrying, their belief in outcome, their trust in paths. One's grandmother insists one is brain ill. She says one burns a hole through her empathy. One's daughter sings an annoying song about a lonely dragon. One's mother says one is resembling one's grandfather more and more every time she sees one after not having seen one for a spell. One's grandmother has a coughing fit, although hers is dry, unlike one's, which is wet. One's spouse kindly brings one magazines—one about kites and one about origami—hoping these might soothe one's insomnia. She also provides a battery-powered lantern—concerned, she says, that candles are unsafe. She pecks the end of one's nose and takes her lopsided breasts back out to the tent.

One by one, before crawling into their hammocks to sleep—and occasionally in the middle of the night—they visit the toilet. Without looking to witness who has come into the bungalow, one begins to be able to discern who is who by sound and smell. One's daughter whistles. One's mother is by far the quietest, one almost not hearing her until the flush, she being the one who spends the most time at the sink, scrubbing her hands. One's grandmother's nail-biting is often audible. If not, the aroma of her powder is prevalent, her trickle the weakest. One's spouse is distinguishable only by her lack of distinctiveness—as far as her toilet sounds or habits go. Sometimes one is able to determine who is who by what type of fastener is being undone (buttons, snaps, zippers), what type of clothing is raised or slid down (skirt, pants, overalls), what sort of breath is expended, one remembering what they were wearing when one saw them in the daylight, what mood they exuded, the likeliest weight of their footfalls.

One wonders who of the four could most easily be turned into the towheaded girl. One's mothy grandmother has the pallor, the hair color, and the frame, but the cough is disconcerting, and might not edit out—although, one thinks, it might be curious to share bouts of coughing with the towheaded girl. One's daughter's darkness

is likely prohibitive, considering one's weakened condition, and if one shouldn't make one's son a girl, one shouldn't make one's daughter the girl of one's childhood. One's mother...a mother-to-girl switch is a psychological cliché, and one is wary. One could mold one's mother into a boy, and then switch the boy with a girl, but one wouldn't pull the wool over anyone's eyes with such tomfoolery. The most likely candidate for metamorphosis is one's spouse, a light-haired, light-eyed woman who doesn't share one's blood. Men, one thinks, have girled their wives throughout history. One more infraction won't matter. She—one's spouse—has a sweet disposition, and her will is profound. One could eliminate the lopsided breasts by eliminating her breastedness. Although one wouldn't touch the towheaded girl, one could fiddle with one's recollection of intimacy with the girl when she was one's spouse.

The stains on one's ceiling keep one's mind on one's limits, one's imaginative borders, one's ignorance of the happenings at the lakehouse. Rains come. Weatherfronts go. The shower drips, trickles, sprays, streams, drips. Consciousness unfolds, crumples, releases, resumes. One's legs shake. One's stomach hurts. One wants to be thrown to the ocean, heaved into the sea. One's a house succumbing to storm surge, one keeling into the surf. One's a house growing out of the sandy soil between four houses of familiar ilk, one insisting upon one's space in the middle, like a new tooth coming into its appointed mouth and shoving the surrounding teeth out of its way. One is a chrysalis in a building's vagina. One wakes, sweating, one's spouse holding one's hand, telling one it'll be okay, she's with one now, one can put one's head back upon one's pillow.

One's weak table, barely adequate for three, is inconceivable for four (or five, should one recover sufficiently to sit with the women at mealtime). They, the four of them, craft a table out of crates and canvas, and two ladderback chairs out of orchard wood. One is amazed at their industry. They appear capable of any task around the bungalow, except possibly stopping the shower's drip. One's daughter—having ridden into town on her brother's bicycle to grocery shop—has brought a replacement bulb for one's globed bedside lamp, so that one can peruse one's magazines without candle or lantern, one's daughter restoring the room's electricity—the chandelier switch no longer wired.

Their meals are cooperative affairs, all of the females pitching in with purpose and effort. One's kitchenette bustles. The odors wouldn't sicken one if one weren't sick. The clinkings and clankings wouldn't throb one's thoughts. The smacking of their lips, the gaping of their maws, the rippling of their gullets—one lies in one's bed, seething.

They should eat in the orchards, one thinks, away from one's stomachache. Their life forces press one into the wall's plaster. One doesn't want them to leave. One wishes they would go off and play in the orchards so one could follow them with one's thoughts. One wishes one's bed were big enough for all of them to join one at night like puppies in a basket. But their pursuit of ordinary living—their bivouacking in one's world as pragmatic beings, as emissaries of health—is insufferable.

One day they set up ladders and dropcloths and go about painting the bungalow, interior and exterior, bright white. They're adorable in their painter denims and smocks, brushes stuck into pockets, extenders shoved into thigh loops, hair tucked under caps. One's daughter does her toilet whistle, sounding as loud from daylit outdoors as from across the bungalow at night. She—one's daughter—is just now coming into her breastedness, almost before one's eyes, her white coveralls (splotched with whiter paint, and with the salmon and aquamarine they chose for the door and eaves and window frames and trim) poofing out ever so slightly at the chest. One wishes one could spare her these troubling days of changes, this time of becoming fertile, of vulnerability under the constant gaze of the creative principle, the law of perpetuation. If one were to make her the towheaded girl, one knows, she wouldn't cease—as herself, one's daughter—becoming woman. One's imagination can't halt progression.

One need never crawl to the toilet again, as one doesn't eat or sleep or secrete anymore—one is developing a superb observer's body. One's stomach has purged itself of pain. One's extremities have stopped shaking. Or so one imagines, assuming one's illness isn't progressive, but static, open to present possibility, to future shift. One falls out of bed, struggles to a kneel, then a squat. From there—from here, from this squat—one only needs to steady oneself with one's fingertips on the floor to perform a standing up in front of one's rickety table.

Out in the plum grove—where the trees are thieved of their fruit, purple and red—one's mother, looking like one's daughter, long past the pausing, malignancy having robbed her of her breasts, sits with her back to a trunk, with one's father rambling through her thoughts. She grabs at the dirt at her flanks, her seven fingers and two thumbs digging parallel ditches beside her thighs. One—her son—is dying, and it's this mother's wish to not outlive her child, even if it's reasonable for her to outlive her husband, even if one's resemblance to one's grandmother makes her believe one—her son—will go only when she—the old moth—goes. And her son's grandmother is as healthy as her son's daughter (give or take a cough or two), who's as healthy as youth.

Out in the apricot grove—where the trees are dying, crown to roots—one's spouse walks with one, having willed one from one's bed. She wants one to tell her of one's life, to express to her—in whatever way one wishes—one's hopes, one's disappointments, one's dementia. The curvature of the path is so severe one feels hints of vertigo, one agonizing with every step to keep one's balance—even with one's spouse's steadying hand on one's elbow. The ground shakes. Another earthquake, of no consequence, with no bite and little bark, but it's enough to buckle one's legs and lay one down in the dirt. And one's self's spouse puts her hands on her hips and wills one vertical so that the walk can be perpetuated.

Whenever one tries to remember one's son's or one's daughter's birth—births one attended—one draws as complete a blank as if one were reaching into one's memory of one's own birth. One isn't one's son. One isn't one's daughter. One shouldn't outlive them. One shouldn't tells lies, of either the golden rule or categorical imperative variety. One shouldn't confess idly. One shouldn't underestimate uncertainty, one shouldn't overestimate the overt. One mustn't spend one's life observing oneself or one's neighbors or one's bloodtrail, when one could be observing observation.

One is happy strolling with one's spouse, now that one has mastered one's fragile gait without stumble or lurch. The sky isn't fallen, but sprung. The orchard bowers bless. One's spouse smells of autumn dock, or lake waft. Her hand in one's hand feels better than mother's or father's, a grandparent's or a beloved child's—her hand was chosen, is chosen. Nevertheless...one contains poisons one doubts she's immune to, if there exists any anecdote beyond indifference, inoculation being hindsight-ineffective, rarely potent enough as afterthought. One's spouse is tough, tougher than anyone in one's bloodline—one's grandmother's only as tough as any embalmed creature—and one vows to begin granting her—one's spouse—the respect she deserves. Then, and perhaps only then, one might make a worthy towheaded girl out of her.

One is having new difficulties distinguishing what is right in front of one from what is off in the distance, what one might bump one's head against from what one might stub one's toes upon—what around the bend could swallow one whole. One's peripheral vision fisheyes. One witnesses optical tributaries, optional pathways of sight. If one could refract, one thinks, one could experience multiple perspectives, one could be integrated selves, the self existing in the integration. One is limited. One isn't limited. One chooses to limit one's limitlessness.

One's grandmother and one's daughter come upon the dove nest while painting

the bungalow's trim (salmon and aquamarine) along the eaves. One's daughter wrings the doves' necks, one by one, without exception, and drops them into a crate at the bottom of the ladder. She has heard dove is delicious when basted with citrus and grilled over an open flame. One's grandmother points out that they emit the most nauseating sounds and their droppings make a mess and the bungalow would be better off without them. One offers up no complaint. The night of the dove feast, the women shower as a foursome, a featherless bevy. Unable to watch from one's bed, one listens to the splashings and squeals—the water is chilly now that the air isn't summered—one picturing their stances and shiverings, one's daughter's hair occluding stars.

Without saying why—to one's spouse or to one's self—one desires to show her one's benches by-the-sea, the houses with their empty lots as bookends. One thinks—with one's faint hopes—that one might undizzy long enough to play marbles with her in the sand under an umbrella. One sits beside one's spouse atop the only sunny boulder along the creek that splits one's orchards. One studies her jawline, her cheekbone, her unpierced ear. One imagines her as a girl, skinny-dipping in a secluded lake on a family vacation, sunning herself on the dock while her mother and father tryst in the cabin's loft bed, her brother either off hunting squirrels with his slingshot or fishing from the lake's dam. One puts oneself in the brother's boots, stealing back from one's impatient hunting, hiding behind a tree, observing one's sister prone on the dock, her white hair flung across the wood, her violet eyes hidden under her lids, her glistening skin goosebumping in the morning air...One suspects one's spouse—despite her fierce will—seldom skinny-dipped, and never in vulnerable family situations, and her parents weren't often reckless with their libidos, and her brother wasn't curious about her specificity, and one recalls the time one's sister (one never had a sister)...One looks to one's spouse for assurance, for an indication that one's imagination is legitimate, that one has control, but she is napping, her mouth ajar.

One's grandmother has plastered and painted the bulge that burst and became a rift in the wall at one corner of the bungalow. Now that the weather shift from summer to autumn is permanent—until winter (minus several days of summer reprise)—one is glad to have her mend cracks in the walls where the chill seeps in at night. The bungalow has no heat, no fireplace, and it isn't prudent to employ the oven for this task. One's mother brings one extra blankets from the trunk of the car. The car is parked behind the bungalow and one wonders why one didn't hear its engine when they arrived, why one hasn't questioned their means of bringing a hefty tent and hammocks and clothing and

tools and supplies to the clearing—with one's son's bicycle being the only mechanized conveyance available. If they came by car, they could leave by car, and one considers slashing the tires with one's knife, although one knows this would merely postpone their leaving, not prevent it.

One tells one's spouse that one is an observer, that one believes participation to be crude, that imagination is divine—or, to be accurate, divinely inspired. One's spouse is sitting across from one at one's table, having dragged one of the ladderback chairs back into the bungalow from the women's makeshift table in the yard, her fingers playing fondly with one's fingers, all of them ringless with nails clipped, not chewn. Her eyes are greener than clover. One almost wishes one could bed her, or watch oneself bed her, but one's cough is nasty, one's skin is cold, one's skin is clammy, one's heart inadequate. One asks if she plays speed or reads fortunes.

One wakes to one's self shivering under one's pile of blankets. There is noise. The odor of smoke. One's coughing is out of control. One's eyes water as soon as one opens them. The bungalow is afire. This is what one surmises, one lying in one's trough of a bed, incapable of fleeing, choking on smoke. One's daughter is shouting contrition, telling one she's sorry, terribly sorry, she'll have it out in a moment, not to worry. One wonders if one's dreaming. The smoke dissipates. One's coughing soon resumes its normal hack. One's daughter stands beside one's bed, looking down at one, her mouth horribly frowned. She built a bonfire of one's fallen table to keep one warm, she confesses, leaving the door open for ventilation, ready with a bucket of water should something go wrong. And it did, obviously, the flames reaching unexpectedly to the toilet's partition, the canvas catching fire...but the fire's out now, everything's under control, one can go back to sleep. One asks where the other three women have got to, if they've slept through the near catastrophe. One's daughter says that her mother left for the lakehouse, right after dark, to fetch a portable kerosene heater, and that her grandmother and great-grandmother flew off beyond the orchard's treetops just before dark. When one wakes to lavendar light, one finds one's table and two of one's chairs missing, but there is no evidence whatsoever of fire. The canvas partition is unmarred, one's floor isn't blackened, the ceiling shows no smoke residue. One flops out of bed onto the floor, and crawls to the bungalow's door. The tent is gone. The yard is vacated. There are almost as few signs of the women having ever occupied the clearing as there are of a bonfire having raged in one's bungalow's gut.

As one recovers one's strength—if not one's health—over the ensuing days,

one wanders one's clearing and one's orchards, seeking for clues to understanding one's world. Like the red-roofed beachhouse, one's bungalow has been given a fresh coat of white paint. This proves nothing. One has white and salmon and aquamarine paint under one's nails and upon one's rumpled beige shirt and trousers. Examining the paint job from the shower's slab, it could've been done by one, or it could've been done by an eleven-year-old girl and her eighty-year-old great-grandmother. One gets a ladder from the apple orchard and checks the dove nest. The nest is unharmed, although the doves are absent. This proves nothing. The young doves could've matured by now and flown off beyond the treetops. The mother dove could be in the orchards foraging for food for herself. The toilet has water in its bowl, and it flushes as a properly working toilet should. The sink's crack has been filled with hardening putty. There is a canvas partition around the toilet that one has no recollection of making. One's pitiful bed is bountiful with blankets. One's orchards appear to one to be untouched, until on one of one's explorations one finds some scratchings in the dirt not far from the bottom of the trunk of one of the plum trees. One looks under one's fingernails. Paint and dirt. This proves nothing, one not placing cleanliness next to anything these days. One sits with one's back to the trunk, letting one's hands slip into the shallow holes at one's flanks. One's thoughts wander to one's father.

One goes to the ocean to locate the towheaded girl, the one reminiscent of one's father. On the way, while stopping for water at the well, one is bemused to discover one's table and two chairs outside the wellhouse. The wellhouse has been given a fresh coat of white paint. Its tin roof gleams under the autumn sun. A vase with a weedy blossom graces the table. One knocks on the sunlit door before one catches sight of the circles etched in the dirt beside the table, the glass spheres not refracting light because of the table's morning shade. The redheaded youth emerges, her freckled legs sticking out of canvas shorts, her ankle bracelet shining in one's eyes, her auburn locks covering most of the moth holes around the neck of her sweater. One stares at her, wanting to accuse her of theft, but one's will falters. She says one is looking younger—as she had hoped—and that she will be coming daily to one's bungalow to utilize the toilet—now that it has a partition and a working sink for handwashing—and one's shower, if one will permit. She invites one for supper and a match of marbles by lanternlight. One assents, stumbling away toward shore, thinking the redheaded youth looks older to one now than one remembers her looking to one from one's summer's heights.

Along the boardwalk—mostly deserted, even at midday among the food

booths—one reels, held within one's new preoccupation. One sits upon no benches, gazes at no house facades, nor does one scan the shore for bleached girls who connote gorilla fathers. One is trying to remember one's son's flicking technique with his marble shooter, the angle and tension of his thumb, the tilt of his wrist, his projections of caroms and ricochets, his defensive strategies of shield and protect. Still, one thinks, she—the redheaded youth—seldom lost to him—one's son. One should study one's recollections of *her* techniques, but one can only envision her bumpy spinal cord, constantly put on display by her one-piece swimsuit while she bent over the patch of dirt in one's clearing, humbling one's son, obtaining his marbles. One doesn't notice the bicycle speeding up from behind one on the boardwalk...

Despite one's enlivened vigor—matching the bungalow's refreshed surfaces—despite one's wrinkles gradually being ironed out of one's reflection in the creek, one is miserably alone now that the women have abandoned one, now that their unvisit to one is exhausted. One misses one's spouse—one's spouse as woman, not one's spouse as potential girl. One misses one's strolls with her through one's orchards, her acceptance—as the mother of one's children—of one's quirks. The redheaded youth comes to the toilet deep into the night, when one is half-asleep, and one wonders why she insists upon making inconvenient walks in the dark for the conveniences of an indoor toilet when the scrub brush around the wellhouse would suffice. Her stream is robust, smelling of russet potatoes, and she scrubs her hands like one's mother, lathering them with soap and rinsing them, then lathering them with soap and rinsing them again. After she leaves, one's isolation intensifies until dawn, when one showers some of it away into the yard, one wincing under the cold spray.

One goes to eat supper at the wellhouse with the redheaded youth, one's bag of marbles tucked into a trouser pocket, one's confidence already shaky. One isn't surprised to find the redheaded youth has developed into a woman, resembling one's cousin, matured and fully filled out, sporting a rocket tattoo on one ankle, an ankle peeking out of a tight slit skirt, one's beige outfit feeling too casual in the presence of her evening wear, the candlelit table, the cleavage and dangling earrings and painted nails. The meal—fowl in a delicate fruit sauce—is delicious, one not having tasted flavors as complex as these since one's arrival at the bungalow. One's glass of wine is refilled several times. The redheaded woman's lips glisten like one's spouse's skin as a girl on a lake dock. One's cousin tells one that one has supped on dove in plum sauce, that before dessert—persimmon sherbet—one must make good on one's promise to play

her in marbles. One runs one's fingertip down her bent spine, bump by bump, without exception, her evening gown cut to the small of her back. She is victorious, in mercifully quick fashion, one walking her back to one's bungalow, arm in arm, one feeling slightly tipsy, her wishing to borrow one's shower since the night is unseasonably warm, one's pockets empty, one's thumb sore from the stress of cock-and-release, even after a short lopsided match.

After she showers—one sitting on one's stoop to watch the moonlight grace her curves—the redheaded woman takes one's bed, it welcoming her exotic differences. One places one's sole ladderback chair under the dark chandelier upon the spot one's weak table long occupied, observing the woman's big breasted slumber as if she were a patient in a hospital, a loved one in need of hopeful vigil. When one wakes, slumped in one's chair, one's neck cramped, one squints at one's empty bed. One sniffs the sheets. They stink of one, not of one's cousin's petulance, not of any female, girl or woman, not of companion collie or of ocean sand. The aroma is of one's living in solitude. One showers in the morning sunlight, one's nipples going hard in the chill, one's skin goosebumping, one making up one's mind to leave one's orchards by-the-sea.

One walks the circumference of one's bungalow property, the perimeter path not as dusty as it was in mid-summer. One likes the way—while one is in motion—that the nearer trees momentarily obfuscate the distant trees, the way one can imagine depth of field where none exists. One covers one eye with one hand. Then, one covers one's other eye with one's other hand, pleased with the simple shift of perspective from either side of one's nose. One walks around one's bungalow, watching the ground to witness one's shoes alternately come and go, appear and disappear and reappear, the rhythm reminding one of flinging stones at tree trunks with one's slingshot.

One gathers one's possessions (one's black metal cup, one's whittling knife, one's pillow, one's never worn swimtrunks, a frozen cookie, some spare wrinkled clothes, a burlap bag of peach pits), wraps them up in one's bedsheets, and hauls them to the wellhouse. The structure has burned to the ground—early in the summer, one supposes, judging by the growth of weeds around the charred boards, the aluminum bars of what was a cot, a scattering of blackened marbles. One stuffs one's white bundle down the throat of the well.

At the bungalow, one climbs upon one's son's bicycle, gives the dripping shower a fond glance, and begins pedaling across the clearing. One falls down, scraping one's knee on a stone, ripping one's trousers, the heels of one's hands stained with clover juice.

Trying again, one hardly manages one revolution of the tires before one slams to the dirt. Again and thump. Brushing oneself off—one having sprained a thumb on one's third tumble—one clenches one's jaw, searching one's surroundings for someone to hug good-bye. Finding no one, one strides across the clovered yard down the wide dirt path through the unharvested trees.

By the time one reaches the bald knoll above the creek and one's town, one is sweaty and out-of-breath. One takes a breather, staring behind one at the orchards' strictly aligned rows, at the clearing and the tiny bungalow, the tinier slab of cement where one stands showering, one looking like a salamander in the sun from where one observes on the hill. Then, before one's eyes, one is gone.

VII

One's childhood....anyone's childhood...everyone's childhood...no one's childhood. One's street is curved and sloped, wrenched toward the sea. The houses peer down at one. The chimneys scrape the sky and leave white scratch marks across the blue. One watches the towheaded girl play in her yard. Observing her spunk and zest, one realizes one's fabrications at the orchards were washed-out versions, one's memory of her failing the actuality of her, as memory always fails actuality, until memory becomes actuality. She is wearing shorts and a sweatshirt, as the day is sunny and crisp. One's father isn't a baboon. Her father isn't a gorilla. One's mother isn't a bird. One's grandmother wasn't a moth, wasn't charred in one's flame. The towheaded girl's mother was as pretty as a picture, not as pretty as one's mother. One's cousin wasn't a bitch. The collie wasn't a faithful dog. One's son is a stick figure, decrepit, discarded in a dark alleyway.

Across the street from the towheaded girl's house, one's house rises into the sky. One is at one's bedroom windowseat, squatting on the sill, reaching up with one hand to touch the raingutter. The towheaded girl is clapping, delighted with what she's witnessing in the street. A marble rolls down one's driveway, and the slope of the street carries it along the asphalt, through the sun and shade tree dapplings to the storm drain at the end of the block. The moment before its disappearance into the black oblivion of the drain, the marble moves from the solid shade of an elm trunk into vivid

sunshine, flashing, for a split second only, as if it has burst like a firework and just as suddenly imploded. One waits to witness whether the subsequent marbles will encore their predecessor's brilliance. As they spin and skitter across the asphalt, one by one, their refractions are lovely, but it's the stunning flashes at the end that are breathtaking and arresting, moments of optical wonder. When the last marble has shorted-out like a lightbulb and gone dark, the towheaded girl refracts light herself, standing on her lawn, her bright gaze telling one she is dazzled and grateful, her quick wave to one in the lofty window across the street not fully betraying the joy in her eyes.

One's imagination sputters. The towheaded girl brings one—one as boy—into her house, upstairs into her room, to her window looking down upon her backyard. She borrows one for her make-believe pleasure, pretending one is a special friend, a courier of lights. She watches one and herself play in her leaf covered yard, laughter and seriousness abounding, one's asphalt-black hair vaguely dominant. One can't become the girl like one became one's orchards. One thinks to become her mother, but one can't breast, not even a smidgen. Her father has come into the room—after knocking—to ask her to tie his tie for him, a task she does delightfully.

One leaves the girl with the knobby shoulders to go to one's house, to one's bedroom, to crawl under one's bed and peruse one's crayonings of violence and disaffection, one's panoramas and blueprints of one's orchard and ocean fantast, one's charcoal sketches of the girl's anatomy, of one's mother as bird, one's grandmother as butterfly, spread and pinned, assorted fathers as victims of duration. In one's color drawings of the bungalow, one spies oneself as man dressed in beige, hair thinning, often sitting on the stoop staring out into the yard. In none of the stacks and stacks of papers does one find a single rendering of the outdoor shower. Stuffed into the bedsprings under one's mattress, under one's pillow, one discovers pornographically precise full-color pencil drawings of four beachhouses, side by side, bookended by vacant lots.

Early one morning, well before sunrise, one's father is busy strapping a canoe atop the station wagon in the garage. One's mother makes herself and one's father cups of coffee, spooning plenty of sugar into his, taking it out to him just as he is loading a hefty burlap sack into the backseat—after having converted the wagon into a three-seater, taking away the collie's back platform, it being no longer necessary. One's father mounts the stairs to one's bedroom. Without waking one fully, he carries one back down in his ice-cream dipping arms and gently puts one into the rearmost seat where one's mother covers one with a blanket and provides a pillow. At the last moment, after one's

father has given one's mother a kiss, one switches them so that it is one's mother who slides behind the wheel and one's father who stays in the garage watching the vehicle roll out into the street without its engine running, one's mother braking and turning the key, the wagon moving forward down the block, one and one's mother off on a pre-dawn lavendar excursion to the lake.

One's son could do this with his life, this backtracking into childhood, a suburban neighborhood, a pony-tailed brunette down the block, a gravel yard with cypress bushes, an involved mother, an aloof father, a grandmother's death rattle, something stuck in her throat. Anecdotes and insinuations, epiphanal confusion and shoulder shrugging, happy instances and stretches of dread. One's grandson couldn't. There is to be no grandson, no great-grandson, no sledding accident, no drowning in frigid waters, no fascination with the mythic phoenix or fire-and-brimstone dragons. Memory is as pliable as tomorrow. One can't say anything is true without the admission that it's belief, that it's trust in one's perceptions, that it reduces—time and time again, every absolute moment—to faith.

You will look sweet upon the seat of a bicycle built for two. A candied ditty—a way for one, as boy, to imagine a merciful future, a contraption of mobility for one and the one of one's choosing, away from systems of control—patriarchy, matriarchy, oligarchy, monarchy, anarchy—toward cooperative union, toward mutuality. One, as boy, seeks innocentless exchange with the towheaded girl. One, as man, seeks nothing from the towheaded girl but one's boyhood, or some aspect of one's boyhood, something like an undampening cherry stem, an iridescent insect wing, half of a beige crayon. One sits in her dark garage, gazing at her silver bicycle, a trio of its spokes agleam with a ray of light—from the streetlamp outside—through a seam in the garage door. One stretches the bike and adds another seat, another set of pedals, non-steering handlebars for one to hold onto. One will pedal. One will keep one's eyes on her hair, on her skin where the scalp was exposed by parting and combing and braiding. She will steer. She will do the bulk of the balancing. Braking will necessitate the collaborative dragging of shoes on asphalt or pavement or dirt, coordinated leans and the planting of the soles of two distinct shoes upon solid ground. Then, the dismounts in sinc. It's while in her garage, studying her bicycle, that one imagines becoming her father.

One hears one's mother's humming above the drone of the station wagon's engine. One feels one's moon coming up in one's lungs. The vehicle smells of collie, although the odor is faint. The morning's haze makes the country highway look emptier

than it is, makes the woods along the lake shore eerie in the earliest light, makes one think of the steam rising from one's evening salmon bath—one's father having festively dripped red and yellow food coloring into the white suds and water to create a coral reef effect. Now the upholstery glistens with dog hair, one's mother's blondeness is braided, one's musty mouth tastes of one's whitewashed dreams, an obsolete chewn bone pokes at one's ankle, one's mother is steering the station wagon onto a dirt road.

One can't switch oneself with the collie. One can't become the towheaded girl without unbecoming oneself, convincingly frustrating the purpose. Transmorgrification is the stuff of religion and the folklore of horror, not one's reality. Nevertheless, one seeks refraction, wishing to position oneself on the verge of dispersion without loss of consciousness. One wants to be more and less (more or less). To merge and scatter, merge again and scatter again...When one was a boy, one suspected one would become a man. As a man, one boys oneself as an escape from congealing. If not the towheaded girl, it could've been one's grandmother, one's cousin, one's sister (one never had a sister), one's college roommate, a frumpy woman at a beach, the grocer, the butcher's wife, one's mother, a glossy photo of a nude with a saccharin moniker, twilight, shoes, a wad of fluff...

One sketches oneself as one sleeps, one kicking oneself for discarding one's whittling knife down the well, one thinking one could carve a model of oneself in one of one's bedposts, and a model of the slumbered towheaded girl in the opposite post, and in the headboard, a merging of dreams. One would concert one's effort on the girl's knees, where they bend, the hollows between the thigh and calf, between cap and pit, half in shadow, half in light, orbiting one's thoughts of peach pits, of ways out of one's compulsive entrapments, one's familial blind spots.

One's terrestrial life is a hiccup. One shouldn't put too much stock in the lurch of one's chest and the awful noise one expends. Whether one inhaled or exhaled into it, one will exhale or inhale out of it, the breathing will persist, one will perish. One shouldn't underestimate the future. One shouldn't overestimate the past. One mustn't take the present for granted, or bosom it till it suffocates. One shouldn't shouldn't or mustn't or couldn't or would've or could've or might've or didn't or can't. One can will and one can won't.

When one dismantles one's world—like all destroyers, petty or profound—one gains inspiration from previous cataclysms. Ruins, wreckage of trees, drained bodies of water, landscape pillage, collective abandonment, ash. Progression, regression,

navigation, sinkage. Pattern dissolution, raveled sleeves of care, hushings. One concedes oneself imaginative sovereignty. The belief of the prey, the disbelief of the predator. One's world, if it's to support tidal life, needs one as moon, needs one to reflect with constancy. One can't go dark upon every one of one's oceans at once. Outside of the rare and brief eclipse, one's world, except in story or memory, won't survive the loss of its moon.

As one's mother slows the station wagon toward stopping, one hears the road's gravel—tossed up by the braked tires—striking the vehicle's undercarriage. After the engine is cut, one sees a crane's flapping (or a snowy egret's) out across the lake. One hears one's mother's sigh. One hears one's mother's door unlatch and open, and her seat squeal as she slides out into the air. One hears her breath expelled. One attempts to turn one's mother into the redheaded youth, but she won't revolve. She's unwilling to contribute to diversion. She stands with her hands on her hips, gazing out across the placid water, as if waiting for one to awaken. One's awake. One's trying to strawberry her hair, to freckle her legs, to restore her womb, to tighten her buttocks and tattoo her ankle. One puts marbles in her spine, to no avail. One's mother, catching one's stare, motions, with her unique insistence, for one to join her outside. It is only then, as one climbs out into the earliest light, that one notices that the canoe strapped atop the station wagon isn't a canoe, but a tandem bicycle, silver and copper and beautiful.

In the autumns and winters of one's childhood house, one's grandmother becomes a mannequin in her rocker by the library's hearth. One flops on the hearth rug—after school and after music lessons and again after supper—making drawings of waterfowl and termites. One's grandmother is a dry husk, one's grandfather having left her with scant but a steep-roofed house surrounded by a riverstone wall and ventilated by intricately calibrated fans—except the bathrooms, which are stuffy in summer and drafty in winter. She—one's grandmother—cultivates an arid cough which appears to stratify her, settling the silt that's too substantial to blow away and packing it into layers.

One's family (one's father, one's mother, one's grandmother, the collie and one) take a trip to a vineyard amid the hills beyond the cluster of lakes outside of town. One rides with one's grandmother in the back seat of the station wagon (one's mother, prone to motion sickness, must ride shotgun, as far away from the dog as possible), and while the landscape scrolls past, one keeps one's grandmother's profile—while she sucks on what is left of a peach—in one's peripheral vision, as if it were a nest of wasps.

She—one's grandmother—whom one resembles, except for hair color and cough, seems aware of one's awareness. One's father ponders roadmarkers at a crossroads. One's mother has stuck her head out the window for fresh air. The collie pants happily, tail busy, anticipating open spaces to romp and frolic, perhaps creekwater and meadowgrass. One switches the dog with a girl—one's younger sister—who now sleeps on a quilt in the unseatbelted rear platform of the station wagon. One's grandmother slips one the scoured peach pit.

One pedals the bicycle behind one's mother. A lumpy burlap sack fills the basket in front of one's mother's handlebars. She, one's spunky mother, hauled the sack out of the wagon with enough effort to tighten her neck muscles, and now, with the pedaling she has done, her nape is glistening with sweat like a horse's. The sun is risen above the trees. A tiny spider tickles one behind one's ear, and in one's attempt to flick it away, one scratches one's neck with a fingernail in need of trimming. One needs to poop. One's mother's jaw is tight as she surveys the lake while steering the bike around the shore trail. One needs to poop, but stays silent, not knowing what one's mother would do if provided with such information at this time and place, one's mother having stopped pedaling now that the lake's secluded dock has been reached, one not wishing to be squatting alone behind one of the shadowy trees while one's mother lugs the burlap sack out to the dock's end—as would likely be the proposed solution. When the sack hits the water's surface, the resounding plop makes one think of one's having once cleaned up a collie puppy's indoor mess, one feeling the warmth of the turd through the sheets of toilet paper before tossing it into the commode and flushing.

When the towheaded girl suffers her bicycle accident—after her tire strikes the pothole and she is thrown over the handlebars against the curb—one rushes to cradle her broken head in one's lap, one pressing one's peeled-off shirt to the wound. She is unconscious. Her lips touch one's stomach and they are dry, her mouth slightly ajar, her eyes half open, but blank. As one holds her, as one's distressed mother dashes across the street to fetch the girl's mother, the towheaded girl's whole life flashes before one's eyes. One watches her grow older, increment by increment, witnessing her hopes and disappointments, her achievements and failures, her lies and selflessness, boredom and intrigue, dramas and banalities, loves and losses…one isn't even remotely in her life, after her father's business goes bad and she moves away (far inland), after she puts on weight as she matures into a young woman, after her mother leaves her father when she goes away to college (further inland), after she gets her doctorate in sociology, after she marries

and has children (a dark-haired girl and a towheaded boy), after she divorces and re-marries, after she is drowned during an ocean vacation when caught by a riptide, or after she dies of cancer as an elderly woman—one only bubbling up in her thoughts once, when her son rolls a marble across a cement patio (sunlit and shaded in straight strips by latticework) which she stops with one of her bare big toes. One's image, squatting on the sill of one's lofty window, the day one's uncle gave one a bag of marbles, pops into her mind. She smiles, the recollection fades away, she goes on with her life, and that is all of one's inhabitancy of her memory—ever.

At the vineyard, one is told to keep an eye on one's sister, to keep her from getting into mischief, or from running into the road. One is attracted to the hills, to the curves of the rows of grapes around their slopes, to their look of bent knees. One's sister, a dark-haired beauty and hellion, dashes into the tasting room looking for cookies, and one is forced to drag her by her waistband back out into the parking lot, telling her one will play games with her on a patch of lawn beside the road. The sky is cloudless. One's sister looks up at one without devotion. One has never tasted wine but one has tasted the towheaded girl's blood, one absent-mindedly licking it off the heel of one's thumb after she had been taken away in the ambulance.

As a father, one knows one's son must be protected from harm and serious suffering, that he must be fed and clothed and sheltered and nurtured and challenged. As a son, one discovers one's father can't shield one from painful twists of fate, even if one's father would never willfully be the catalyst, would do everything in his power to spare one hurt. One erases one's father. One's son erases one. One's son is erased by duration.

One's father, because he's driving, sips wine like it's tabasco sauce, careful not to overwhelm his tongue. One's mother treats it like liqueur, dipping the tip of her pinkie into the cup. One's grandmother, the true impetus behind this vineyard excursion, tastes the wines with her wrinkled eyelids toward the sun. An ant is crawling up one's shin, and it tickles. One resists brushing it off, but tries to get it to crawl onto one's hand. One notices one's fingernails are filthy. Then, one hears the brakes squeal, the muffled cry, the brutal silence. Despite one's momentary paralysis, one is the first to reach her, one lifting her head into one's lap, the black curls matted with blood and asphalt grit, the sunlight bright in her half open blue eyes, one peeling off one's shirt to staunch the flow from above her temple, her fluttering eyelashes tickling one's stomach, one desperately wishing one's father didn't have to be among the people gathering to witness the sorrow.

One wants one's father safe at home, scooping vanilla ice cream from the depths of the huge carton, alternating hands to scrape the bottom clean, some sticking to his hairy wrists.

One would untell the story, scuffing what was scratched in sand, shattering what was etched in glass. Wanting to reverse time is about regret. Wanting to alter memory is about response. One has options. One's memory is clay. One builds one's world, instant by instant, witnessing it in and out of focus, imagining it in and out of focus, *imagine* (along with its guardian angel *wonder*) being the only worthy companion verbs to love. The towheaded girl can't be appropriated by one, nor can one's grandson, nor one's sister (one never had a sister), nor the redheaded youth, nor the frumpy woman. Nevertheless, perception invents.

One would wonder, one would have oneself wonder, one would that one would wonder…one's wonder will calibrate one's imagination. One's cousin is no more peevish than one, no less subject to fantast, and this could as easily be her story, about a dark-skinned boy and, say, a trampoline. One would be inserted as an annoyance, a sweat bee at her birthday picnic. The orchards and sea might be exchanged for evergreens and a mountain lodge. The dark-skinned boy might have a birthmark on his shoulder. He might be injured while showing off on the trampoline, backward somersaulting out of control, striking his brow against the metal bar along the trampoline's edge, and lying motionless on the ground, still confettied with piñata debris. She—one's cousin—might cradle his bleeding head in her lap, absent-mindedly tasting the coppery blood that has stained the heel of her thumb. Or, his sled might slip through the ice of a winter's pond, he could drown, and she will dream of breathing warmth back into his body. This could be one's cousin's girlhood, with embellishments, or the frumpy woman's, through a custom lens. Individual memories, put together, don't constitute truth, any more than cubist renderings, even if every perspective, living and dead and unborn, were to be put into the stew. The broth, so to speak, is of inscrutable origins.

On an autumn afternoon, after a morning rain, a woman hangs laundry on the slope behind her house, the breeze billowing the white sheets, the woman's long skirt flapping against her legs. She's beyond the middle of her life, her hair rivaling the whiteness of the sheets in the sunlight, her skin the texture of burlap and the color of canvas, her existence constructed out of moth wings and crumpled paper. Her legs—kept warm by striped leggings—are spindly, and from a distance she might look like a bleached scarecrow, an ambulatory mop, at risk to be blown over by a gust of wind, if

the wind could find any of her surface to blow against. She clothespins her overalls and flannel nighty, her black towels and washcloths, and finally her underwear, hiding these intimacies from view of the house by hanging them on the rear wire, behind the sheets. Then, picking up the empty basket, she descends the gentle slope to the porch. There, she stands, rickety, like a table with two legs, grateful that she has been imagined, that she has had a life—even if it was unspectacular, from some angles—from girlhood to womanhood to sentient husk. She stares along the slope to where a horse grazes in the blond grass. She's not able to ride anymore, her bones and equilibrium not capable of handling the jouncings. She wasn't the maker of her world...she's a maker of her world. She becomes plump and happy, dying in her sleep, at home, her grown daughter and son at her bedside. She refuses to be misused.

One is cut down by the bicyclist, time and time again, one falling to the boards of the walkway, the sand of the beach, the broken shells of the path, the asphalt of the street. One glimpses the blur of the speeding bicycle out of the corner of one's eye, and one attempts to move out of the way, but one's too slothful. One goes sprawling, as do cyclist and bike. One isn't hurt (nobody's hurt), not terribly, only a bruised rib where the end of the handlebar struck, and perhaps a scraped palm. The bicyclist is different every time. A towheaded girl, an auburn youth, a dark-skinned boy, a fat gorilla of a man... They apologize, one after another, and one protests no innocence, claims no grievance, one admitting one's preoccupation with one's thoughts, one's cavalier obliviousness, one's wobbled gait. All would end unremarkably, a clumsy accident, except that one can't resist swimming in the ocean, out beyond the breakers, in the undetected riptide, and one's injury—harmless enough on shore—cripples one's stroke just enough to doom one to the open sea.

The imagined woman lies in her simple bed, while she's still alone in her country house, before her health fails and her daughter and son come to stay for her leaving. She lies on her back, having patted the covers tight along her flanks, staring at the ceiling, imagining a world where the created creates the creator by creating. The square radio, sitting atop the bureau across the room, emits static. Outside, under the eaves, there is silence. Well off shore, one treads water until one is exhausted, having fought and lost to the tide, having forgotten to conserve energy by floating while waiting for the riptide to weaken. One is too far from land to survive swimming. One floats on one's back, staring at the sky, imagining the towheaded girl clasping her fingers around one's wrist and pulling one—undrowned—to shore. One considers her impervious to mortality, as

long as one doesn't will her death. She considers one not at all, not even subconsciously. As one sinks below the surface of one's consciousness—one beginning to fall asleep on one's blanket under the beach umbrella—one wonders if the towheaded girl will outlive one or die upon the instant of one's death. The towheaded woman—having also drifted off to sleep (in her spartan room, in the country, on an autumn evening, in a conjured house, under a milky wayed sky)—is now snoring, her breath unsweetened, her conscience unshielded, her ears unpierced.

When one becomes the towheaded girl's father, one doesn't know what to expect to feel, what one will think of her, how one will respond to her needs, her complaints, her daughterly affection. One is surprised to find that, as her father, one mostly feels fear and worry that one will be insufficient to protect her from the world's terrors, that one isn't either tender or strong enough, that one's love for her mother is waning and the reflective light at night darkens and at day disappears. One doesn't think of her unlifted breast brushing one's cheek long ago after the sand castle collapse. One doesn't think of the small of her back, of her snowy hair, of the angle of her jaw—one only thinks that, although she's feisty, she's slight and breakable. One sits at her bedside, reading to her, her favorite book, about stallions. Her breath is sour. One can't get her to remember to brush her teeth before crawling into bed, and it's only when she hugs one goodnight that one is reminded, and one insists she go to the bathroom and scrub them white. She does so dutifully, after a flirty scowl. She's also forgotten to pee, and one hears the trickle through the door, and her vulnerability smites one anew. One can't turn one's daughter into a son. One can't become her one. One can't keep her absolutely safe forever, not for a single day.

When one unbecomes as her father—dying of a heart attack in a taxi cab on the way home from one's mistress' apartment—one tries to send one's daughter one's love across the distance between one and her (she's at college, not yet a mother, not yet a wife), trying to provide a witnessable moment of irrefutable truth. One drifts to the coast, to a modest bungalow amid neglected orchards, where one stands admiring an outdoor shower, a persistent drip keeping a portion of the cement slab wet. One hears whistling. One's daughter's emerging from the trees. One rips a stack of one's drawings—not those of unaccomplished men, but those of fruit groves and dirt paths and low slung buildings—throwing them into the fire while one's grandmother dozes, the tall chimney spewing the charred flakes of paper across the rooftops, away from the sea of liquid salt toward a lake of potable water.

Once it is gone, one shrugs one's shoulders, she waves and goes into her house. One is hesitant to drop the last marble, knowing the light show and the girl's pleasure are coming to an end. And perhaps from her vantage point—since she keeps watching even when the marbles have vanished from one's sight—she is witness to their destinations. She doesn't wave, but bright with delight, she watches as every refracting little sphere goes by in the sunlight. While crouching on one's sill, waiting for the dropped marble to emerge from the spout, one glimpses the towheaded girl observing from her yard. One watches until the marble is out of sight before dropping another into the rain gutter, enjoying the gleam of the rolling glass as it moves from shade to sunlight across the asphalt before disappearing from view. One's first attempt results in a marble on the lawn, but after a trip downstairs to adjust the spout's angle, every subsequent marble shoots along the driveway, out into the street, down the gradual slope and around the soft curve of the bend. The slant of the eave carries the marble to the downpipe, where it plunges toward the ground and is spat out of the bent spout at the bottom. By squatting on one's windowsill, one is able to reach one hand up to the rain gutter (while holding onto the window frame with one's other hand for balance) and drop a marble over the gutter's lip. When one's given a bag of marbles, one takes them to one's room and imagines a way to dispose of them, one by one, without exception.

VIII

One undoes. One unimagines. One uproots one's orchards, tree by tree, one by one, unexceptionably, apple to citrus to nuts to apricot to plum, row by row, grove by grove, heaving every tree over the hill onto town, igniting the pyre and burning one's childhood to the ground. The smoke and cinders drift toward one's bungalow—one forgetting to conjure a seabreeze—coating the bungalow's tin roof and covering the stoop and the shower's slab of cement with a layer of ash. Within one's bungalow, one dismantles one's imaginings, beginning with one's ditch bed, shredding the mattress into strips and wads, splintering the frame into kindling, unfastening the bedsprings coil by coil. When one is done ripping and tearing and breaking, one stuffs the debris into one's toilet and flushes. One spends the night slumped in one's ladderback chair, chin to chest, dreaming of company, familiar and unfamiliar, sympathetic and accusatory.

At first light, one renews one's purging. The globed lamp, the bedside crate, stray clothing, the ladderback chair, the refrigerator, the oven, the cabinet and all of one's plates and pots and utensils, the cutting block, the chandelier, the canvas partition, and the sink—into the toilet and flushed. One does one's undoing, deconstructing the bungalow, nail by nail, screw by screw, board by board, walls and floor and ceiling and door and window—a window one has no recollection of ever looking into or out of— one halting one's progress only when one comes to the corner that once contained

a bulge. One tries refabricating the cocoon, complete with mysterious occupant, larva to pupa, to no avail. One shoves everything into the toilet, but before flushing, one tops it off with one's son's bicycle. Its coppery gleam is the last trace of anything one glimpses in the whirlpool's swirl.

Then, one stands between one's toilet and one's shower, hands on hips, surveying what is left to undo. One rolls the bungalow's tin roof into a tube, and after hauling it to the well and tossing it in, one breaks down the well, brick by brick, one scratching at the mortar with one's fingernails—in dire need of clipping—every brick rattling against the tin and splashing into the water's depths. One fills the hole with the charred remnants of the wellhouse, including a handful of blackened marbles and an ankle bracelet with a broken clasp. One pats the dirt down to a flat surface until convinced—as if one were guilty of a crime and attempting to hide the evidence—that should someone come strolling along the shelled path, he or she would never suspect there had ever been, upon this spot, a well for slaking one's thirst.

At the beach, one allows the four houses and the three benches—along with the boardwalk and the shops and the food stands and the dunes—to be swept out to sea by a storm surge. One watches the blue and green and brown and red roofs float out beyond the breakers, the riptide carrying them as if they were party hats tossed from a boat in celebration. Back at the site of one's bungalow, one drains the creek to mud. One crushes the boulders to dust. The dry creek, one suspects, indicates the lake that fed it to be dry as well, and this satisfies one without necessitating an excursion to verify one's suspicions. One brightens the sun and heightens the wind to flatten and bake one's landscape to hardpack. Not a sprig of clover, not a grain of dirt.

One has a toilet with its plumbing exposed. One has a shower with a persistent drip. One has sky and sun and surface and horizon and night and moon and firmament. There are no birds, no insects, no speedy hearts, no stingers. The ocean has withdrawn to the distance of memory. One's shower's leak neither diminishes nor worsens. The water table, far under one's world, is bountiful. One employs one's toilet as chair—one no longer needing it as toilet. There, upon one's ground level perch, seat down, one sits, day by day, night after night, waiting for resolution.

People are invited to one's shower. All, save one, accept. One's mother and one's father—one's father as one's father—appear together, when they were young, before one was born, and one enjoys witnessing their enjoyment. They conceive one under the healthy spray, wave, and leave. One's grandfather and one's grandmother—one's

grandmother as woman, not as moth—appear together, when they were young, before one's father was born, and one enjoys witnessing their enjoyment. They conceive one's father, wave, and leave. One's spouse and one appear together, when she and one were young, before one's son was born, and one enjoys witnessing the enjoyment. One's son is conceived, one's spouse blows one a kiss, free of facetiousness or regret, and leaves. Then, a litany of showerers. One's son, one's daughter, the sister one never had, the redheaded youth, the redheaded woman, one's cousin, one's grandson, one's uncle, the frumpy woman...They wave from within the spray. One waves back, somewhat sheepishly, especially at one's uncle and the frumpy woman. The towheaded girl—as girl or youth or woman—refuses to appear, regardless of the sincerity of one's invitation, the concentration of one's will.

One day, under the harsh spotlight of noon, one tries to walk out of visual contact with one's toilet tank and one's shower post. While sitting upon one's toilet, one wonders if the toilet and the shower are in the middle of one's world. One could say that they sit in the middle of one's world, but without clarifying one's world's boundaries, without measuring the geometric area of one's world, and without determining the toilet's and shower's positions in relation to one's world's area, one is speaking approximation. If one wishes to stop speaking approximation, one must stop speaking. One doesn't wish to stop speaking, no matter how often one wishes one were capable of wishing one could stop speaking. One's toilet and shower, one suspects, are more or less in the middle of one's world.

The distance across one's world is perhaps a measurable distance—with a steel tape measure, or with wire or rope or a yardstick or one's stride. One has none of those objects. But one has a stride. One's strides are, without doubt, inconsistent, as are anyone's. Still, if accuracy is lenient, one's counting of one's strides—through one's world, back and forth across one's world, around the perimeter of one's world—will be sufficient to provide a reasonable idea as to one's world's dimensions and the position of one's toilet and shower within one's world.

One gets up from one's porcelain stump. One walks away from it and one's shower. One's stride feels strong and vital. One encounters no obstacles. But one is unable to elude or lose sight of one's world. The optical illusion is stubborn. There is the toilet. There is the shower stem. One hears the constant drip upon the cement from every distance. One attempts to make ever-widening circles to fool one's perceptions, but this only results in exhaustion, one stumbling back to one's open air bathroom, hot and

thirsty. One cups one's palms under one's shower leak and slurps the refreshing water. Then, not knowing what one's to do (or undo) next, one collapses upon one's toilet throne. Despite the midday heat, despite one's uncomfortable relationship to curvature, one is thankful that it's winter, that the sphere's axis has tilt. One doesn't allow oneself clouds—one can't predict what shapes they'll assume, what they might all of a sudden resemble—so it never rains or snows upon one's landscape. One's flat ground would fry one to a black stick if it were summertime, or anywhere close to summer. The season is melancholy, as is every season, but one isn't inordinately sad or lonely. The only shadows cast across one's world are of porcelain and metal.

To give oneself something to do, to occupy one's time, one climbs out of one's beige outfit and spends one's hours plucking one's body hairs with one's index nail and thumbnail, beginning with the back of one's opposite hand. When the pain of every subsequent pluck slips from annoying to excruciating, one takes a breather, turtling into the shade of one's ponder and mull. One envisions one's son as one's father, and one's father as one's son, a flip-flopping of roles, with oneself as hinge. One likes being father or son to either or both, one witnessing oneself as a nice enough boy, as a nice enough old man, as a harmless observer.

One bolsters oneself as observer, accrediting oneself as a judging committee of one. What gets observed isn't what matters, one observes. The observer—despite the singularity of perspective—doesn't matter. The space between what is being observed and what is doing the observing is what matters. This space contains the world. One's world consists of the space between one, as boy, and one, as man, stuck in observation of the towheaded girl. The space between what is being observed and what is observing isn't a contained space. When the observer shifts focus from one observable to another observable, the space doesn't shift. The observer is merely partaking of another portion of the space. Within any space there are unobservables. To the eyes, to any apparatus. These unobservables contain space. Within these spaces, one wishes to roam.

Night comes. The observer observes alone. One likes to do one's observing by oneself. Solitary observation is preferable to everything but mutual observation with one's one or one's other. Observation connects one to self even as it disconnects one from self. This paradox is the primary thrill of observation. The secondary thrill is that observation can bring one to the edge of imaginative unbecoming. The tertiary thrill of observation is the flutter of recognition and surprise. One's sharp chin pokes at one's chest.

Night deepens. Syzygy results in a new moon. Planets reflect. Stars twinkle. They remind one of one's bonfire, of orchard walks with one's son, of one's daughter's hair. One's landscape is dark. One isn't sleeping. Observation relies upon separation. The eye, without a mirror or reflecting surface, cannot observe itself. The eye observes what isn't the eye. The self observes what isn't the self. One's hand, although it is of one, isn't one (plucked or not). One stares between one's knees at the ground (dustless and slate). One engages in optical fiction. One strides out away from oneself upon one's toilet, so that one can pretend to observe oneself upon one's toilet, while one pretends to observe oneself standing off in the murky distance. The observer indulges in optical fiction. The observer sees what isn't available to be seen. What is unavailable to be seen is unseeable. One, as observer, calls into being what is there, but unseen. It isn't the observer's role to deal with what isn't there, but is nonetheless seen. Imagination recognizes what is there. It doesn't create what isn't.

While one is separated from oneself as observer of oneself, one hears the squeak of the shower faucet turning, and the resultant resplendent white sound of water rush. One, as boy, on the toilet as chair, looks up. One, as man, some dozen strides toward an unseen horizon, glances back. There, in the silvery spray, lit by a lesser known portion of one's imagination, is the towheaded girl, as girl, and as elderly woman. One, as boy, flinches and drops one's gaze to the ground. There is white sand between one's toes. One hears the sound of surf. One lifts one's eyes. One's sitting on a dune, waiting for one's turn to shower, to wash the beach from one's body and one's plaid swimtrunks. The towheaded girl from across the street is spinning under the outdoor spray. One's mother and the towheaded girl's mother chat nearby. It's cloudy. It's the day of the sand castle collapse, of the undone shoulder strap. One, as boy, stares at the girl staring at one, and one is granted a moment of recognition, a lifetime of fidelity, as image and as spouse. One, as man, gets rid of the image of the girl, gets rid of oneself as boy, marvels at the image of the woman standing upon one's slab in one's world, the woman looking older than one remembers one's grandmother ever being, that mothy woman one always favored. The towheaded woman, even from within the shower's stream, becomes flame, and, with a quick thought toward one's great-grandson, one hurls oneself into it.

One is lying next to the towheaded woman in her bed in her spartan house in the country. Her children, or one's children, a man and a woman, of strikingly different colored hair—one without light, one without dark, one of all color, one colorless—keep vigil over one's death, or her death. One, as best she can recall, picked a clover for her

earlier in the day, and it's now wilting in her palm. She, as best one can recall, gave one a glass sphere—resembling a moon—earlier in one's life, although one forgets where one put it, if one holds it in one's palm even now, or if one put it in one's mouth and accidentally swallowed. One is on the verge of comprehension when she, or one—one can no more be sure of origin than of destination—is willing to die, to stop the dripping, to abandon one's world for inclusion in the world of another. One unpopulates one's world. One never outlives one's water table.