



Capretto alla Romano

They hadn't been long in the new apartment; they hadn't in fact been very long in apartments, either of them, having risen to the point of their meeting out of the general mist that covers the details of young and ordinary lives: the days when parents lived in strange cities working unimaginable jobs, sorting or describing small objects, transcribing ten thousand pages of shorthand for general bodies and boards, fishing out the stuck ink belt or wading around in engine oil; yes, deep in that gloom, fresh from the robot past of life, they had walked into the new apartment together, a man and a woman by force of convention. They held fast to the force of convention, they saw what it had done for others and so they partnered up; they tied each other to the mast and went limp until the mist cleared one day in the apartment.

The woman did it. She asked him why don't you make dinner tonight, I've been cooking a lot recently, she said, but she actually didn't mind the cooking she just didn't like how little he had to do. He sat all day on his computer and when she told him he shouldn't sit so much he began to work standing up at the kitchen counter but he stood perfectly still so she told him to sit down again in the end. She knew it was bad to sit but it was hard to figure what was better about standing if you didn't move at all, and besides she sat most of the day too, but she got up sometimes to get a glass of water whereas he would bring his water bottle to wherever he was sitting. She thought for a while about getting rid of his water bottle. She knew it would have been a kindness but she couldn't bring herself to do it.

For his part, he was often engaged in counter-operations, subterfuge designed to get her to stay in place for longer. He had noticed that she didn't even bring the water glass back over to the chair with her after getting a drink, but it was one among a million inefficiencies; she had a

technique of inefficiency or she wanted to be interrupted always and he thought of it as her way of keeping her head above water. It would be unfair to say he wanted to keep her down, but he was at least trying to stop her getting up so much, and so they fought their little war through a sequence of invisible conflicts, like he would bring her the glass of water she'd left by the sink, but she'd drink it all in order to go to the bathroom and lean out the window there. The bathroom had the best view of the whole apartment as it had the only window that looked onto the small courtyard their building helped enclose, an overgrown area unfortunately rendered completely inaccessible by a sort of encircling siege of first-floor businesses. Once she had left the blind open in the bathroom because she thought the window was so pleasant but he closed it and said he didn't want anyone watching him in the bathroom, which she understood so she just opened the curtain when she used it instead, even when she came out of the shower. She would scan the windows of the units across the way to see if anyone could see her standing there in the window but she hadn't seen anyone yet, even if she leaned out the window which she often did now, she wondered if they weren't all bathroom windows too, she never saw a soul there, so she leaned out the window even if she'd been in the shower or was going to be, and sometimes when the sun was right overhead she could see better into the courtyard below; dark vines had climbed all over whatever crates or benches would once have been visible, volunteer trees were shooting up especially in the center, all of them skinny and pale next to the ivy which seemed to be drinking up the shadows as well as the light, and sometimes she thought she could see stone sculptures underneath in that strongest light, in places where the ivy had fell cool away down a shoulder or the nape of a sandy neck, but that could have been the shower speaking to her, without her glasses on, wrapped up in the towel like a headwound, now a backwound, the wound moves lower and the toweling off has the pleasant to and fro rhythm of being sawed in half. Without her glasses, she doesn't need to close her eyes to imagine she is the magician's assistant, halfway out the window, halfway in, and she dares him to close it now, to draw the blind like a red curtain over her just legs, because that would be fair too, it's the least she could ask, and in the worst case, the very worst case, there'd be a new torso down in the garden.

For now, though, she asked him to make dinner because she knew he'd accept and he did, hoping to head her off at an inefficiency. They traded pawns like true lovers, which they were perhaps growing into even if it had been convention in the first place. A convention is after all one of the best places to meet like-minded people.

Yes I will make dinner tonight, he said, standing up and he went to the kitchen. He brought her her glass of water. Then he looked for the cookbooks for a while in the cupboards without saying anything. He grew furious but didn't want to appear childish so he kept his silence, so many of these cupboards are still empty, he thought, what an insult to the searcher, and it was true, there was almost nothing to be found in the kitchen, it was very easy to open a cupboard and see that there wasn't anything in there and as a result he picked up pace quickly, no sooner was a door cracked than it was closed again, he couldn't help but take on a dismissive air for he was beginning to feel like a duped inquisitor, he had arrived to the heretic's settlement after the evacuation and at some point he would be making their point then wouldn't he, he for them, them watching from the hills probably, laughing at how quickly he tears through the town, it is a shame when being thorough becomes an embarrassment, he thought, for that is a trick against the good-natured in people, it's unfair to the inquisitor who is going to check every house

anyway out of a sense of duty, never mind the solitude he'll experience at the last house, when he sees they didn't even leave him a closed door to open and he closes the door himself and sits on the stoop and thinks what am I, a flood? what is this, the site of a new reservoir? but there's no one to tell his joke to and even if he squints at the hills in the distance he can't make out any figures so oh well, time to go home, at least I can go home he thinks, and he knows they have it worse than him at least, and the man in the kitchen knows likewise the inquisitor has it worse than him, because cupboards you don't have to knock on before you open them unless you have rats, once he'd seen a friend do that in a pretty infested apartment, knock on the cabinet each time before opening it to get a plate or something and there's be a frantic little sound and then you wait a second and open the cabinet and its been thankfully cleared out only you have to wash the plates or whatever really well before using it, but its a manner of cohabitation at least, he thought, and it's fairly humane except for the moment when the rats think the world is about to explode, and he flung another cabinet open and moved on to the drawers, which he knew was ridiculous, nobody puts cookbooks away in drawers, but he really couldn't find them and he was enjoying fighting with the shitty drawers that got caught a lot and made so much noise early in the morning, like more bells. She saw him at the drawers and now she had to step in, that was a step too far, so she said what are you looking for and he said the cookbooks and she said you put them all on the counter remember and he looked up and saw she was right, oh yeah he said, that's where they were and he clucked a little as he took apart the stack he had made to work on when she told him to stand more.

The New Basics Cookbook. He flipped through it, muttering the names of recipes as they went by. The book provoked in him some fantasy of an insanely classy picnic, pencil drawings of fruit baskets and ornamented loaves decorated the recipes, everything was on a rustic wooden platter or set simply on a rock, as though anyone, after meticulously executing the incantation for pear tatin, whatever that might be, would set it down on a rock. Pear Tatin, he said to his wife, who nodded. Then she said, what's that? And he said some sort of French dessert. Then he looked through the recipe and said yeah it's a tart that you serve with fresh cream. Oooh she said, but that wouldn't be for dinner then, no, he said, maybe some other time, but he flipped away without marking the page. We will never have a pear tatin he thought, and though it was a dark thought there was a certain liberating quality in it too, but this liberating quality came quickly to scare him as well so he thought instead well we might have a pear tatin, why shouldn't we, it's just a recipe anyone can make a recipe, anyone could make a pear tatin, he thought, even if they didn't have creme fraiche or whatever, even the worst child could probably make it carefully, even perfectly, if they had the recipe in front of them, so so much for the luscious French dessert then, it was equally the dessert of any literate child. Run-o-the-mill. After all, this is the New Basics Cookbook we are talking about, he thought, the point is that its recipes are basic, they represent a new paradigm of basics, in twenty, thirty years everyone will have grown up eating pear tatin it will be a sort of general dessert, you'll walk through your neighborhood and see pear tatins on every windowsill next to the pot of cold creme fraiche, or maybe you buy that, but the point is, he thought, that pear tatin is actually basic, it is on its way to canonization, little matter that it happens to be new now, there was a time someone made a sugar cookie for the first time and now its the most banal thought in the world, that's what you make to test the oven, tomorrow it will be the lowly pear tatin with its worldly dollop of creme fraiche, which must just be

whipped cream, he thought, and he flipped merrily on, happy to have lost the place. The project that the New Basics represented, he was realizing, was actually monumental. This is a pretty epochal book, he told her, and she said which one and he said the New Basics and she took a long drink of the water he had brought her.

Sometimes there were pull-quotes in little star-lined boxes, colored in red to stand out from the rest of the type. He had been watching them go by for a little while, hoping to read her one, but now it had been a while since one had appeared. It's been ages since the last pull-quote, he thought, and worried she might be growing distracted or not be listening as well by the time he found the next one. I should have just read the last one, he thought bitterly, but there's no turning back now. Watching for the stars to come back out. He cast a glance at her, she had looked up from her work and was looking out the window at the wall of the house next to them. It was a neutral sign, but it troubled him just because it was a change and so he flipped way forward in the book, he jumped over salads and special breads, he lamented dinner options as they flew by, especially the pastas, but he did find a new pull-quote, finally, almost on the six hundredth page, and he read it before he'd even had time to scan it himself he cleared his thoughts and affected the quoting voice, almost shouting: "Wine is sunlight," he let her know, "held together by water." He made a face. What the hell, he thought, what the hell. Who said that? she asked, and he said it's from a quote and she said from who and he said Galileo. Galileo? she asked and he sighed and said I guess. She went into the bathroom and then he sat down.

If wine is held together by water, he thought, and then looked at the bathroom door for a while. Galileo did actually know a lot about the sun, he thought. Too much, perhaps, he thought. Now it is Galileo who arrives to speak with the inquisitor. You stand accused of very strange lies, he says. How's that, asks Galileo. You must forget this business with the sun, the inquisitor says. There can be no new basics, he says, and draws a sword. I was speaking metaphorically, Galileo replies. Oh alright then, says the inquisitor. Yes, says Galileo, I know what wine is and what the sun is. And the two of them turn to look at it, squinting as though it were blurry or detailed or lay a little in shadow, and it's low toward the horizon even though it feels like midday so they don't have to crane their necks, they can look directly at it like a third conversant. Long midday we're having, says one of them. Midday is the sun's warmth, held together by stillness, the other replies. Careful now, replies the other. Wine is literally made from grapes, it's a process that takes a little while but grapes are what wine is, while the sun isn't wine, the sun isn't much else at all, it's way over there.

She got under the water and like always she didn't sit down on the floor. There's no sitting on the floor of the shower, not because it's dirty, it's always insanely clean, but rather because it's not a good sign if you sit down in the shower. She knew that some things you just shouldn't do because they are bad signs, some things don't bode well for you. One thing is wanting to sit down and another thing is actually sitting down there on the clean floor, and besides if you sit that far away from the water you have to really crank the heat. You'd be surprised how much a piece of water cools down from the moment of its emittance to where it hits the floor, cleaning it. You'll never feel the temperature of the same piece at the top and the bottom, but you can feel the top then feel the bottom and it's more or less the same, it won't have been the same piece of water but it's a near perfect simulation of it, it's pure statistics, they'll

both lose their heat at the same rate as they travel from the shower head to the shower floor not because they have to but because it's the only thing that's likely to happen. Agitation tends toward dissipation, things tend toward the floor, and in fact agitation decreases as one gets on the floor, she thought, it must be very relaxing down there. I would like to tend toward dissipation. It's lovely to. She always set the water just warmer than her skin, she liked to feel it get cold as it ran down to her feet, especially in the winter she used to come in, not to this apartment, with hands like death and run normal water on them to feel how it turned cold. I just ruined the water, she'd say getting out, and he wasn't there to see it but some other people were. Water is water held together by water, she thought, that might be a sounder idea. Wine is held together by wine, if there's anything else in there you ought to return the bottle and get a refund, especially if its water. I don't think I like the notion of holding together, she thought.

Sorry for taking an unannounced shower, she said when she came back. That's alright, he said. She noticed that he hadn't moved at all and so she told him the mold on the shower head is the size of a half-dollar now. I'll try and look at it soon. A half dollar. He was writing things down and going around in the kitchen. He said I found a recipe for dinner to her. She thought he was beautiful when he was up to something. It's alright, she said, it only grows where the holes aren't, so I think you can leave it. Do we have a lemon still he asked the fridge and she said yes, it's in the bowl, and he said no I used that one last night, and she said you used that old lemon? and he laughed and said yes it was like leather. Then she was thinking about it and said why did you use the lemon last night and he looked her in the eyes and said I ate it with sugar, I was worried about scurvy, so I cut it in quarters and ate them with sugar. Then we don't have any lemons she said, and she said I think sometimes you're just like a little boy, and he said everyone was a little boy once and she said even me and he said well not you and then he looked a little frustrated.

There was another room in the apartment that wasn't set up any one way. It would have been the other bedroom but they were of course sharing a bed, they spent every night together even if they didn't fall asleep at the same time and if one of them woke up earlier, which happens whenever there's no alarm, the one would just look at the other and think that it is pretty strange, that's all, just strange, and is it good or bad to feel that, does it go away or just get stranger, and what happens if I get caught out. The room was painted in nursery blue. It had a sort of electric feel to it, a faded neon hung about the higher, darker corners, and when it got its few minutes of sunlight in the very early morning the contrast only increased the effect. The sharp angle sent the light back and forth between floor and ceiling, leaving the recessed areas to their own duller productions, sometimes even the production of dullness, so that the room in its greatest glory made them both sneeze. Sensitive people will tell you some things can jump the optic nerve: mint, horseradish, a feather on the down skin. In the part by the window they had put some plants on a folding table, in the part that was the corner there was a box of wine. He looked at the plants and called out is this sage without turning around, right into the closed window. Which one she called back. Is one of them sage, he called out again. The herbs shared one long pot like a board of directors. Except for the thinning basil, each had a wizened look about it, the distinguished gloss of shrubbery, perennial vitality, the kind of plant you could put bark on, which he admired. She was next to him. This one's sage, she said, and took it between her

fingers. You can always remember it because it was sage the time I did this, she said, and pinched him hard on the forearm. It was the catastrophe.

I'm making Capretto alla Romano for dinner, he told her. They were lying on the floor. Is that a pasta. I found it in the cookbook, it's not pasta. Is it Italian. It's Roman Style. Roman Style, she said it too. It's Roman Style Baked Baby Goat, I found it in the book. You mean like kid? It's young goat, I don't think it has to be a real baby. Where are we going to get a kid? It's in the New Basics so. She pinched him again. I'll figure it out, he said. Then he said, the window curtain was open again in the bathroom when I went in. I think someone saw me in there, he said. There's no one out there, she said. I really think I saw someone, he said, but they moved away when I went to the window. If you can't see them they can't see you, she said. She moved to sit up against the wall. That just cannot be true. It is true, actually, she said, and she felt so nauseous.

They drove to the grocery store. One of them drove, the other watched, they chose at random and it didn't affect anything. With the right attitude, or without the right attitude, everything can be noncommittal; one can always let the consequence out, even of a beautiful day, when you see the sun light up the baseball field as you pass it and even though you were passing it from the highway the outfield grass, grown long in the offseason when no one does much fielding, strikes you as the actual American flag, if ever there was one, and you briefly feel the beauty of knowing a place and being right about it, the beautiful day when for once the world is like a textbook a day like history, like class, and you wish you were at a ribbon cutting or a rocket launch. Yes, the consequence practically sprints out of a day like that: did you ever see a cup stuck upside down on the table? It's not that water is hard to contain and it's not that a cup can't do it, rather it's the mechanism that's introduced the instability. So it can easily come to be the case that it doesn't matter who drives to the grocery store, that it actually doesn't matter, it follows from letting the consequence out, and fewer and fewer things are worth fighting about every year, argument is going into retirement. The grocery store is ringed by gas pumps, it probably started as a convenience store and it somehow got bigger or else was reorganized, because now it is a real grocery store with a loading dock where the vegetables and fruits come in on pallets, cardboard crates that have worn down on the way from the distributor and which sit in insanely tall stacks by the loading dock, at least a story high, and it could be a skyscraper for mice who eat fruit.

And the grocery store has a meat counter, which is where they went. She put her hands on the glass, which was pleasantly curved, like a little cliff. He took a ticket and they looked into the case. What number are we, she asked him. He showed her the ticket but he held it upside down so it took her longer to understand. All the way to the side and in the front of the case was a section where the butchers had been having some fun, seasoning mashed meats with strange spices and sauces from other parts of the store. It really did look mashed up, like smashed and chopped up and smashed with a pulverizer, as opposed to ground meat, which has a distinct wormy consistency when you buy it from the butcher who shoved it through the meat grinder. And the butcher probably didn't wear gloves after hours, he thought, when preparing these mashed smoked pork teriyaki sliders. He didn't trust butchers because he had always heard about them putting their thumb on the scale and also the barbarism, and he didn't want to use the word patties to refer to the sliders until he saw that the butcher was a woman and then he regretted it.

She called his number, the butcher, and he couldn't help being off-put by a woman butcher, or he could've helped it but he was enjoying the deviant note, as anyone in their private bigotry will, for even a man to whom it doesn't matter who drives to the grocery store a woman butcher is still out of the ordinary. He said hello, I'd like one rack of young goat please and she said young goat? And he said yes and if you could cut the ribs individually, approximately two inches thick, that would be ideal but if its a lot of trouble I can do it myself and you can leave it as is, but then he wished he hadn't said that, he had only mentioned that he could do it because that's what it said in the recipe, that if your butcher won't do it you can do it yourself, but he didn't want it to sound like he didn't think she'd do a good job cutting it up. It has to be pretty easy to cut them, he thought, it's in the New Basics, but even if it was hard I bet she could do it, she is a butcher after all. She said we don't sell any goat here, and he thought he must have annoyed her by offering to cut them himself so he just said thanks sorry and put his hand in his hair and walked away. Can I help you, the butcher asked her then, because she was still standing there with her hands on the glass which is one thing when a child does it, but an adults hands really shouldn't stay anywhere for very long, that's one of the rules, it wasn't even cold just glass, the feelings are often mistaken but glass can be very room temperature. She said do you know anywhere that does sell goat, and the woman said you could try an ethnic market.

They got certain things and left after the discerning, so that there wasn't very much to speak for it. They ran and ran in the parking lot; they made loops around like pulled things, swung things, only they were the things. There's no goat at the market, she said to him, but her voice sounded only the consonants, she couldn't reach him when they were far apart, where their paths often took them, so instead she would mention it when they passed by on the drum head, rolled nearby and honked at each other. The day was so beautiful, she noticed. It was literally beautiful. If she wasn't moving so quickly around she might have stopped so she thought about falling to her knees to be short like the day, the day which is low to the ground have you ever line in the dirt? she honked out to him as they nearly touched. He said line. She said the dirt is what the day smells like so you have to get down into it if you even care at all, if you get into the grasses its so otherwise you want to dissolve into ... the way someone moves when they do the robot dance and let their arm swing, but he had gotten too far away and didn't hear the last part. She said they don't have any goat at the market, he, because once when I was younger I got so hot that I went inside to put more sunscreen on although I was already wearing a straw hat and when I put it so much on my neck, when I was smashing it around onto my neck with both hands, I suddenly saw it more silver gelatin, I thought someone was choking me, I thought what sort of things are these wrapped around my neck, no one touches the neck that way, what sort of things are these arms, and the teachers will tell you not to call things things but not because it's gonna be wrong, more because it would be the death of teachers, if everyone was allowed to just say thing and be done with it, thing, she said, thing, he said, the thing, she said, that thing, he said, yes, she said, yes too, so you know what I mean, she went on saying, but he said I don't believe in that otherwise and they were back in the car which itself was almost home and passed that property backwards onto them. She looked at the footwell and thought it might run off some day if they left the door open. But no one leaves car doors open, not even burglars.

An older woman was sitting in the planter outside the apartment smoking a cigarette coming apart. She said to them isn't this sunshine just what I needed! and they agreed. He said I

think it might just be and she said it'll only get warmer from this point on. The older woman nodded. Her weight was resting on her right hand crushing a yellow flower. He thought about saying something but he didn't know what sort of flower it was so it didn't seem fair to chastise. The older woman, who was older than them but younger than almost anything else, said you can't get sunshine when it isn't there, to me that's what's precious, the darling sun, it's so nice to have it, you think, but then you realize you never really had it and no one else does either, there's no one you can get it from. That's always been a balm for me. Balm is sunlight, the younger woman said, and the younger man bent over to stretch the backs of his legs. Held together by gasoline, she said, and he did a somersault right there on the pavement, or most of a somersault because he was trying to go up the ramp to the door, the ramp was in between the planters, and he wasn't able to make it up the ramp. I didn't get enough momentum, he said, and the old woman said try coming down but he said I could go into the road, don't wanna go into the road. He stayed sitting on the ground though, feeling secretly enervated, and he brought his palms to his nose because they were a little roughed up and the smell was very mineral and wet, he remembered a sort of organ music that he must have heard once, he was thinking of a jetty or a quay, it doesn't matter much which, he thought about walking on the rocks until they got wet and how once he had slipped and then never, ever again, you learn so quickly you forget learning, he thought I wish I could remember everything I learned because then I would remember everything I learned, but mostly he was just smelling the funny pebbles they cut for the ramp and the funny glue they used to put them together in a weird slab, a slab of pebbles, and also sometimes the salt from ice that melted before the salt was necessary, the almost preventative salt that you'll sometimes see wise custodians scattering like food for antibirds, antifood to eat the crystal apart, antiseed to stop the seed from spreading, the custodian opposes the farmer in that way, he thought, even though they both are wearing overalls, he thought I must write that down.

The old woman sucked on her cigarette there and the paper, leathersick, waxen, unfurled a little. She leaned back a little by flexing the other elbow. She said Baal is sunlight indeed, and the younger woman nodded and closed her eyes, saying yes, the sun's the thing, even if it never really got here. Agh, the sun, the older woman said, pinching around the cigarette to light the part that had stopped burning with the farther ember, has very little to do with me. I don't blame it for staying away, lots of things stay away, I've done it myself often, the stars, for instance, are all suns staying away, they keep their distance and it is their color. At night, cursed with suns, blessed by absence, you can count on their not being here, you can direct yourself by it or to it, for it too has a mark on the earth, a pole and a flag on top and an antipode and an antiflag underneath. Baal stays away, son that Baal is, and it's calmer without them all here, don't you think? The younger man was looking at her face and trying to determine what ethnic meant.

They asked her do you know where to get a baby goat around here and she said I don't know a single thing that you don't know. And they said that's alright, we're two people, but she said you don't know more than each other either and wagged her finger. The younger man stood up and went next to the woman, and it was alright. She looked away I'm sorry, she said, I shouldn't wag my finger at you just because I'm a little older than you, I have no right. But, she said, I'm certain I could get a goat if I needed one, that's why I was being so annoying. From where, they asked. Not sure, she said. That's not part of it. They stood there some more and she

was putting out her cigarette and it was also alright. Could I show you something, she said. It's in my apartment.

The apartment was the same as theirs. They saw that when they walked in. The kitchen talked to the living room so, the spare room looked on the next building at the funny angle so, the whole very so, but it was also elaborate, and since theirs wasn't elaborate, it produced a sort of sick instinct in their stomach, in the one stomach each couple shares, because what was concerning in the old woman's apartment was something that concerned the couple, about the man and the woman it had very little to say, except so far as they were attached to the fate of the couple. And it was the third party that had to balance on the small entrance rug, some sort of jute or else it was just an outdoor thing indoors, but better to imagine it was jute, and the third party saw that a counter could become cluttered with objects, that decorations can grow, can creep as mold that gets taller at night, that each surface could be a sort of skyline, that a cat would stay on the floor in some places and never jump up, and that cleanliness had nothing to do with it, a place could be spotless and stink without smelling like anything. You have to adjust your idea of cleanliness, the third party was thinking, the couple held its hands in a gesture of mutual handedness.

And the place wasn't spotless, but they waited on a couch. This couch seems to have been designed for someone with different proportions, she thought, I can't get my feet to the ground or I can't sit deep in it, what's the point of that, she thought, and the man seemed to be having the same trouble when she looked at him, but he was also looking around the room so she thought he might be upset. Psst, she whispered to him, just for fun. Psst, they were at the factory at night, swinging around the flashlight beams. Night watchmen, she said to him. He said: "anybody out there?" and swung the beams around, he put them around his head and said anyone there, he said, "I won't be mad."

The old woman came back into the room and she didn't have anything to show them, they thought, she just came and stood by the counter, looking at some of the pieces there. She was probably thinking, why have I got all of these things. I've got to adjust my standard of cleanliness, she might have been thinking. But she also might have thought I love the counter here, which has all of the things I got, a tin from somewhere colorful with some funny sweet words on it, this little porcelain item which I carried in my pocket when I would go on trips for a long time, and I rubbed it so much with my finger when I was on the train that I had to let it deform, I worked it back into clay, slow clay though, she might have thought, because it took a long time to wear away the details and to move the glass, and once I even got a thin tiniest thinnest shard of it stuck in my fingertip, that was my arrow, that was the moment when I was most touched, I was on the train when someone was yelling and I rubbed it and I was kissed on the forehead on the finger, I was visited then by a beautiful need which came and took and that's why I have that object, and if I got rid of it I wouldn't lose anything but it's nice to see it, you can't blame me for that, a lot of the time it's just nice to see something.

Look, there's another one, he said, and she swung the beam around and out of the hallway was slowly advancing a pair of knees, a person too but you would have noticed the knees which choreographed the movement of weights, it was like watching a skier or an ancient machine, and she came into the light shining. She lifted her arms above her head, on her sides, but she let her wrists hang, her hands were like a spinal fin, delicate, translucent, the fingers

didn't interest separating, she would have repelled water, she would have resisted many attacks, she said welcome, she said it's nice to have you by, she said staying long on the island, you'll have to have some dinner. The young woman didn't want to ask, so she said to herself the woman is one hundred and twelve years old, wow, she replied, that's actually amazing. Behind the window, inside the world, someone drove by with music playing so loud it asserted itself, it might have even proved something, it shook a little everyone by the shoulders and the very old woman dropped her hands to shield the sun, still glorious, out inside the world, and her eyes were covered in darkest shadow, she provided a hole on her face, and she said I was looking at the sun. The old woman said anything to report, and she responded no movements yet.

The very old woman said my husband the very old man used to know you two. She made gestures while she talked and her hands were like slivers, they were connected like ribbons to the stations above, the shoulders, she must have done a lot of talking in a past life to move her hands like that, she must have talked with ten thousand people at least, like a speed therapist, or maybe she did lobotomies or read fortunes at the circus, it's not impossible to have a life like that if you don't mind spending some time moving around, if you can roll up the tent you've been living in when the weather changes, when the rooster swings around and you don't mind swinging with it, a person that gestures that much steals a little swing from the weather, accumulates effort with the sentence the longer it goes on, that's how to talk to ten thousand people without so much as moving your shoulders. We only just moved here, said the third party, but the old woman said it would've been before, my very old husband was generally before, and the third party said before we were in the same place we lived apart, before we moved here we lived back there, yes, said the young man, I lived in one city way to one side and I lived in one city way to the other side, said the young woman, we were in contact, of course, in the sense that tin cans tied together are in contact, but we were very far apart and therefore the contact. Well, said, the old woman, my very old husband was in communications. Oh, said the third party.

He was a phone operator at the beginning, she explained, but at some point the phone absorbed its own operation, that's what he used to say, I remember the first time he said it, he'd already been out of work for a few years, we weren't doing very well and he was so, so sunken, he just sat and looked at the phone and if I took him outside he would just look up, not a hopeful upward but always at the cables, we'd walk and he'd say the cables already got here, and I'd say now you know how the couriers felt and try to get him to look at the ground because at the time he was very often stepping in mess on the street, shit, that is, and then he'd say and the dogs already got here too, what's the point of going anywhere, why don't we just leave this world to the cables and the dogs, that's twice, he'd say, that we let our projects get away from us, they got ahead of ourselves, a fella throws a projectile as hard as he can and he's beat himself at his own game, see what I mean, he'd say, and I thought you must be the stupidest man of all time, once I said to him when I was too fed up I said you must be the great idiot, to talk like that, and I think he said yes, he went to the window and craned his neck and said yes, talking is ruining my brain, I am more irritable, nothing makes sense, and it's not that I'm realizing things don't make sense, it's that all that I once understood now sits like mud in my throat, that's what happens when the brain has to get out through the mouth it just ends up as mud, only the finest particles make it through the tissue, it's silty, it's smooth to the touch, it's the product of a very delicate filter, and when a thought gets destroyed that way and now I've got it in my mouth, this mud that's nothing

like what I was looking for, I can swallow it or I can spit it out and I'm a mute or I'm a fool. But darling, and suddenly he ran back over to me and put his hands on mine, if you could only see me operate! and he turned his hands over so that I could see his palms and the insides of his fingers, if you could see me work the switchboard, at night I sometimes think I'm there, not in dream, just lying in bed staring at your back, I think what if she was riddled with holes and set up with cables, I imagine certain complicated connection, the most complicated connection possible, some collation of relays, one board to the next to the next and maybe back through the first in a different direction, there's a discretion about the whole thing, it's incredibly discreet, and the voice, it makes the voice secondhand information, the voice can be thrown around like mail, the voice moves itself, the voice requests its own transference, it's simple but it's so obvious but it's so perfect, hullo, will you connect me, the voice, through to the next bit, I wish you could see how I operate, I only know how to talk in service of an operation, for me, he said, talking can never be the operation, I always remembered that even though he only said it once, he had these flashes where he thought he was finally getting at something and he'd talk so much he would almost get angry, clear mud, and it was one of those times that he said that about the phone, that it absorbed its own operation, and he really made his eyes wide then he said woah, clear mud, and he cried for a long time then because I think he knew that was the end of it, he cried but it was the beginning of it getting better or something. Even though he stopped work a long time ago I always try and tell people who he met back then that he says hello. He knew a lot of people from his years at the exchange and the two of you were one of them. How are you getting on? It's been a while since we had any news of the young couple! You've disconnected the line then?

The young woman thought once you've made your choice you stay with it, doesn't matter what the math says, if the pool is smaller then so is the sea, she put her hands on her lap like a pet, she lifted them up and put them there like they were delightful to have close by and she wondered is the very old woman very honorable, she thought what am I supposed to think about a person like that and as often she wished someone would have instilled a little more prejudice in her, just in order to know when to cross the street, prejudice is a nice mechanism for survival, she thought, you notice that more the less you have, the first prejudice was probably against a snake or poisonous fruit. The young man, who had picked up some prejudices somewhere, dubious ones, they might have fell off a back of a truck, he keeps them in milk crates in the spare room, he knows when to look a person in the eyes and when to look at a person's eyes as though that was all that's it, he was looking at the very old woman now as she smiled the hypnotized listeners smile back at them, he sometimes looked at the eyes and thought there is a person made of eyes, just as I thought, but it was never totally clear which was the mean one and which the respectful.

He said, I think you might be mistaken, but that's alright, it's very nice to hear what you're saying,

the young woman added, you have an unusual voice, it's an adjective voice,
and the very old woman said, he said it was the first voice he'd heard in the world, he said hello I've been hearing your voice and I hear a lot of voices but I know I've been hearing yours for a long time,

but he was born before, said the old woman,

yes, said the very old woman, he was born before, as best I have been able to tell.

And the young woman started to say something but it snagged too much on the way out so it was more like a cough or a special breath, and the old woman began talking, prodding the very old woman along into further stories of courting days, they'd met when she tried to make a call or something, but the young woman wasn't paying much attention, she'd taken possession of a porcelain statuette from the sidetable and she pushed it up her sleeve as the very old woman continued in fits and starts, she moved it from one sleeve to the other so that she could have the sleeve on the side of the sidetable free to take another figurine, which she did presently, she slowly filled the sleeves of her thin jacket, he was noticing but it was the sort of behavior he treasured in her, and when she got up and walked to the bathroom twinkling like a china cabinet when you walk by, he raised his voice for her, even a little higher and into the better masking register.

There was a visit on the windowsill in the bathroom. They were in miniature file; they were a battery, strung with hands. Everything is eventually set on the windowsill, she thought, and the porcelain was probably not porcelain, she held one of the figures by its feet, yes, she saw there was a dark ring there on the bottom, she felt it with her fingers, it was the coarseness of average clay, there is an embarrassment underfoot, she thought, and when she put her fingers on the body exposed it was like a brick wall, like a schoolyard, here was churned material, she thought, and its been all covered up by idiotic tin, why do a thing like that, they know better in the brickyard, in the quarry there is always a memory of digging, even when it's all flooded in and surrounded by pine trees if you dive down deep you can taste the minerals dissolving, you know what solution is, bricolage, swimming is an obvious experience, you know what solution is then, she thought, you wouldn't cover that with a tin glaze and call it porcelain, she tried to snap it in half but it was too heavy and she put it back on the windowsill with the others in the battery and got solemn. She said to them bad news boys, somethings gone wrong with you and she pulled the curtains open, she said bad news boys, someone's gotta pay and she opened the window behind them. There comes a time, she said, when you have to be terrified, and she knocked the middle one down on into the chasm, it made no sound, it went into the brush with a straw. She said: there came a time, you know, when even the great limewood sculptors revolted, they said: no more polychromy! we can't take any more yeso! we're not in the business of plaster saints, they said, she said, so no more retables, she knocked another figure off, no more virgins, and another, you'll have to learn, as we have, to see the wood as skin, that's our final offer, it's raw or bust, only not busts either, they added to clarify. She pushed the last one off and leaned out to watch it fall, she watched it disappear into the canopy, headed towards some village likely, it would wake up a farmer's widow and she'd go to the window to see it lying in her field, disassembled, white tin in fragments all embedded in the pasture, and luxurious parts of dark ware facing up from the inside, all glinting in the moonlight as she moved from window to window to get a better look, she'd think, what is the chocolate warhead, she'd wonder, and what's it got to do with me?

There was nothing going on in the other bathrooms, all was ignorant to the life of the courtyard, to its conflict and to its peace, each apartment slept on its side, the curtains were an eyelid closed facing the wall, and though it wasn't especially late the recent decline in the height of the once-brilliant sun had set people quickly to their nighttime routines, everyone uses the

bathroom and turns out the light, makes sure the eyelid is comfortably shut, you wouldn't want to dream about the wall all night, and only a few windows still had any energy about them. A silhouette over the sink on the west wall, another with a towel around its head, and then, straight across the pit and a few stories down, someone kept going back and forth in front of the open bathroom door, that one you could see a little better because the curtains were still open even though the bathroom light was off, a person would cross in front of the door moving quickly, she couldn't imagine what they were doing. The figure crossed back toward the kitchen, and she waited, watching, and they did come back and suddenly stopped, stopped as though they didn't want to and came into the darkness of the bathroom, went right to the window and closed the curtains all without turning on the light and she had to put her lips against the glass she suddenly felt so hot, she turned on the tap and put cold water on her face and neck until she could close the window, the curtains, leave the bathroom and go back out to where he was sitting listening to a story about the very old woman's nursing career, sitting with his legs crossed and being good. She went right to him and said we have to go, I'm sorry, we have to go back right now, and he was serious and they went, immediately, in the hallway she said there's someone in our apartment and he said who and she said someone else.

He unlocked the door and they went in together, into their own apartment. They opened every cabinet as they went, even the spice drawers, each was empty, they checked in all the rooms, in all the closets, under the beds, behind the shower curtain, inside the bathroom mirror, they checked the bookshelves, just to be sure, but the place was empty, there's nothing here, they said each time, to each empty cabinet, no spices, no soap, no medicine, no books, there's nothing here either, the other would reply, and in the spare room there was no real checking to do so they sat on the floor by the bed. He was kept seeing the same movement on the same side of his vision, all the way to the right some glimmer, a visual rustle, but he had checked enough times to know he wouldn't catch it, whatever it was, so instead he moved his head around while they sat there, moved his head back and forth to produce the glimmer which only happened with a little motion, he figured out how to make it appear but you couldn't look at it, you could only think about what it might be, over in the corner. She looked at him and said are you alright? but he shook his head and said something funny with my eyes. I saw a figure in here, she said. I know you did, he said. I saw a light.

Where do you think it went? Hard to say.

Can't be here anymore. No, can't be here anymore.

I would hate to be attacked. Yes, I don't like surprises either.

Do you think we should check again? You locked the door?

We could always call someone. Do you know the number of a figure?

We could always call the police. They know lots of figures.

They know about attackers. You did lock the door though?

I've got such a strange headache. My eyes hurt too.

I wonder if I was always going to get it. I think it was just too bright today.

All that driving in the sun. Yes, well, I was driving.

What do you think it's like to be attacked, I wonder if there's something that it's like to be attacked.

It could just be the opposite of attacking someone, that would be a tidy way out,

if I attack you quickly, will you attack me back after? you'll have to leave me in condition to fight back,

oh if they're opposites we only need to do one, we could get away with one attack, it wouldn't matter who, could be me, could be you, and then I'd know what it's like to be you, it's like not being me, and you'd know what it's like to be attacked, so you wouldn't need to know what it's like to be me, but I could if I wanted to, yes, you could if you wanted to.

In your bed, finally, there's almost nothing more to say. They reached the part of the day that's just about skin, skin against clean sheets, relaxing into the porous experience, the reticular doctrine, a bed of nails in your shape, the small hairs have their day; the couple was alone in the apartment at night, even the day was gone from them, they slept cloistered, they slept the sleep of hermits, the dust in the vacuum or the edge of a quarter, nothing stirs in a chamber, a witch's quiet, nothing glows for a while, and sleepers make visits to areas with stairs and whimper through the fold. At night, the tubas sing in intervals and by the docks, where people sleep on crates of smuggled goods, abandoned, everything begins to lift off the ground, just space enough to get your fist in if you weren't up there too, around the scene like a glass dome or becoming the manger.

In the morning she woke to the sound of nice shoes. She looked into the light from the window, where the blinds were up, and thought that the morning is a good allegory, you've always missed the action, the night happens in the shadows, it passes while you're resting your eyes. She never remembered her dreams. I never remember my dreams, she thought, that's part of the allegory too. Waking up is always a late arrival, no matter how early you get up, you'll always stop the world by coming back into it, the last streamer has just finished falling to the ground, the others have been carried off by birds to decorate their nests, but those birds came a long time ago, when it was all still in motion, when motion was allowed at night. I'll never remember my dreams, she thought, they see me coming and they all run away in a tangle, like schoolchildren, like a gathering mass, they say run while you still can, go while the goings good, and they'll explain to the newest among them that I'm bad news for motion, that I mean a stop. It could be, she thought, that that's what makes it so hard to wake up, that you have to bring the whole mechanism to a halt just to take a look at it, just in order to get your bearings you have to really put your shoulder against it and say where did it all come from, who was here and for how long; the morning, she thought, is the exhausting time for the day.

He had put on his nice shoes, for instance. And a nice shirt, she could see that as well. It's alright to feel wistful when you wake up and he's already dressed. What's the occasion, she asked him. I didn't know you were awake, he replied. No, she said, I woke myself up. He said did you dream of alarms? No, she said, I never remember my dreams. Then you could have dreamt of anything. No, she said, I'd remember a dream about anything.

Listen, he said, lowering the window blinds.

They drove away from the city, into the state. The highway followed generally the level of the ground, sometimes lagging behind the swell of a hill to cut through. In the resulting corridors, a different kind of light was briefly available, and they looked to the exposed rock with interest, neither needing to say anything, when you drive between a rock you just look at it. She played with the recirculation to try and get rid of the chemical smell. He always said it was the smell of having the windows closed, like it was the smell of the car, but if that was the smell of

the car, she thought, it's the part of the car that's supposed to be hidden, closed off, and smelling it is like seeing a prisoner running alongside your train, running with the shackles. She thought about mentioning it, but didn't. At some point, she thought, no one's paying much attention. And you could run away, if you wanted to, and no one, but no one, would notice. And you could also stay forever, live on the your side of the bed, and that would also be nothing to no one, but just for you alone. She took a look at him. She knew what he was looking at. He told her once about the part in the distance where the lines of the road bend, where they oscillate in the heat but also where they bank one way or another, he said it was like taking off your sunglasses or coming out of the movie theater into fluorescent light, following the guiding lights in the pathway and coming out to the street back into the building, and he always liked to describe scenes, she thought, not event, just a scene where an event might have taken place, a scene for many events like a setting, a room life seems to have gone through often, once, the sort of place there's little boxes of office supplies still out on the desk, bottles of epoxy on the windowsills, he would always tell these stories that weren't really stories, he just told them the way a story goes but she could tell what they were, that they were just settings and no matter how evocative there was simply no one there, there was a body you could breathe through and the setting was really wearing the story as clothing. I was in a store, like so, which I had to go around the back of a car park just to see it, you know how I mean, and the store, well, the counter was all the way at the back of the store, but over by the other wall was this young couple, and so on, and I had to go out because the shoulder almost touched the rock where the passage narrowed, only, well, we could see a bit of light at the farthest part, past where you'd imagine the cave could continue, there was an illuminated face there, almost straight up and bending, imagine looking up a chimney or meeting the face that's also in the sparks of the out lighter, look, look what the setting did, it got into the skin like the pilot strapping into a plane, he always found a way there. He drove to pass the time. She didn't know what he could be up to really, but they once went to an indoor market and he made her talk with all the vendors so. She would have liked to follow his line of sight. At least to locate the hazy point. He says it lets him relax his eyes and he doesn't have any forehead wrinkles so.

Waiting at a railroad crossing which never happens. He put the window down and she did the same. When was the last time you had to wait for the train, he asked. I'm not sure, she said, it used to happen all the time but now that you mention it I can't think of the last time. Well, he said, I know the last time we saw one together. She watched the stripes on the barrier. She thought she might have seen them move. The last time we had to stop at a crossing, he said, we weren't even living together yet. I don't remember where we were going, maybe we were driving to the beach or something. A lot of trains go down the coast for some reason. It might just make it simpler to lay the track, it gives you a line to follow. We were behind another car waiting, and they let their kids out while the train was coming. I remember, she said. And then what, she asked, and he said hmm, I think the train came, she said you don't remember what the kids were doing when the train came? He said hmm, like a word, not the sound. She said maybe the train already came and we're waiting for it to get far enough way. He said I don't think they would make us wait this long if it had already passed, we'd have plenty of clearance by now. Some trains are half an hour long, she said, and if they have to make you wait before its here why not after as well. Because you can't get hit by a leaving train, he said, so she told him that some

things could hurt him even when they're out of sight. He finally let go of the wheel. He stretched his arms out the window. Which way do you think it will come then, he asked her. It has to be right to left, she said, and he nodded, that's exactly what I was thinking. Because that's the downhill, she said, back toward the city, that's where it all flows in my opinion, back toward the city, the trains just roll downhill back into the city full of the country and when they come back empty it's not so trying to climb up, they probably feel light and vigorous. She looked at him, he was looking straight ahead, over the shoulder of the landscape, he said, you know I think you're right but I can't think of it that way yet, I never think about coming back to the city, always rather going into the city, that the world is imported, dragged away, yes, I can't help but look at produce as though it's there against its will, but it's what I like about the city, it's what makes me feel royal in the city, it's all a sort of banquet, like I'm a part of the force that generates the bazaar, I pay my dues and I walk around the exchange, every day on the floor feels illegal like I'm waiting for a raid, like everyone knows that a raid is coming but it hasn't yet, people push farther and farther into an amoral strategy imagining that they'll be relieved or justified when it collapses but it hasn't yet, and for entire generations it hasn't yet, people are expecting it on their deathbed, they look out the hospital window late at night, see the ribbons of red light departing, oh, so those weren't the judges yet, just the workers, they leave the city every night but they'll be imported again the next morning with a little more substance in the trunk, another small contribution to the pile and I'm not being negative, I love to watch the pile grow, that's a joy I wouldn't give up until something happens but it hasn't yet, the pile is the weight of the highway and it is everything that is proper to the city, everything that doesn't leave at night, the museum's collection grows and stays, it grows in order to stay better, it takes what comes in but not what comes back, you know? because what comes back is not coming to stay, an import is never returning and what's returning has already been allowed to leave.

No, she said. You're in an old way of thinking. Listen: the city is always in a depression. In the city we are at the bottom of the valley; the world slopes up on all sides. If you pick up a rock and throw it as far as you can up the slope, it rolls back, sometimes brings back something with it to keep around. All comes back to the nadir, everything cast out descends the gradient again, all is slowly eroded back towards the deep part, the outlying slides each year closer, whole communities fall totally into the condition of the city. It's just the natural curve, but the more that ends up down there, the deeper the center sinks. And to speak of coming back to a place you've never been is no problem because that's just what a slope means. If you're born on the incline, you still know which way is back, that way down the ladder, you can go back into the city for the first time because in a way you came from there, you don't get to choose what orients you, one day you'll set off from home and say I'm heading back, time to go back, and you'll roll down the hill naturally, releasing the potential you had tied up—the potential was a gift from the city, it showed up when the ground underneath your feet began to slope. Two thousand dogs—

Look, he said. The barrier had gone up.

There was a wooden sign at the edge of the town, before the road turned to dirt, it said *autos* with an arrow to the right. The asphalt continued in that direction for a half mile and then widened into a lot. Besides a few older cars that had been abandoned here, left on the edges of the asphalt to rust, the lot was empty.

They walked towards whatever. It was early afternoon, another warm, mild day, and the air was almost without any feature—only when the breeze came a little stronger could one get the agricultural sense of nasal hay, the fat grass that squeaks, other items hard to tell: manure, animal breath, reed flax drying on stones, all the sort of smells that might also just be the smell of the dust that was everywhere, dirt trod soft in the road, a powder that was too thin even to hang in the air, that just settled where it fell and took the imprint of a shoe well. Dogs came out from behind the houses to bark at them and then run over to say hello and walk a little way along side. It was all so incidental. She pulled at his wrist, he let go of the car keys in his pocket and they held hands, it felt like the thing to do but it was also nice. We probably don't have enough casual moments, she said, but it's nice to be outside of the car.

They walked toward the only sound available. She wanted to say, this place is deserted, the doors of the houses swing loose, well not the real doors, but the screen doors all the same, not exactly a screen door either, more like a cloth door, stretched with burlap or occasionally with some diaphanous cloth stained yellow, these cloth doors breathed that gentle breeze like a sail, *histos*, she thought, but she didn't need to say anything yet, it was still early. The first settlement is deserted, he said, and one of the doors swung all the way around until it hit the house again. And so actually is the second, he said, but they should be close enough together, and he took a piece of paper from his pocket, a receipt with some markings on the back, a map, probably, she thought, she asked him: is that a map? Yes, he said, and let her have it. For a second he even had the instinct to warn her not to lose it, strange, he thought, I know she won't lose it, how could she lose it? She handed it back to him, it turned out to be sort of uninteresting, it wasn't a real map, more like directions, a real map can show you the places you aren't going as well, a real map is indifferent to where you're going, she didn't like that he called the sign at the head of a hiking trail the map, oh, here's the map, he'd say, but that's never a map, that's just directions. He was looking at it again because they had left the first settlement now, he wanted to see what they were to do next, we just follow the path, he said, just keep following the path until the next settlement. She nodded. The landscape made him nervous; he didn't like to see so far in every direction.

To enter the second settlement they had to cross a small bridge, or rather the bridge crossed a dry cleft in the earth, not more than a few feet deep but with a sharp look to it, pointed at the bottom. It almost looked as though the ground had split from dryness, the whole place was obviously under strain of evaporation, when the water goes the hooks are driven out from the eyes, there's many tragic separations in the world and that's one of them, very little, she thought, gets to stay hooked for a long time, if the sun comes out, for instance, or if someone needs something and its their turn, everything cedes to what's next unfortunately, we can't help but be fair about it, you never get anything back and you only get one turn, you'll be a moist soil if you haven't yet but not forever and not again, you'll be a cleft one equally, why, but why, build a bridge over something that you could easily fill in? no one drives cars out here anyway. He said, do you think there used to be a river? Or a brook. She said do I think there used to be a river or a brook and he said no, either, and she said no, I don't think either was here, I think it opened up on its own, it's rough in there, it hasn't been worn at all: if instead either was here it would be a superfine material, raising in clouds at the force of our footsteps, the powder of a river or brook gone away, either dried water, you know, the air. He said yes, fair enough, and

jumped on the bridge to see if any dust would come up but it didn't, he pointed at her and said you're good.

The second settlement was simpler. Many little huts in clusters, all wrapped in that same cloth, sections cut out all over, like windows only without any material, she said I wonder if they made all the holes to let the wind through, maybe, maybe, might just be to see out, he said, doesn't matter much, I don't like huts too much, they always upset me. Did you never play in a hut as a kid? Forts yes but huts never—a fort is a kind of hut—you couldn't be more wrong—well let's go into one, quickly, she said, come on, and she took him by the hand and they pushed through the flap and inside there was no one but nothing at all, it wasn't dark, it wasn't difficult to see, the light was even and plain, just the light of day inside, no checkering or entertaining window pattern, there were signs of animals in the corners, at the bottoms of the walls, places the cloth had been somewhat ripped up toward some animal purpose, it was probably lining some downlow hollow nearby, they looked around the hut, they saw as much as they could around, he was looking at the floor in the center and he said don't you think there should be a figurine here, a stone piece or something? and she said it's not an archeological site. And they were quiet for a minute and again nothing came to them, not to say or to hear, there wasn't even much to avoid looking at except for some plastic in the corner, there was a lot of trash around the old settlements as always, it would be easy to blame teenagers but it wasn't teenage sort of trash, it was rather the waste of some other kind of alliance, a more serious trash, the packaging of things that people had been hoping to save, wrappers taken off reluctantly, things abandoned out of a sort of revenge, trash that you talk to, trash that can turn around because it knows the score, they ignored it all because they didn't want to talk to it, you can go a long time without talking to the trash around, that was the thing to avoid, sometimes the healthiest growth comes up from the root stalk but you have to hack it back, you need to enforce a separation to make sure the nutrients make it to the delicate parts, the parts that make dainty fruits that seem to have nothing to do with the trash below, if you don't prune the growth from below the cut you're in the nightsoil, you'll want a long trunk like the woman with the Long Neck, she did not indulge the roots that started lower and look how long her neck got! if you want to nourish the body after the transplant, the new hand past the end of the finger, you'll want to beat back the trash unconsciously, strike with your eyes closed and especially don't talk, swallow your regard and sweep with a sweet look to the wall, you painted stars directly on the wall, amazing, an every star is terrible and blue, blue compared to the blue that gets black that's the night, the oil begins in the ground only when you're not looking, rises, flushes into the wall of the geologic table and obviously, but secretly, it will get in through the trunk and set all the organs in motion including the extra ones, it doesn't mind visiting the grafts a little, the trash doesn't stay underfoot for long, the two of them both knew it and the third party too, the third party was a little choked for it even, out between the wrong shoulders as it was; they ignored it because they wanted to not deal with it, it's as simple as that sometimes, even if it happens in a complicated way. It wasn't enough not to look at the wrapper, so they looked at it a little but that didn't help much either, there's not a lot that helps much but that's alright, the third party thought, nice to be in the shade for a moment. She said, do you think we could ever live in a place like this and he said no. She said, what if there was a giant in the cities and it was too dangerous. If there was a giant in the cities I would go and see it. So would the people from the country, she said, and that's exactly

when we could move in. A lot of them would die during their visit, not just at the hands of the giant but just in the city at all. They'd say I don't think we could ever live in a place like this and then be swatted into a bus by the giant or else poisoned by a meat disease. Raw meat in the city is a death sentence. Is a death fragment. I can't imagine going from there to here or here to there. But if there was a giant. If there was a giant I'd have to. If there was a giant death in the city, or a country death by the city's giant, then we'd get good at going hin and her, from one end of the clam to the other, like a giant smile or the space between her footsteps.

It wasn't clear why people leave settlements, but they recapitulated anyway, they ran along in better spirits toward the current settlement, the last town. It wasn't far, it was barely further, the path went up to the cliffs edge and then switched back and down, letting the way easy down to a stone area, a mixed looking stone that crumbled at the touch and so had formed strange structures to avoid touch, as all that was touchable fell away, the rock formed into dodges, fled towers with put hips, and down at the bottom one could see the animals long since smelled and heard kicking about, they were out in a picked over area, eating the bark off the trees that were still standing and making noises, what I would give, she thought, to eat a piece of fresh wood just once, to chew through an immature tree. I never get to interrupt anything at all. A dog appeared, the flock was herded and tolled.

They went slowly down towards the valley and they were both quiet, trying to sort out the atmosphere that had arrived with the fresh view and the hydraulic motion of descent on two legs, are there any other animals that walk quickly? Better to let them be, they who march and halt and enjoy the turning points where the stress varies and some obscure piston in the greater knee gets its moment and although it could not be called elegant that doesn't mean they didn't have a beautiful descent, elegance yes belongs to the animals and snakes, to all the vertebrates that don't use the spine as a sort of improvised flagpole, a curtain rod surprised to find itself acting as a central beam, the mast is Cleary inelegant, we are letting them be but that much it would be suicide to deny or the loss of elegance its seizure, there is no belonging elegance to the thing that walks downhill quickly, bracingly, but beautifully, the true inventions, a thing with more natures and it can never go wrong, smoking kills—which is okay too—but finding a bank in the path on purpose is one of those true inventions that there's almost no need to think about, they go on two legs, six legs, without wings, varying the stress patterns, thirds fall, fourths fall away, the rock, in fact, falls away, and a sound escapes like something you'd hear outside a changing room, the sound of a child with a shirt stuck over its head, the sound gets in past the hydraulics, past the state and security and they listen and look but there's nothing to look at, he picks up one of the rocks that fell and holds it to his ear but the sound can no longer be heard, it slipped back in somewhere else, she brushes at the material left where the sound had come from and the dirt caught up around the rocks all came up in clouds, or actually it was likely the rocks that were caught up in the dirt, but that doesn't matter too much because now they stood on either side of a dust cloud settling in front of the section of interest and she was half annoyed because now they had to wait for a minute as the spirit lay back down on the ground. As they waited she set up to stretch her calf against a good rock at the edge of the path when she suddenly noticed, right there in her peripheral vision, that it would not be appropriate. They waited longer for the clouds to pass, she called out to him across it, he called back, they talked mostly about how long the cloud was taking to settle and something about something else and

after a while it was becoming a concern, they just couldn't continue without its dissipation because it separated them and the path was too narrow to cross blind or blinded, true, they said, hmm, she said, I bet if we keep our hands on the wall we can meet in the middle, yes, he said, and I can take you back with me, alright ferryman, she said, go, and they went in, each from their side and with their palms against the cliff's face, they found each other hands first and she said hello ferryman and he said look and she opened her eyes.

At first she thought the dust had settled. She saw all their hands on the wall and the wall simply. But to the right and the left, and then in all directions, there was ever the cloud again, larger than before, almost no light got in; it was a dusk area they stood in, he looked to her in factory blues and grays, and at the corners he too was involved in the particulate swirling, I think it's all around, he said, unfortunately, it doesn't hurt my eyes, she said, I think it's not so dense, just all around, exactly all around. He tried to beat it away waving but it held the pattern, its healthy animation and refusal to fall back down and here, standing together next to the section of interest, they could see why—first they smelled it, a mineral smell, like the clean inside of a barrel, a smell louder even than the original noise and harder to place, that it was issuing from somewhere was clear from the pattern of circulation that meant the smell was strong in some pockets and not in others, what's that smell, do you smell that, no, come over here, they moved around in the field talking, calling out the pockets of smell and building its shape in the system of air that seemed to be moving faster now than before, they used their limbs too, just basically, extending them to feel where the currents were strongest and coldest, smelling to make sure, and soon they found the source, a small hole in the rock, low, almost at the level of the path, emitting a stream of strong and suspicious air that sustained the cloud like a cherub juggling a stream of fountain water, it was really only a small hole but she began to make it bigger, using a rock to widen it, prying out the better stuck parts of the cliffside mix with sticks, the inside was too dark to see, but the smell was only stronger now that she was kneeling by the entryway, it was starting to open up more easily on its own now as the area's integrity was compromised, it was joyous work and she was good at it, she scraped out around the large rocks while freeing the small ones and more and more and more dirt came into the air, for a second he had to look away and she went down, the edge gave and she slid in knee first, an almost unheard breach. She only said her own name to herself as she fell in, there was nothing he could hear and she covered her hand with her mouth.

In the dark,
 A ribbing glitter, the same breath standing up too fast,
 And you have no chance at going somewhere you want to go somewhere where there
 isn't the same breath and ribbing,
 Where there's less putting your head through the ceiling, forgetting what you had to say,
 The sound of shapes transmitting, saliva down the backs of teeth set
 and holding a few bones in a strange position—
 the tragedy of a starved hive,
 Torn over the lap like wrapping paper
 And also wrapping paper
 (except the comb is not the outside of honey
 even though honey is strictly inside the comb)

There is a point sometimes but its limited, a capital seeks a base, Somerville area, we
 exchanged a meaningful glance in the aisle at Rhodes,
 We were looking for diamonds and you let me borrow your loupe,
 My kids had run off with mine to investigate ants, you have
 Always given me such knowing looks,
 I never knew a real look could make pretense actual;
 Ridgeback area, you let me think I was making sense,
 You let me borrow your credibility and I don't plan on giving it back,
 I was up to my knees in it, breathing heavily already I
 Needed to use both hands to move faster,
 Bridge at Prague I ended up below the stream, looking straight up at what survived of the
 day we met, the day turned its ribs on and shook for me or shook me
 No, I had put your pen-light in my mouth by then to have an extra hand,
 I was shaking back and forth on the transitive I needed
 To extract something soon, I was a jaw reversing and
 Bit through your light and swallowed.

In the dark,
 Without knowing
 The sort of look you were giving me
 We started clapping
 To kill flies.
 But I know a parade when I am one,
 And I saw the marching glitter again,
 I was all progress and arms around the waist.
 Lookout! I know a monster who lives around—
 Mine's no place for a lady tonight,
 Tonight there were names in the sky worth pronouncing
 Wouldn't you have another pen-light?

The apparatus shown had a dull shy aspect
 You couldn't think of anything to say?
 The kids came out back to drag me back out, they said,
 Did you know that all ants up close are burning?
 She found him back at the parking lot, leaning against the car. I'm glad to see you, you
 too. They were the both of them filthy. Her hair was full of dirt, her legs cut up and bruised. His
 shirt, meanwhile, was stained all down the front and ripped in a few place. I was in a cave, she
 said, and told him everything. Unbelievable, he said, the exact same thing happened to me. She
 picked at some whitish paste matted in her hair. You have to look, he said, and pointed through
 the back window into the trunk. And there it was.

Kids are a little more difficult to flay than adults, but they bleed faster and less.
 Sometimes the skin will need to be guided closely with the knife, and you're going to lose more
 meat than you would ordinarily to the process, but it's not impossible to get most of it off in one

piece if you really take your time unzipping. A good sharp kitchen knife will do if you don't have butchers equipment at home—which even butchers don't—but you'll want a pair of strong scissors to supplement. The younger the goat, the leaner, which means sharper curves to deal with. Fabric shears will work if you've got them, and so long as you don't puncture any organ you're not supposed to, they should clean up fine to continue for fabric use. In the event that you do nick the stomach or bladder—be especially careful making the cut down to the navel and around the genitals—you'll at least be able to give them a final act of textile work cutting up whatever clothes you were wearing and probably the rug too.

She bought an armful of newspapers from the machine on the corner and laid them out on the floor in the spare room. They closed the blinds and worked under the fluorescent light they were hoping to eventually replace. He hung the goat by its heels from the only thing tall enough, the brass coat rack, but the load was uneven and one of them had to stand on the other two feet of the thing to keep it from tipping over. Whoever was acting as the counter-weight would also be in charge of directing the procedure. He had wanted to work off his memory from what the women had told him the night before—she gathered they had given him his goat information—but he had been sure that the goat should be hung by its head, which she knew was wrong even before they looked it up, so in the end the director was allowed discretion. The butcher simply obeyed and was not to question whether the commands were arriving from intuition or reference. Work went quicker in this way, they discovered, and soon the skin of the goat was off and drying draped over a chair. With the abdomen open, the organs leaned out so far they thought they might just fall out on their own, but no, they were just putting their heads out the window, getting a little air. They were so hot to the touch it almost seemed wrong, and once they succeeded in peeling them off the back wall with a paring knife she poured a pitcher of ice water down into the carcass—now, without the organs, it felt correct to call it a carcass—but not without first putting down a layer of disposable grocery bags on the floor beneath it. The rinse was effective and soon the flesh had the more rigid bounce feeling meat. They stopped to drink some cold water themselves. With the window closed it got pretty warm in there. He had opened it at the beginning, to let a little air out or in, but she shut it after only a minute or two saying it made the smell worse to have the air moving. In the still air, she said, and he came around to her way of seeing it, you only smell at the pace of your own movement; when you walk around, you walk into the smell that's hanging there.

It was hot at least. They drank another glass of water. Outside, no one could remember what sort of day it was, the window looking out on the wall anyway, but it was easy to come up with options. There are really only so many kinds of day. And though that's more an artifact of kinds than days—which are each alone if it's important to be precise—the fact is that kinds circulate, kinds subsist. There will be kinds tomorrow, when the day will be gone, and the same kinds the day after that, and if it ever became necessary to create a new kind, that could be done as well. Once, when they had first moved in, he had tried to touch the bricks out the window. He thought now about leaning out. To look left, or right.

Breaking down the kid again, she asked him what had happened while she was in the cave. Tell it from your “point of view.” Well the whole time I am going to be in the dark, he said, beginning to work around the ribcage. I didn't see anything happen, he said, because there was no light where I was—that's how I know I was in the cave, because I couldn't see anything, and

because of other things, actually because of other things. I spent very little time thinking, I was “feeling my way” through an enclosed space. It was quiet, so I didn’t think to call out—it wasn’t that I thought: she’s not calling out, so I don’t need to call out either. It didn’t occur to me, very little happened. I think wherever I was must have been hard to get to, that must have been why so little occurred to me. Sometimes, there would be a spot where the wall on one side would recede, sometimes to belly out and come back, sometimes to begin something running off, I thought of them as alleyways for some reason, but these alleyways didn’t intersect with my passage at the ground level, they were more like absences in the rock, beginning well off the ground, with openings not much larger than manhole covers, or the hole that a manhole cover covers, I guess a manhole, hey, well anyway. At first I ignored these alleyways and stuck to the main passage, or what I was using in the manner of the main passage—without really thinking of it as such—and when I found one, I’d just leave my hand out to catch the other side of the opening, where the wall returned, and continue on. It was my habit to walk with arms touching both walls at once, this gave me a great confidence: the one thought I remember having at the time was a sort of disbelief at how parallel, how uniform it all was: the walls were very rough, making their own organic detours but returning always to the path, like running with a pair of faithful dogs. If I’d been thinking more, I might have realized how herded I felt and rejected the feeling. It didn’t occur to me at the time though. What came to the fore, overwhelming and instead, was that feeling of being between two things that would always keep their distance, that I would always have the space I needed between them. I didn’t feel any part of claustrophobia, rather, the opposite, I felt a sort of dizziness at the impossibility of being confined, that I would sooner die of thirst or starvation or heartbreak than get trapped, get crushed. There seemed to be no way to get closer to anything. I was lifted in a very, very uncomfortable way by this feeling, I don’t think I’m describing it well even now, I felt it without noticing it so I have little to reconstruct it by: I know my heart was racing. I was moving faster. It was a manic rush only I wasn’t talking—the seconds when the car is skidding or you see the threat very close, a moment of mandatory focus. If I think about crashing the car, I remember that dread so well, it’s one of the only feelings I can call to mind—even though I’ve never been in a car crash. It was a little like that anyway. I’m trying to remember if I had my eyes open or closed. I think they must have been closed, because what eventually happened, what relieved me of this state almost definitely brought on by living without any vanishing point, was that I ran right into some rock formation hanging down from the ceiling. And with my arms out to the side so I just fell down.

I was lying on the ground for a while although I didn’t lose consciousness, he said. Oh, he said, look. Look where I just cut, he said, and pointed with the knife. She came closer. At first she only saw a sort of discoloration in the flesh, a section of softer looking tissue. But then he scraped it a little with the tip of the knife and she saw how easily it just scraped away. It’s like paste here. But just in the one section really. He cut the area out, but there was paste on the other side too, so he cut the whole rib out, and on the other side, the paste again, just a spot and in a slightly different place, but with the same grayer look to it. He went on, taking out rib after rib. They watched the course of the softened part in the revealed sections, it’s some gruesome imaging technique, it bears left for a few ribs in a row and then comes back towards the center, where it produced a larger stain, or was a larger stain. A faint siren rolled by somewhere out the window, slow, as though walking. As the ribs came off, he lay them down flat on the ground,

bookmatching the small steaks in a long row. She thought of when they cut down the oak tree in her front yard. It had apparently died, although it was still producing leaves and acorns so she didn't believe it. Branches had been falling off every time a real storm happened though, so it had to be cut down and so it had to be dead. One way or another, her mother said. The problem was it was close to the house and leaning, and that it was dead. She went out the bathroom window onto the top of the porch to watch. He climbed the tree by a sort of hugging motion, the chainsaw hanging down from his belt, swinging back and forth every time he levered himself up. He had special shoes to run up a wall too. And he removed limbs on the way up, even the big branches, sort of guiding them on the way down to miss the power lines and each one fell into a beautiful pile. They all ended up the same way in a line in the driveway. When he finished with the branches, he was naturally at the top. The bare tree did look sick to her now, and when he began sawing up the main trunk, working from the top down, she saw why: the whole thing was hollow, right from that crotch at the top, the big split, all the way to the bottom. In the sections, progressive, she could see the hollow grow. Into the thick part, towards the roots. He threw down ring after ring. The oak was strong enough they didn't break but piled up in the driveway like primeval tires, sometimes rolling and buzzing like dropped coins before settling. That's what the ribs had reminded her of, that decomposition—not the rotting, but the slicing of a changing shape, the indexing of a tunnel—but now she remembered something else: when he'd come a little more than halfway down the trunk the cut made a strange popping sound, like sparks, and when he shoved the new ring off along came a shower of acorns, the whole bottom almost half of the tree was full of them. She could see them at the brim. When he tried to make the next cut, they spat like hot oil into his face, bouncing off his safety goggles. They churned and it was unworkable, he said, he came back down the tree and cut an square opening near the base, a little window, and now the acorns came pouring out, it must have been thousands of acorns, the ones on the bottom soupy and wet, and the drier ones at the top, it all bled out through the little hole and into the yard. At first he used a stick to rake them out a little, but soon a channel opened somehow, dynamically, and then he had to jump out of the way of the opened stream. The smell was incredibly strong, she remembers that, and the way he just stood watching, hands on his hips, as the pile grew and grew.

It must be a parasite, he was saying, because here, here there's no more mark. He showed that the newest exposed rib—almost the last on this side—was firm, didn't have the discoloration. It didn't get all the way through, she said. Not yet, he said. Not yet, she said. She picked up the first rib from the ground. So, she said, it's either in here or it's in there. We've got it cornered, he said. It's just a question of which way it was going. If you were a parasite, she said. It depends, he said again, on which way it was going. In one end and out the other, she agreed. We've two suspects really, he said. The head-to-ass parasite or the ass-to-head parasite. If you were a worm, she said, which way would you go? I am surely of the ass-born parasites, he said. Ass-raised, headed to the big city. I'd go north. You? I would like to think, she said, that I'm sick of the head. I've spent my whole life up here. I'd head asswards. Well, he said, we all have our freedoms. Shall we? They traded chops. On your marks, she said,

And then there was a knock on the door.

Three policemen, two holding a small battering ram, one with his hands resting on the semi-automatic rifle hanging in front of his chest. Hello, they said. There was a lot of noise in the

hallway. People, neighbors they half recognized, kept squeezing behind the policemen, pulling suitcases or duffels. It's really not your fault, the policeman with the rifle said, so don't worry about that, but something's wrong with the world. You'll need to come with us. They asked how long and he made a face, looked at the guys with the battering ram. The problem is, he said, it kind of depends.

Later, in the van, he sat in the back with them, staring out the tinted window at the back end of the vehicle. There were others in the van too, and other vans—that's what he must have been looking at out the window, the long procession of identical vans out on the highway behind them—and the floor was covered in bags. Mostly clothes, though some people had brought work things, a yoga mat, some food. They hadn't had long to decide. Someone was asking him again how long they'd have to be away. I really don't know, he said. It's not my project. You have to understand, he said, his voice breaking a little, that this is me going away too. He turned around to look at the person who had asked, a young woman who was there with her sister, and even in the dimmed fluorescent light, eaten mostly by the dark carpeted interior, his eyes shone. Sometimes, he said, mastering a little the uncertain note in his voice, when there is something wrong, things need to change. And sometimes it just takes a little difference. Although sometimes it's a lot too, he said, and let out a sob now, facing away again, toward the dark back window. Outside, the whole tail visible climbing the hill behind them, all the headlights suddenly switched on at once. Light sensors or something, someone said. It must be technically night. But the sun, setting out of view off to the right, was still at work on the landscape and the lowest part of the sky, itself a part of the landscape, bathing the earth in a warm, honeyish light, coming in Mars red through the military windows.

The fairgrounds was clean, at least, and the first nights they all slept in the vans still because there was supposed to be bedding coming soon. But soon the vans had to leave for other things, although a few were kept around for the police to use for certain things and to sleep in. The question of bedding went away, people figured out things to do. Once, after about a week, another group of vans came with more people, but not nearly as many as the first time, and then no more vans came.

They, the woman and the man, slept out in the open. It never rained here, so the ground was dry, almost sandy, and easy to shape. They dug out a sort of pit for themselves to protect from the wind and slept in there. Every few days they would take out the sheet from the bottom and stir up the ground again, decompacting it, erasing their indentations. During the day, when the sun was too hot to sit around in pits, they would go out walking into the denser areas, where the trees and bushes were. Or really, they were all shrubs, just different sizes. He had some string in his pockets that he said he would tie to a bee if they found one. Tell me if you see a bee, he said, and I'll tie this string to it.

Their movements were not formally restricted, but there wasn't any real way to go. It wasn't a hostile terrain. It was easy to walk a long way: the ground only ever sloped slightly at one time, and some wildlife, now departed, had once formed fairly strong if winding paths through the unending valleys. The soil was rocky and fell away easily if you kicked at it or stepped on an edge. Any activity would send rocks jumping downhill. Birds would take off from the low bushes with a sound like machine-gun fire, as if equipped with ill-fitting wings. The bottom of the valleys, which they would often end up in without thinking about it, were lined

with feet of loose rock. Once, when she was out walking by herself, she had spent an hour moving the rocks aside to try and see the bottom. She confessed this to him when she got back, as a sort of apology. He turned to her in the pit. What did you see? he asked. I couldn't get through them, she said. I was hoping to find some metal under there. Like if there was a metal door, she said. They held hands. The sky was too darkened by dust to make out the stars, so they looked instead at the moon, kept their time by it, a sort of white smear, coming in and out of the light. I bet you got close, he said. Thanks, she said, but I want to get there. Most people don't even get close though, he said. You know, she said, sometimes I think its better to be you than me.

They would always bring a few rocks back to camp, ones that were the right size, for the fights. No one really wanted to hurt each other but it was sometimes unavoidable. To keep conflicts down, people stayed apart. There wasn't much talking. At the beginning some people had been too social, spent too much time going around and talking to people. That quickly found an end.

They drew on the ground with sticks and tried to build things but they couldn't build anything. She thought he was becoming depressed, some days he would come to the edge of the camp with her and then just sit there, looking down into the valley. And there wasn't much to look at but he didn't want to come any further in. It's alright really, he said, I don't think I'm gonna come in today. Do you feel alright, she asked him a million times. Yes, yes, he said. Once, she got him to come in with her, all the way down to the bottom where the rocks are. He sat with his back against the bank while she cleared some away in a spot she'd been working at. She talked with him about maybe building up the walls of their pit a little bit tonight, since the wind had taken them down over the past few weeks again. Last night, she said, some dirt blew right into my face, got in my mouth. That only happens when the walls have gotten too low. Okay, he said. Do you feel alright, she asked him. Yes yes, he said. What are you thinking about then, she asked. I've been thinking, he said slowly, hmm. And then he went on. Once when I was a kid, he said, I thought I saw something move inside my cat's nose and I threw up. I never told anyone. My parents were in the room and they asked me what happened and I think I said I had smelled something bad. They were concerned and let me go take a shower, I went right to bed and shut the door. My mom came in at night to check on me and brought the cat, she said I thought you might like some company. No no no I said, no I'm okay. I couldn't even look at it. For the next month I avoided it and kept having a dream, the only dream I've ever had more than once: I hear the cat scratch at the door to come in, but when I go to look, there are two of them sitting there, identical. They wait and look at me, and I feel that I need to let one of them in, that it was so important to let the *right* one in. And I couldn't tell them apart at all.

He picked up a rock and threw it up the hillside, watched it roll back down to his feet. Do you know what I mean, he asked her. I think so, she said. When I was little I was afraid of pilots, maybe it's like that. Pilots? he asked. Pilots, she said, and construction workers, truck drivers. I didn't like to see someone operate like that. Right, he said. Right.

That night she turned to him in the pit, shook him awake. I think we should escape, she whispered. To where, he asked. To have something to do, she said. I'm bored of being here, it's not enough for us. We're supposed to wait, he said, what if we go back too soon? Look, she said: they're trying to get rid of us. They don't want us there. So what's the harm? Okay, he said, let's

take a week. To think it over? Yes, he said. One week to think it over, and then we escape. They shook hands. He lay for a while, looking up at the right-handed moon. I don't think I've ever seen that before, he said, listening to her breath—to how it didn't catch when he started talking, but floated along through, unaware, like a little bastard in a basket. Sail on down stream, toward the kingdom. They slept.

The first day, they walked as far as they could and then came back. They made a map of the journey on the back of a receipt. There were always a lot of receipts lying around. That night, the police called everyone over to their area and ordered everyone to form two lines in front of the vans: those that could work and those that couldn't. But! they said, don't tell us which is which. When the lines were all set, they went up and down, making out to be paying close attention. This went on for a while until the captain roared Time! He took off his policeman's hat and put it down on the folding table that was always set up next to where the police vans were parked. Gentlemen, he said, please submit your guesses now. The rest of the policemen formed a line of their own and began depositing slips into the hat. The captain was eyeing some of the men in line with a dissatisfied expression. When they came to drop off their slips he sort of blocked them, swatting them away as they fell to the hat, but he sort of knocked the hat a little as well and it fell on the ground. Pick that up! He shouted, and they did. He said I'm not happy with you two at all. His lieutenant, the first who had submitted, came over to us and let us know that was all, that we could go back to our duties and shooed everyone away. The lines broke, dispersed back into the camp. Although a few tried to watch from a little distance away. Too far to hear their voices though—and the general darkening, combined with the heat, would have taken a heroic focus to break through.

The second day, which started late at night, they checked each other for ticks. No marks, no dizzy feelings. They were the both of them mostly hairless anyway; they were young and enjoyed the special partial immunity nature extends to the phenotypically young.

The third day, they walked over to the police camp during the day in order basically to case it. The vans were parked so as to create a sort of courtyard within. The courtyard had an irregular, asymmetric shape and was covered over by whatever material the police could find: sheets of tyvek probably scavenged from some construction site, bedsheets requisitioned from those that brought too many, assuming something else or else confused at the time of eviction. There had even torn the carpeting out from a few of the vans to finish the canopy, with the result that the shade underneath was patchy. A whole ecosystem of shade life was developing in there—a certain kind of shade was best for the morning hours, to get you awake without discomfort, then in the afternoon they got under the tyvek, as many of them could fit, to watch the sun swim through the flashspun pattern on the ground, on the lap, on an outstretched palm. At night, so it was said, it was best to sleep in the thickest shade, where it was cool and darkest—low to the ground, below the status of the opium smoke better seen against the lighter shaded areas, where the skinniest policemen would sit late in the night, passing around someones long pipe, jade-colored ceramic, probably celadon over a British imitation porcelain—the crazing of the celadon into large, often irregular shards was the giveaway, probably some energetic once-young Englishman had brought back the recipe with him from his rite of passage visit to the eastern potteries, where fire climbs up the hill for days and days and they really get their fingers in, there's no shame in British orientalist ware exactly, in fact there's really no shame in it—sipping

for hours and hours, passing the thing around, too low to tell stories but talking, just each to his neighbor, when there was something to talk about, usually at the occurrence of some old memory: the fact is, life in the police courtyard was easy and therefore elegant, or it could have been the other way around, which meant lots of sitting and remembering other days, other porches, the same sun and moon and some of the same people and stars—but you don't tell stories about the people you're with, and the sun and moon only have one thing to say between them: look: so it ended up that, poppyheaded, alee, they would tell stories about people no one knew, at first siblings back at home, then cousins, the more estranged the better, and after a few months of estrangement the game became to name strangers—not just any strangers, but the really lost ones, they would sit and think about the people they'd met who must have met the least people, the strangest stranger, and when they got one, they'd incline toward the person nearest and say: a woman at a gas station in the middle of nowhere, using the vacuum at the air pressure machine to clean out the footwells. She was in a cloud of dust and I never saw her face. And the next one nods, thinks about it for an hour, two hours, until leaning back over, shaking the first man awake: a man coming out of the woods behind the church, small town, maybe 550 people, his beard is white and tied into a not, he's only got three fingers on each hand, the way you're imagining it, exactly those three. Coming back to the world.

The fourth day they said, it was late in the afternoon they were throwing rocks at rocks and one said to the other, hey, let's leave right now. I don't want to wait. I want to get out of here now if we can and go away until we never come back. Go get hairy.

Ya.