

# ALLOY

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So I've a son and a daughter (actual, fictional), as does everyone, celibate or impotent or barren, gay or morose, a boy and a girl, who grow up to have a girl and a boy of their own, not together, but with someone else's daughter, someone else's son, actual or fictional, a boy and a girl and a boy and a girl, without fail, giving us (my adoree and me) four grandchildren, four voices, God's cardinal points, bringing me water, bringing me perspective, self-portraiting he's unsure of himself not knowing how to move across a room which chair to sit in which window to look out of as if that matters the beauty of uncertainty, the thrill of a corner not turned I don't understand his hesitations, his immobility at quieter times of day as if his ability to act is one of reaction and not impetus he's unsure of himself simple lack of confidence arising from a childhood of tract home ease carpet hush, draped sunlight that's too convenient, too pedestrian in its psychological evaluations, the stuff of popular narratives we fail when we nitpick or calibrate without the widest authenticity when we either collaborate through affectation or insinuate without affection we bog down with elusive language, emotionless linguistic circumlocutions, like this, the oblique skirting we've inherited from him his fetish for contrapuntal harmony he lacks confidence in melody he likes the tanglings of complex rhythms refracted spectrums, fractured simultaneities he's not a man to emulate if one wishes to be straightforward I hardly know him, I will have hardly known him he's too old to know that's a moronic thing to say he's only forty-two he's only forty-two now, but he'll be much older when we know him, when we hardly know him he'll be in his sixties and seventies and eighties if he lives that long like his father and his father's father he'll be dead eventually he's not even sick I'll be dead someday, she'll be dead someday, you'll be dead someday, they'll be dead someday with all that sugar he eats he'll likely be diabetic like his father they'll likely have to cut his legs off like his father's father's father they would still go on walks together, she would push him Othy and Gram the abiding pleasures of fidelity, the joy of

every corner turned they're in love, still, genuinely, after fifteen or fifty she would wheel him all over town, talking up a river waters of wonder what happens after he's dead and she's alone or five hundred years and he's not around to listen and he would listen and interject what if she were to die first she won't, she can't what if their son, your father, our uncle, were to die too young God we would still exist our mother was never born and you still exist we were talking about him and you can't talk about him without talking about her peas in a pod, sides of a coin they'll cut off his legs and he'll become bitter he'll go deaf like his father and his father's father but she won't let him become bitter we hardly know her, we will have hardly known her although she gives of herself more than he does, her compassion is more immediate, she's not coy she was self-absorbed in her youth that's not coy what do you mean by coy coy like you I'm not coy Othy was coy he is coy he will have been coy she saw through his coyness she was able to keep track of his elusiveness surfaces of a stone I was just kidding about your being coy they'll cut off his legs and he'll have dreams of mobility, sad dreams that will worm their way into his days and sour his natural melancholy, embittering him into a grumpy old man with regrets that's too easy, that kind of summation doesn't bring truth you said he'll go deaf the interior of a stone but it won't make him bitter, she won't let it as if she has that power you said he's coy only because you said she wasn't and only because he isn't dead he will be yes the subconscious plunders the rational soul yes what about before she knew him when he was only dreaming of her he should have stopped with the sugar way back when he was seeking not only her but his dreams of her his dreams of a comprehensible existence as if the ineffable can be grasped his belief in the transient and enigmatic, fostered in friendship, fooled him into thinking his lifespan would fall short of a score far shy of fourscore unlike his father and his father's father his nonviolent deathwish as wistful as his longing for a customized someone sleeping outdoors, in the sunlight, in public spaces, hours at a time,

made him feel vulnerable and invulnerable slabs of cement, patches of grass, stretches of sand steeped in splendor his intelligent innocence that she would find genuine incubated throughout these sunlit naps his slumbering now lacks abandon unless with her they don't sleep in the daylight anymore they don't have that kind of time she misses dozing on docks above lapping water he misses drifting off in cars in parking lots with tangential glimpses of sky they never taught our mother or your father how to daysleep outdoors it isn't teachable you learn it all by yourself or alongside a sibling or a friend, if you're lucky yes her innocent intelligence flowers along lakeshores amid contained bodies of water he's drawn to the desert's facade of lifelessness our father liked alpine woods and the suddenness of the timberline our mother would have adored the open heartland but our father was a city man and our mother was a surfer girl projected history is as easy as revisionism truth is distributed evenly, as is untruth, neither in conflict nor cancellation, unable to coalesce or cease, we keep colliding with ourselves in old photographs untaken you're not coy, just obtuse as opposed to acute when we talk about him we talk about someone with severe doubts, beyond ordinary shoulder shruggings, nearing middle-of-the-night panic attacks when we talk about him we talk about ourselves but when we speak of her we speak of him not of his doubts but of his assertions not of his failures but of his fortune he didn't know what was waiting for him around the corner he doesn't know what is waiting for him around the corner we seldom know what is waiting for us around the corner we don't want to know what is waiting for us around the corner unless it's true love or the satisfaction of having known what was around the corner we don't know, not one of us, not in the matters that matter, what's around the corner when she walked into the room his future reached back to his present the past was suddenly as consequential and as determined as the future his past was as present as his future he knew something as he has rarely known anything all he knew was he wanted to know something, that's not

unusual, that's intuition, that's curiosity this was different it was simply heightened awareness of a prophetic sort only in retrospect his future reached back to his present balanced dissonance creates sublime harmony we eat too much sugar the door was ajar and he peeked into the room we'll lose our legs he's frightened of making wrong choices but not of having made any the sublime luck of the regret-free soul, the there-but-for-whatever-go-I charm he wishes he hadn't ever hurt anyone who doesn't there are some anomalies he isn't one of those, she wasn't one of those, none of us are one of those, none of us even knows any of those he has regrets puny transgressions, he never truly hurt anyone, not in any way worth acknowledging he's not sinless who is we must avoid extremes most of us do most of our damage through omission yes we miss ourselves when we're not around I miss my mother who never was who never wasn't who never will have been she's still worthy of talk like most absences our mother might never be, our father might not notice the door ajar might not choose to peek might regret what he doesn't know enough about to name, whereas our father is even more nebulous than our mother he can't exist if she doesn't exist, unless imagined Othy once whispered in our father's ear when our father was a boy when he was snug in bed and about asleep Othy whispered if I could give you one gift for your life if I could wish one thing for you, if I could grant you one grace, it would be for you to find someone to love and be loved by with whom to share your life it would be true love romanticism is as dangerous as cynicism obfuscation is a cousin to exaggeration compassion springs from projection if I could give us one gift for our lives I would give us truth what is truth go wash your hands they're clean enough for field work or shaking hands or eating or surgery for true love for love, true or not she'll outlive him, but there won't be another for her she'll persevere as if burlap she'll act with action I miss my grandmother and I miss my mother and I wonder where my we don't know not one of us even as imagined and imaginative voices created and creative we can't speak

with assurance about what hasn't happened we can't speak with authority about what has happened she'll outlive him, but that won't stop her from spreading their love our existence spreads their love our existence would spread their bloodline if we had blood to spread our blood connects to his future to her future and to our children's children's futures our children's children's futures genealogical sphere of tangled string without ends, frayed or not we shouldn't think of origin or destination but of location and duration not where we came from or where we're going but where we aren't and never will be the dissolution of the unfated when our grandfather whispered to our father when our father was just a boy our grandfather wished he were God or some sort of genie or fairy or wizard or prophet and not a smudge of a man with nearly no hold on the future none to speak of his son as vulnerable to the whims of the next breath and of tomorrow as anyone else's son as anyone else's daughter as his own daughter we're not talking of her just now she's worth speaking of as is any true absence only not at the moment right but he wasn't a god isn't a god won't have been a god godhood is for another time or another place and our father might not meet and your mother might not and your mother might not and none of us might and that has to somehow be acceptable the corner or the next breath the first breath the final breath and our mother right might have never right and that has to be acceptable, too, as unfathomable as any unhappening we shouldn't mourn what hasn't happened it's the unhappenings we must mourn the most more hasn't happened than has what has happened is the eye of the hurricane and what hasn't happened is the fury of the storm, that unpredictable potential, and surrounding the storm is what has unhappened, the tainted or rosed memory, and beyond that is anybody's guess, up to one's heirs (biological, hypothetical) to circumnavigate and grid, the accounting by those unaccountable what didn't happen as opposed to what hasn't happened yet or won't ever happen or is unhappening as we speak or what happened and is accessible to

memory but is inaccessible as the happening itself memory is faulty as fact individually and collectively memory can't help but be faulty as fact events happen outside of perception and therefore outside of memory and memory individual or collective can't recreate a duplicate happening but projection can invent a happening that doesn't have to happen to be remembered memory can embrace a happening that never happened as if it did happen that isn't memory that's fantasy or remembered fantasy false memory memory nonetheless, true or not memories of dreams we're losing our legs subjunctive memory is so alluring we can't remember the future but we can be nostalgic for what hasn't happened she is nostalgic for her grandparents' memories he was nostalgic for parallel understanding I'm nostalgic for a mother who might not he is nostalgic for us and so we come into being and keep coming into being and his nostalgia for the future grants us our nostalgia for what never transpired he's unsure of himself he can't help us cross a room when he has trouble doing so himself his vascillations are hard to understand the clarity of twilight, the obscure noon she knows that her grandparents, before they met, as winsome couples or as a staunch foursome, linked through the fates of their children, imagined her her and her brother her and her brother into being, birthing sons and daughters out of their musings, out of the childhood projections of their mothers and fathers, the conception of their grandchildren likewise arising in parks and playgrounds carseats and schoolrooms bed-unders and closet-tucks bureau flanks and television flicker refrigerator hum and garage halfnight and carpet hush and she knows this in a way he doesn't, his belief in individuality hovering above autonomy and not communal precision, imagination as auto-eroticism and not as divinely molded in the image of creator creating creativity enough creation creating creators we should talk about his faith ineffable moments or lack thereof her faith is in fluid continuity the river metaphor she believes in renewable innocence, replenishable as it flows, like love like imagination enough imagination tributaries

into love we should talk about his internal flinchings, his hidings-and-seeking from himself, his wrestling with honorable hypocrisy one day and pure severity the next those are common to everyone she has those days we have those days you have those days I do, of course, but his have an acuteness as opposed to an obtuseness that make them somewhat unique, intensified, not quite perverse or psychotic or neurotic or satanic or cancerous not quite amplified, but louder than the unassisted voice, reverberant and chambered, as if he were alone we are all alone she is with him in his currents and his eddies his undertows and his subterranean grottoes his high seas and she comprehends that echo in his chest, that longing for more nothing than something for nothing as something the wide open nothing that comes with stopped time an embraced moment a held breath enough we are never alone when consensus becomes cloying, when contention is thwarted into a crouch, when stoicism opts for cliché, it's time to try anew, to step to the podium with premeditation and fresh resolve when I consider him, more than when I think of her, I imagine myself an old woman with grandchildren of my own, two boys and two girls, products of our son and daughter and their chosen partners, our son and daughter products of mine and some dream's, and like Othy, as his daughter's daughter, I'll struggle to cross a room at dawn, to cross a field toward home at twilight, my hopes tucked in my hood, the mysteries of life just above the treetops, leaking beyond the horizon, my ankles as stable as my heart, my knees participants in compromise, my pocketed hands unheld by spiritual assurance, and the wire and limb birds, like us, sing and beak their observations, affording me coded self-perception, nothing as crisp as the sound of my shoes on topsoil, and like him, like my long dead grandfather, I'll succumb to the moment as if it were my creator and the next one my temptor and the subsequent one my savior, mortality and immortality expressed in the ordinary shifts from moment to moment the absolutely stunning and extraordinary shifts from this to that and then to now and that to this and



now to then and when I think of him I feel his philosophical meanderings stick in my throat, the initial tease of nausea, wishing he were more familiar with brass tacks, with straight-from-the-hip pragmatism, the authentic calling out of what is obvious, childhood failure as nothing more than goes-with-the-territory, adulthood failure as proof-in-the-pudding and not salt-in-the-wounds, the wisdom of the ages not reducible to its sayings nor divorced from them either and when I portage my solid frame across the bog from brook to sea, neither transcending my gout nor buckling under my doubts, the crippling nay-saying historical self, mine aligned with his, my imagining paternal grandfather's actual self, I'll disseminate the family name into the ocean and let his inheritance wash ashore where it may and it will wash ashore in my granddaughter's backyard and in her granddaughter's yard and so on until the sea is molten again portaging is interplanetary and I will stare out my kitchen window at my father's mother playing in our yard with her father's mother and my granddaughter and her granddaughter, and the warm sinkwater at my wrists will blend with the lowering sunlight on my chest and I'll feel radiant and believe the unimagined life isn't worth living isn't worth unimagining, whether one has faith, as he does, in the integration of will and fate, or whether one's faithlessness, like his, extends to flashes of belief in heaven and hell, reward and retribution, or whether one's internal spiral is also pendulum swung, motion in manifestation, one's imagination promoting movement in every direction possible, every potential frame of time, the loneliness of omnipresence and immortality necessarily combined, to be everywhere at every moment, so he conjures our mother and your mother and our father and us, out of his need for representation, an endearing and failed attempt at godhood, selective omniscience, and my heart goes out to him, knowing I might behave likewise someday, but it doesn't exactly excuse his inability to change the world we all change the world each in his or her own way simply by existing and none of us change the world, not through mag-

nanimous gestures or charismatic willpower, not through mere existence the world needs either every one of us (actual, fictional) as much as it needs every grain of sand (counted, supposed) or any of us as little as any grain of sand I awake with stomach weight, with that singular middle-of-the-night gut-ache, the middle of my body sunk into the mattress, my mind flung into the future, my legs stuck in the past, my mother's footfalls moving along the hallway past my sister's bedroom toward mine, not getting closer, or coming closer without arriving, my sister's door as green as clover, the hallway rugs as plush as leafy paths, my mother's aroma of flowers unable to penetrate my wintered heart, her footfalls silent in the deep rugs, my imagination of her footfalls longer than any house's hallway our memories are illusionary, artificial, processed through nostalgia and fantast, dredged and museumed and projected out of need to recycle, to recreate what has always been, resumption of the infinite I'll stand at the kitchen window amid faucet flow and birdsong and feminine laughter, the sounds of warm weather play, toward evening, supper afterglow, and behind me the lamplight will gain prominence as the sunlight diminishes, the legions of pasts and futures ever encroaching upon the solitary present or vice-versa, the one past and the one future bookending an impenetrable infinity of presents I'll watch moving images on the kitchen television of our father as a toddler, when Othy and Gram were young, when he sang the blue train song to our father most nights, when she took him out into the world to witness delight, when our father moved in fear of falling, then in fear of disappointing, then in fear of outgrowing them, our mess of a brilliant father as a boy, disheveled, selfish, innovative, undeveloped, there on the monitor in color, watchable at my leisure, backtrack or freeze-frame or skip ahead our father as artifact, as image on screen, flattened and diaphanous, infant into boy into man into father into memory before our eyes, a life edited down to a half hour video, soundtracked with vibes and chimes ocean waves and tumbling river stones the beauty of certainty, the thrill of a navigated

bend we can't get the linguistic engine to turn over, even if my sister's door is as green as clover, even if my mother genuinely wishes to comfort me at my bedside, whatever the metaphor, whatever the trope, language like imaginary footfalls I was submerged in reverie when mother passed by my door and I didn't notice she passed without passing, passed while passing, the passing resembling a thought discarded before properly entertained, and in my reverie I travelled to visit a friend, a friend who had killed herself you're making this up and was now living alone on a pig farm in a hot valley, and as I approached down the unmown gradual slope she stood at the trough, arms in the muck up to her elbows as if she were groping for her engagement ring, or the key to a heart we dream with our eyes open and our minds awhir, propelled by his mosaic cravings his quest for non-sequitor congruence his belief that there are no legitimate non-sequitors his lack of faith in surprise what she brought to his life to his daily living he never wanted to be a father he didn't know what was involved he was okay with it once it came to pass she was okay with it as it came to pass passed without passing and as she disrupted my threshold without breaching my room, without priming the space, neither coming into the room nor humming a lullaby from where she floundered, I spoke to her, calling out to my nonexistent mother to be careful where she trod, telling her about the marbles scattered on the rug beside my bed where I had been playing earlier and this suicided friend greeted me from amid her snuffling pigs with the look of a lost soul, the defeating smile of innocence wasted on empty fear and emptier dread and I pulled the plug from the drain and let the sinkwater swirl away like the last of the daylight, and the feminine voices sank away into the grass, the stars came whoring for my attention, their twinklings blending with the flickering television images, and I will replay the tape as memory it will be different every time our father will mature or he will suffer tragic death or be impotent or flounder outside the door or he will seek the acetic or the hermetic or the aesthetic

or the pathetic and we won't become flesh Othy and Gram won't spoil us with insight won't stun us with decline and with my head on the pillow I will search the stars outside my window for evidence of solitary design, but their unearthly twinklings are inscrutable this won't do as they were to him as they are to everyone yes as they will be to me as they will have been to all of us this won't do, these fabricating fabrications, this spectrum play, refracted fakery and deflected truths, anecdotal portrayals of the imaginary, there ought to be accountability, toes-to-the-line confession, flaying self with words of disclosure he's unsure of himself yes not knowing how to cross a field which path to take which window to look into as if that matters as mother passed by my door she blurred into uncertainty, unable to turn the corner into my room (although I wished her to) or persist to my brother's room (as I knew he wished her to), unable to pass her passing, unable to stay framed in my doorway, the incredible sorrow of impossible motion what I want is sufficient distance for appraisal, without the avoiding span, to be inside the outside, voiced with the wisdom of contradictory and complementary angles, controlled and uncontrollable he's unsure of himself okay not knowing how to survey a dream what memory to indulge what future to request and our father was a hired hand on a pig farm in a hot valley on a summer escape from the city and our father is eleven and likes trains and baseball and crocheting and is fascinated and frightened by the possibilities of alien visitation and abduction and he likes girls but not any particular girl and he can't imagine having children nobody can when they're eleven and our mother is as hypothetical as yours forever walking the hallway toward our bedrooms the ocean in her lungs and my suicided friend and our nonexistent father fling slop together under the sun and swap stories under the stars, and it's an odd sensation to be remembered by the imagined yes to imagine the remembered to forget the unimaginable to adore the space between the actual and the possible between the impossible and the given and it's an odd sensa-

tion to have forgotten to leave the present to have steered clear of the next as well as the recent to remember the imagined as if memory neither precedes nor follows the imagining, as if there is no lag time or as if lag time is all there is, never ending and in denial of itself my mother never makes it to my bedside, I never make it to God's, Othy dies, like most everyone, without knowing his place in the world, without, in the last moments, needing to know, the ideas of light and motion sharper than any corporeal pain, his love for Gram and for their children and for the four of us secure, the assurance of grace without the clarity of purpose, his inability, like most everyone's, to accept either his individual divinity or his mediocrity amid the contemporary and historical throngs, his faith in the moment absolute, his faith in conglomerations of moments insufficient, his trust in the parts and in the ultimate sum but not in the everyday sums of the parts, these subtotals perpetuating his melancholy, as he was aware that wisdom and happiness reside in the yet to be fully figured, the incomplete tabulations and the shifting parameters he's aware of these things he isn't dead he will be okay and we will either outlast him as authentic or be silenced as contrivance, crossing an empty field, hopes in hoods too small for infants, marking in remarkable ways about an unremarkable man I remember the time when our father was a child when he was playing on the kitchen floor while Othy cooked supper, and Othy dropped a pot of boiling water because the hotpad slipped and the metal burnt his hand and the water sloshed upon our father's foot, soaking through the dirty little sock and scalding his skin Gram was at work and Othy stood there as if his heart had suddenly been nailed to the floor for only a moment stood for a horrible moment and then sprang into motion, peeling off the sock and gathering our father into his arms and rushing down the apartment building stairs into the street to flag down a taxi to the hospital they were only second degree burns requiring bandages and salve and rebandaging and ointment and visits to the doctor to have dead skin removed and Gram likes to

tell about when they went to the doctor the first time the doctor was obviously tired he had had a difficult day from the looks of him and as Gram tells it, our father, sitting on the sanitary papered bed waiting for the doctor to unwrap his bandages and peel and cut away the damaged skin our father asked the doctor how the doctor was So, how are you doing? he asked just like that just like that So, how are you doing? and the doctor turned to look at this odd boy who asked odd questions and said Thank you for inquiring. I'm tired. It's been a long day. Now let's take a look at that foot and throughout the rest of her life Gram loved to ask strangers like waitresses or bus drivers or grocery clerks So, how are you doing? just like that with a gleam in her eye she always had that gleam in her eye it makes her the most beautiful woman in the world and I remember the time when Othy was a boy and he was helping our great-grandfather landscape the yard of their new house their newest house and he was wheeling barrows loaded with gravel down the driveway toward the corner of the yard where great-grandfather would spread it around freshly planted shrubs, and on one of these trips down the driveway with an especially hefty load the wheel hit a loose chunk of gravel and Othy lost control of it and the load dumped across the sidewalk and into the gutter and onto the edge of the street and Othy stood looking at the mess knowing his Dad had witnessed the accident knowing the only thing to do was to fetch the shovel and undo the done but he was struck by his failure his inability to accomplish the task of wheeling the barrow's load to where his Dad was waiting patient encouraging supportive the only possible judgment of failure from him would have been if Othy had quit if he hadn't reloaded the barrow with the errant gravel and seen the task through to completion to its expected end but Othy was fascinated by this shift of events this most banal twist of fate and so he our paternal grandfather as a boy had sudden comprehension an epiphany of the interstitial those spaces between signposts process as opposed to product process as product I remember when our great-grandmother was a

girl, when the world was dustier but the stars shone brighter, and she was sent by her mother to the town store one saturday morning to buy sugar and coconut for her father's birthday cake, but she didn't make it to the store that day, hasn't made it yet, won't make it anytime soon you're making this up and although her father enjoyed his cake that night (his younger daughter was sent to the neighbor's for the missing ingredients after the older daughter failed to materialize with the sugar and coconut), he marvelled at the parallels between his daughter's disappearance and a story his father's mother told him about her mother's father enough about the illusions of motion, tortoise or Achilles or hare, his daughter neither kidnapped nor abducted, not a runaway nor an Elijah nor a meeter with foul play, but merely stuck in the effort to get from one place to another all loss is thus explained and I remember when our children's children and their children's children sought the solace of adventure by reaching beyond our sun, just as our ancestors, to satisfy their desires, crossed mountain ranges and continents and oceans, while we struggle to cross a field and he struggles to cross a room as if that still matters loss and unloss are unexplainable hands in pockets, hair in hoods, the sky mute and white, our visible breath betraying our warmth, our actuality, blood under skin, lungs under sweatshirts, the likelihood of birds, winter-locked and tree-rustled, the sound of our footfalls an homage to motion and gravity, attributes of the autonomous and the imaginative, meaning rises with the day, leaves turn inside us, our memories of the unfulfilled, the given and the removed, the very matter of thought as gifts to the air I'll veer off to cross the bog, toe throbbing and mind fogged, hauling the boat of my birth from fresh to salt, back bent with personal weight, the backbone of every attribute is mercy, the equilibrium of every effort is recognized doubt crossing a room is easy crossing a room without crossing the room is hard crossing a room while pretending to not cross the room is foolish crossing a room without the room having been crossed is truth I remember a girl, bare-chested and bathed, sitting backwards

on a ladderback chair at a farmhouse window, her fairer hair still damp, her eyes staring out the window and condemning me across the fields and the centuries, forgiving me across language but not across intent, me as boy or man or concept, boyhood pillow as torso, cotton sheath, man afraid to seed, celibate rifle, the concept of masculine dominance under feminine threat, the whole of history reducible to complementary secrets, cerulean and tangerine she loves him despite and because of his desire for transcendence that stale snobbish ivory-tower quasi-spiritual God-envy urge amen and he loves her despite and because of her physically grounded wisdom her knowledge of immediate energy as opposed to his belief in everlasting stasis we should distrust someone who loves everything more than anything I (the I of this telling) understand she isn't my daughter (I never wanted a daughter), isn't my sister (my sister is brunette), isn't my lover (she isn't anyone's lover, she's too young for those tanglings), isn't my granddaughter (we don't have any grandchildren, our only son is only eleven), and yet I know her, or knew her, and loved her, without depth, I love her without depth still, not knowing her (I actually don't know her, never did and never will), and she stares at me like I don't know her but as if she knows me, as if I'm known by her, a stare of judgment with an echo of forgiveness, all the daughters and daughters of blending into whitest silence I remember the time my sister and I were playing checkers at the kitchen table in the summertime, on a hot morning, and you were shirtless and she was losing and got mad you were cheating and she threw a checker at me and I stooped to pick it up to throw it back at me and she dove for it and our hands landed together, hers upon mine, mine upon hers, hers upon mine, and when we lifted our hands, one by one, like football players being pulled off a pile, there wasn't any checker I thought you had it cupped in your palm she thought I had it cupped in my palm and I thought she had it cupped in hers but neither of us did neither of us did, and we looked under the refrigerator and the stove and the radiator with a flashlight,



and we methodically searched the whole kitchen and the adjoining living room and even one another's pockets we each thought the other was playing a trick but we never did find that checker not ever not even when we moved and she (the girl in the chair, at the window) might as easily be a photograph or a screened image or an interior scarecrow, as she never moves, not even (if I remember my imaginings correctly) to blink or swallow or breathe, her motion that of a conjured god, iconographic and parallax, and although I'm not one who has exchanged his musts for his mights, she stares at me as if I am, the rare stare of pubescent certitude, telling me that my flaws, while neither hereditary nor pathological, are irrefutable, run deep, and need absolving acknowledgment of a problem or a lack is half of its solution like when I realized my mother, as lost as that checker, wasn't going to make it to my bedside, not soon, not ever, and that I needed to dream up another like when I lost my friend to suicide and I knew I had to go visit her in her hot pig valley or when Othy come back to me, this is about me our dear grandfather understood he didn't have a daughter and wasn't ever going to have a daughter not that he ever wanted one right and although it isn't a crime not to have a daughter or a son it also isn't a crime to imagine oneself one to imagine oneself whatever one wishes to imagine oneself the country of the imagination is unassailable to uninvited intrusion now is the time and this is the space to speak of my son (our son, he isn't something I could have invented alone), the he to the author of the I, the beautiful baby boy, vulnerable in body and heart and mind and soul (invulnerable, like everyone, in spirit), more mysterious than the sum of any union (unless there is to be some ultimate unfathomable union), none of this worthy of a pat on the back, all I did was succumb to arousal, work the proper bloodflow, spurt seed, all unwittingly, knowing its potential, not knowing its eventuality, and since that split-second common miracle, all I've done is my duty, out of love for her, out of love for him, the tangible loves of my life, so much more than most are given,

pearls to a swine, she as friend and lover and collaborator, he as teacher and ballast, reasons to live, reasons to fear the mortality of others more than the mortality of self the country of the self is inaccessible even to an invited other the self isn't self-perpetuating physical conception requires two others birth, both physical and imaginative, requires only one death we can do alone

when something moves out of your sight but you know it's still there  
it isn't what you think but what you think again  
redirected light which contains a shadow from an object you can't identify  
what happens when you look down but it's too far down to look

I will now speak about those moments when something moves out of your sight but you know it's still there, hidden from you by occlusion or peripheral limitations or reformation of matter, but there nevertheless; those moments – however banal or distinct, ignored or arresting, visual or auditory, sensate or conceptual – coordinate time and space, place us in the world, contextualize us, like the assignment of a mark of punctuation in a beloved text, or the brushing of a crumb from the vicinity of a loved one's mouth, the renewal of cheekskin from the facts of eating to unsullied abstinence, addition and subtraction as manifestations of a solitary sum, the sway of a tree, the story of breathing, the wobble of this planet; our mother, my mother, made in my image, ever outside my door, a feminine Jesus, unreal and more real than saliva and so it isn't what we think but what we think again that sustains us, repetition not only as affirmation but as authenticity, from attempted sounds to perverse litany to blossomed senility, the prayer of repeated failure, mistake not compounding mistake but codifying possibility, the cauterizing of an eternal wound; genuine pain, like that emanating from a specific anatomical location, say, one's big toe, throbs because throbbing validates the pulse, the function of the heart,

its passion to persist, to do again what it just did, what it did well, or well enough, or perfectly, unrecognized perfection requesting an encore of itself; I am, I am again, I am yet again; creation in perpetual sudden recognition of itself sunlight through a window upon a surface; if I move my hand from indirect sunlight to direct sunlight, and if there exists, perhaps, a shadow cast across my knuckles, those nearest my wrist, my wrist still in shade, there will be a discernible difference in the shade most of my body inhabits and the shade of the shadow (originating from an unperceived object) across the back of my hand, across the lower knuckles of my fingers and the upper knuckle of my thumb; there must be as many varieties of absence as there are of presence; or, to put it another way, presence is the loss of absence I will now speak about what happens when you look down but it's too far down to look, or when you look up and the upness consumes your gaze and redirects it as an internal piercing, the stare into a hypothetical infinity exacting its consequence, an outstretched arm releasing from its socket, our desire to witness whelming our ability to witness, our wish to see ourselves seeing as an intolerance of position, the congruence of the having and the eating too, the coital testimony of virginal wisdom; I pull the plug and the sinkwater drains away; I cannot, do not, will not, follow; I throw a stone across a field; what awesome unaided power to hurl a significant object beyond one's gaze I will now speak about those occasions within everyone's experience when something shifts out of your sight but you know it's still there, the result of insistent motion, yours, or the things, or both yours and the things, the persistent calibrations of spatial relationships, the lifelong assignment of honing your craft as a truster, as one who has drafted and redrafted trust, a thousand drafts with refinements and renewals and relinquishments, desperately planning to get it right the next time even as you offer up a prayer to be allotted (ahead of time) at least one more chance after that and so it isn't what we think but what we think again that sustains us, the cyclical rethinking of the rethinking, not

augering into the tether but stressing the centrifugal integrity of its rope, with measured or frantic strain, a moon recalculating, with every revolution, its chances of breaking free of its planet I will lie down in sunshine, in full-throated operatic sunlight, my chest bare in my own public privacy, the shadow from something unidentifiable slanting across my midriff; I'll lie still and concentrate on the cooler skin, then the warmer skin, then my discernment of the two, focusing on the transitional space between where the temperature of the direct sunlight builds and where the adjoining shaded skin stays cool, this transitional area altering slowly and inexorably as either the unidentifiable obstruction shifts or as the earth revolves, my transferring concentration from hot skin awaiting the approaching shadow to shaded skin awaiting direct sunlight I have no desire to dwell upon what happens when you look down but it's too far down to look, a well of time bored through a planet and thus negating its opposing gravitational pulls if I were to admit to being (someday soon or in the great by and by) – a commitment, ideally, of heroic proportions, one for the ages; or when I at last submit to being (through the narrow gate of utter conviction) – a submission with innocence as its spark, accountability as its flame, and forgiveness as its ash, I will be a reckoning force, I'll tap my strength from the veryest source: now that I admit to being (in this unbecoming age of been) – an admission costing me but a fearful man's dream of phantomhood – I won't tolerate false witness, I won't abide agenda'd testimony, I won't lie with diseased language in the hyperbolic beds of nostalgia, propoganda, comedy; what I won't do will hurt me, but I won't do it nonetheless, as this is my entertainment and my creed, won'ting around the clock, out of stubbornness if my faith wavers, out of intuition if my discipline lags, will notting sunup to sundown to sunup, my heart wide awake and my mind laser tight, I will make light by the eternal spiral