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In Different Tongues

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A Thesis

in

The Department

of

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ABSTRACT

In Different Tongues

Daegan Fryklind

Set during the summer season on Santorini, In Different Tongues chronicles the fate of one woman, one dog. Upon the death of her aunt Astrid, Kate, alone and confused, travels to Greece to join her boyfriend Thom. Soon after Kate arrives in the main town of Thira, her life begins to erode: her relationship with Thom meets an abrupt end; her subsequent affair with a French marine biologist is cut short when a lost whale is spotted in the port two islands away. At the heart of the novel is Kate's failing trust in words, her memories of her mother's voice box, and her unspoken bond with the stray dog Kyno. When Kyno's body is discovered in a dumpster on the outskirts of town, Kate can no longer stifle the changes which have been taking place: as language withers, Kate gives up the rush of memory, the human race.

Good words should get their goodness from our lives
and no where else; the evil we do should show,
a rottenness that festers in our speech
and what we say, incapable of being glozed
with a film of pretty words.

-Euripedes, Hecuba

How do you move in a world of fog
That's always changing things
Makes me wish that I could be a dog

-Tom Waits



Consider the things that have been sent into space: dogs, monkeys, humans, words. Shuttled to the stars to represent life on earth, progression. Jettisoned in order of importance. Dogs. Monkeys. Humans. And where we could not send carbon life we sent words, caught up on carbon tape, chronicling our existence, calling out into the black.

The Russian dog, Laika, pilot of Sputnik 2, was sent up for eight days with only a week's worth of oxygen. On the eighth day, Laika received her last ration of breathable air, then slipped into a nap which lasted forever. Sputnik 2 was destroyed upon re-entry into the atmosphere, the flaming wreckage perhaps mistaken for a shooting star by those unknowing spectators who viewed the explosion in the night sky.

Imagine the ride from Laika's perspective: nose pressed to the pane as the world pulled away, the force of being rent from this earth, the vertical catapultion into an area of little interest. The arced trajectory of the body, dew claw caught in the buckle. The grey of the world. The grey of space. The arced trajectory of the body.

Kyno's body carved a perfect arc through the air when the port police pulled her from the back of the truck, hands grasped her pasterns before the

toss, the perfect toss which lit her into the air. Sent her body through air, fur ruffling with the motion, and then the thud of her limbs against the dead steel of the dumpster. Followed by the flick of an expired cigarette, their laughter.

That sent me from the villa, sent me to the bus depot with Leone and Bess holding my bags, passing them to the boy on the roof of the bus and the wave through dirty plate glass as they backed up the path to the White Palace, the glow of neon lost in the intensity of daylight. I could still picture Leone's wink, her charged grin. Still felt the warmth of Bess' forehead on my shoulder. And when they turned, faced away from the bus and me, I climbed off through the back door. Ran barefoot to the caves, the empty spaces between the villa and the cement factory. Unloaded Thom's stolen cutlery from my pockets. His words about accepting the loss as best I could, that nothing I did or said could change the facts, that under the circumstances the logical course was resignation. Now waiting for Sirius to appear again in the night sky, the slow shift from day-blue to concealing black once the fluxing firmament holds both the sun and the moon upon its arced surface.

Shift. Flux. Such things seem natural when viewed over the course of time. The appendix, wisdom teeth, the little nails on baby toes. These are losing importance; they are being eliminated by our efficient genetic codes. The definitions which used to separate "lie" from "lay" are collapsing to the point where these are interchangeable; I can still distinguish "lie with" from "lie to", though it doesn't seem to matter any more, not as much as the gnawing in my belly, the throes of my thumbs.

There is still one memory which I don't want to relinquish, so distant now that it could have been real or imagined, my life or one of those on celluloid: the girl was eight years old, possessed all her adult teeth, the runt of

the second grade. Her voice spoke like a fist punching through her diaphragm, as if her tiny frame would implode unless the sound could escape. And so she, above all loose-toothed others, was chosen as narrator for the class Christmas play. Night after night she forewent television to practice her lines, "There was a match-box girl, an urchin..." She imagined the match-box girl as a sea-creature, purple spikes moving with the flow of the tides; said the word over and over until it lost its meaning, became a sound which didn't require much of the mouth, produced by a slight movement of the tongue.

She stood, in a new rose-coloured dress, at the front of the stage while her classmates acted out the story of the match-box girl. She was oblivious to them, living only in the words. Her voice boomed over the heads of gushing parents and distracted siblings. She could not see them. The stage lights screamed down on her. The room for her was only that, lights and language; she had faith in those things.

Outside, the city was lost in the cold white.

I spoke too late.

Mother said I was waiting for the right word of entry into the speaking world. That had to be the reason, for each speech therapist found nothing wrong with me physically: the voice box was formed correctly, the muscles of the throat, tongue, everything was built for speech. But I wouldn't even make gurgling noises, goochigoo insights, dadadadada and the like.

I don't remember any of this. At the point where my memory begins, I was speaking, trying to soothe mother's pain with stories about my day at school while Flyk ran in lapdog circles on the duvet:

"...and then Chad stood at the front of the class and peed his pants. I saw the wetness slide down each corduroy ditch..."

But she wouldn't laugh. The cancer had eaten up her throat; when she laughed it hurt, made a hacking sound. And when she held the buzzer to her larynx, to that hole there, all her words sounded the same, constructed from the same staccato morphemes. Her throat could not produce the spectrum of noise, could not translate the sounds made with the tongue; when she called my name it was no longer Kate but Kae. And the dog was Fly. Still, mother spoke in cackles, words coughed up like the cancer itself.

I try not to remember any of this. Memory should begin at the moment of greatest joy, but still I recall hiding in red-osier dogwood with Flyk, hiding from the microphoned voice, and wishing I could have been somewhere else, something else. We started digging in the soil and found a full potato and a plastic decoder ring. Pink, with half of the band broken off, so it was really not a ring at all, though the decoder face was still intact.

Mother's last words were moans, silent moans. I could have heard them if she had the strength to hold the buzzer to her throat. She had said my first word was "Argentina", and I was pointing at the davenport when I said it.

Memory should begin at the moment of greatest joy, and yet I have these recollections.

There was a moment of such silence, such momentum as that plane descended from the black to the Balkan tarmac below. Silence not because I needed to lay down my sleep encrusted mind or because of the lack of iron in my blood, but because of the terror and bliss that kept the adrenaline crashing

in my fingertips, that kept me awake despite dream build-up like a murmuring heart behind my open eyes.

That was my arrival in Greece, or rather into the air above Greece. The birthplace of most structures known to me. The lights of the unknown city approached. I hungered for everything I could imagine – raw tomatoes with the thick skin peeled back, braided slippers for my swollen feet, horse breath on my shoulders, Thom's shadow intersecting mine on cobblestone paths. I hungered for a padded mattress overlooking the overgrown ruins of bath houses. For the voice to ask for such things. Contentment. Fulfillment. I knew already that I had packed the wrong shoes.

The city was unbetrayed by its darkness. Pictures from history texts rushed through my mind. A group of lights illuminated something of importance, the Acropolis, or the headlights of taxis rounding a square. And then the only lights became those directing our plane down to tangibility again.

The seat belt light flashed on, flashed, hands clasped, pushed together the metal, wheels appeared, propulsion of the plane slowed, raced, sped to the tarmac, to the soil, to the line of lights that directed us from the sky to life again. And Thom, in his twilight hour suit, somewhere in the Aegean.

Perhaps it was that I knew I was leaving Victoria for the endless space of the prairies. But when I happened to reach for my jacket from the chair's back in the university cafeteria, I saw Thom's face, his unaverted gaze. He smiled and mouthed "hello". A first word, a salutation, a calling over, unvoiced and somehow precise, as if it meant more than a simple greeting, as if it contained all within two stark syllables. Though I suppose any word

would have worked just as well after the news of my aunt's health: "lemon", "because", "cognac". I walked right over, sat, and said, "I have to move to Calgary." He said nothing, though I could see he was running his tongue over his teeth; he traced his fountain pen nib along the cuticle of my thumb.

Perhaps it was that I knew I had to leave, and that he would spend the summer in Greece. Such things liberate the mind, the body, allow for a simple stranger to enter a life, to move a chair into an otherwise unfurnished room and sit. Still, when I met Thom, I permitted our progression, assumed I could spin on one heel and move on, could leave him behind and forget altogether, as I had done with previous lovers. Assumed I could recreate my life, my self in another city; as though it was easier to accommodate change than the possibility of love, of uncontrollable circumstances. And my prairie aunt was dying.

Thom had grown up on the prairies, knew the depths of oil wells and more than five words for snow. I learned these things while I learned his middle names, collar size, and bruises, so that I would feel prepared again for when I left Vancouver Island and travelled down a crow's nested highway. So far inland that I was beyond the sea smells and kelp imaginings, the things I had grown accustomed to for a second time. I left behind secret caves on washed-out beaches for "wash me" etched in the dust on rusted American prairie automobiles. And I left the Island and the rain, Thom's resentment for the move I was making -- closer down the couch, farther across the country, closer on the inside of my stomach. Was that the location of love? Not the heart, for it was my stomach that was most affected by his presence. My stomach, my palms, my clitoris, my scraped shin where he wiped me out on my bike as if we were kids in elementary school. My shoulders when he kissed them. This had never happened before. He tossed that stick and I

chased it into the water for all I was worth, even though I couldn't swim; and then he tried to teach me how to paddle, to keep my head in air.

On the side of the highway, buying black cherries to fuel my trip further east, I had caught the speck of flight in air, or perhaps wished I had, wished I had made some communion such as seeing Thom's plane overhead on the day of his departure for London. On the ground, a convoy of Safeway trucks rolled past as I spat my cherry pit in the direction of the oil-drum garbage near the front of the fruit stand, wasps hovering in the Okanagan heat.

But after I arrived in Calgary, I found that the Blackfoot land of my habitation held no marine life outside of the fishbowl in which I walked, all faces staring with prairie short-sightedness at the morose expression on my face. The expanse was overwhelming. On melting days I would drop a pencil on a map and just drive to the place where the lead pointed, losing myself in space. I could drive as far as the day was long and more. But I couldn't drive to Thom.

The pilot's voice interrupted on the PA system: Athens was here. A lifetime away, anyway. It seemed like a lifetime since staring into those full eyes that I so wanted to empty. It was only a month before that he passed a shaven cheek over my own, that I heard his words whispered in my ear, "Please follow if you can." We had both thought that I would have been with my aunt for months, drawing out the progress of death. Instead of the city holding midnight movies in run-down theatres and bottled beer on rooftops, my reality for that short time was the round-the-clock death watch in my aunt's hospital room. I had realized during nights spent in the sterile room

that I missed certain aspects of him: perfectly flossed teeth, bony boy wrists, a preference for stout.

When, on a sweltering Alberta afternoon, the pencil landed on the town where he had touched a dinosaur bone as a child, I drove there and took a photo of the grain elevator rising from the passive earth like an oracle, then just sat on the side of the road watching dusty trucks pull into town. By the time I returned to my aunt's home, his letter had arrived in the day's mail from a Soho pub, written on the backs of rave pamphlets, lager spill included. He'd stolen the in-flight blanket and slipped honeyed peanut packages into his pockets, just in case. Included were words that we were reading the same Russian novel despite the distance between our hands.

I passed untouched, unquestioned through customs and found myself in the Athens airport. Empty, sterile. Outside, crowds of waiting relatives pressed themselves towards the doors, guards held them back. An aging man in white pushed a drying mop over spotless linoleum as if trying to wipe the place from the face of the city.

I found the women's bathroom and washed my face, pulled a wet toothbrush over my teeth, changed my clothes. It was Saturday night and I had been in flight since Friday afternoon. Been in the same clothes since then, could trace my journey by the stains on my t-shirt: the lounge beer from the Calgary airport, the tartar sauce from the fish at Gatwick, the orange "drink" spilled during the bus trip to Heathrow. Those things, like a map pointing east, then just a touch south to a new space, a familiarity to which I yearned to return. I would not have come to Greece had it not been for Thom. Had it not been for Thom, the silence of the phone, the limp arugula, the money left to me by my aunt, the six dead swallows in the garage nest, the

uselessness of a degree in linguistics, the empty apple-juice container in the stark white fridge.

One evening, when we had just met, he had pulled out an atlas, pointed to a speck in the blue and said, "This summer, I want to go there." He tossed back the rest of his wine. I cannot mark the exact point that I felt his hands dive beneath my skin and extract my crumbling beliefs in a life of solitude, but the moment itself remains vivid; the smell of chickpeas frying in ghee and the circling squeak of a mother pushing a baby carriage out front of the apartment. The bees nested next to the kitchen window tapped the glass with their determined foreheads, trying to penetrate the sweet peas vased on the inside sill, dozy in the afternoon heat. And the distant barking of a large dog, which died out at the precise moment that Thom leaned forward over the open page and kissed my open mouth, him tasting sharply of Dijon mustard.

His face had lost resonance by the time I reached Calgary. There was a dimple below an eye, a scar on an elbow, and the smell of mesquite in his jacket for days after returning home from nights beneath tree branches, me baying for the rain to stop, Sirius' return to the day sky. There was an outline in my mind, like a halo around his body, backlit; the inside was dark, featureless. But there was an outstretched hand, beckoning, a deer bone balanced on his palm. This was what it was like when someone close died, the face began to disappear not long after the body had been buried, leaving only a few distinct markers. Before mother died, it had only been elderly relatives whom I knew mostly by smell, the smell of dour flesh and sugared breath, but not by anecdote or even by voice. And then there was my aunt, who had filled me as a child on summer Sundays with homemade pear nectar, the pulp so thick it was as if the stone had been ground in. Her body

was hardly recognizable to me when I found her in the hospital, bloated as it was with the sewer-fluids of her intestine, her body a cloaca of human waste. Her hair, which she had always kept in a neat bun, remained unwashed and scattered on her stiff pillow.

I had tried so hard to remember Thom's face, every feature in accord, every bone and lash symmetrical to those on his living skull. But it was an impossibility, and I was left with a face reft of detail. A visage visited by the tip of a nose but no bridge, an earring or two, a set of perfectly straight white teeth. I had sequestered myself in the confines of my aunt's dilapidated darkroom, the remnants of her only foray into adult education classes, and burnt Thom's face into emulsion, fixed an impression on paper. Three separate photos capturing only three differing expressions from a repertoire of thousands: Thom on a hilltop, supine at the base of an arbutus tree, clad in second-hand clothing and the socks of an unpleasant person, the tanned arms of the tree holding the sun in place; Thom in his bedroom, pulling on his worn suede jacket, though I can't remember where we were going; Thom lost in the aisles of a Victoria bookstore, wooden planks stretching out beneath his feet, leading the eye from fiction to history, him engrossed in the *Alexandria Quartet*. I remember that he called me over, was glared at by the cashier, and read me a passage about the quality of light in Greece. I imagined it would be like viewing the world through an inflated blue balloon or through the bottom of a pop bottle, all vision distorted by the heat of the place, the lack of shade, the diesel, the diesel.

This was the first smell that came through the expanse of the airport on that Sunday morning, the stench of taxis idling outside the doors, waiting to whisk anyone away. It was a smell that was edible, thick and metallic, lingering at the back of the throat where tongue meets nasal passage. There

were no longer any crowds outside the front windows of the airport, no one waiting for a lone Canadian who had travelled two days to arrive at this bus stop, waiting patiently for the next leg of this journey.

There were still necks that I wanted to taste, lovers that I needed to wake up with, tongue into morning breath, smooth hands down smooth chest. There were still zippers, buttons, laces. I still craved the awkwardness of first mornings spent together, first showers, first times mouths roamed down skin. I still needed my navel filled with the million thumbs of unknown hands. Nipples of shapes, sizes, colours; I had sometimes seen chests with more than two -- and I wanted to possess these. There was still a need to extract plasma through swollen lips with teeth, to shave clean points both convex and concave, to drill inside cavities and live there for 13 hours or until the house cleaned itself. Newspapers could stack themselves outside the apartment door, mail could go unopened, the answering machine could record itself over, and I would not be saved until I was spent.

My need for Thom did not fit in this equation. But there are always two realities to life: the one we foresee, and the one we experience.

My first experience with the quality of light in Greece: it was not at all the balloon or bottle bottom I had expected, but a clarity and haziness in one motion. A simple glass of water on an outside tabletop seemed more real than ever, more perceptible, and I could almost distinguish each particular atom making up its structure; yet, I may have under or overestimated the distance when reaching for a drink. This may have just been my state of

mind -- tired, slightly nauseous, filled with blood like mercury. I could feel it moving through me, heart kicking like a dreaming dog.

Thom had no idea that I was already in Greece. For all he knew I was still asleep, tucked away in the foothills of the Rockies dreaming of Athens, rather than standing in front of its airport, climbing on a bus bound for Syntagma Square. And he was waking on his island in the Cyclades, feeling this same sun sneak through drawn curtains. We were in the same time zone; we shared constellations. The air that I breathed was that same concoction of dead soldiers' limbs and cedar roots as that which filled his lungs four thousand times per day. I knew then that it would only be a matter of time before we shared flesh, shared fluid.

The bus driver directed me to the metro, a short walk, he said, down a hill from the square. The city began to wake as I walked; rugs were shaken from windows, water splashed down from overfilled flower pots, and somewhere in the maze of streets someone was pushing a cart with a poorly-oiled wheel. And everywhere was the garbage, piled off the streets and into vacant doorways, waiting to be swept up into stinking trucks. At one heap, a nappy dog sniffed at an open paper bag, turned, and lifted one leg to urinate on the mound, marked this spot as his own. I whistled. The dog noticed me and came over to smell my open palm: toothpaste, soap, the faintness of fish and chips, a short lifetime waiting to be beckoned somewhere, the fake leather casing of a fresh passport, adrenaline, a liking for Russian novels, etymologies, Canadian beer, detergent, deodorant. A grin, and we continue towards the metro, him pausing every so often to spray a selected column or crevice.

At one empty intersection, I looked into the sky and saw the Acropolis gleaming in the morning sun. The dog seemed unimpressed by the

magnitude of the building, its endless appearance in coffee-table books. Instead, he spotted a mouse and chased it from one gutter to another, then lost faith in his own speed and resumed our walk.

The road spilled out onto the Plaka, and a few dealers were setting up their stalls. I purchased bottled water and a folding knife for fruit, splinters, bread, stubborn corks. I asked the vendor for directions to the metro; he pointed behind me. When I turned, I saw the gaping relic, leading down into the earth, more a catacomb than a metro stop. It was not yet eight in the morning, and so my passage to Piraeus was free.

This is all I knew, all I'd been told: take the airport bus to Syntagma Square, find the metro, get to Piraeus, catch a boat to Santorini, wait in the main square of Thira by the American Express office until he arrives to find me. He said he would start to look on Tuesday. A few directions to lead me from one continent to another, from there to here and to here again. "Here" changed by the second -- a metro platform, a padded seat in motion, a shipyard station, a dock. Ticket in hand, feet on cement, I faced the last stretch of loneliness.

But this much I thought was for sure: when I saw Thom I would sink my teeth into the curvature of his ass. I would burst open the self-inflicted social infibulation I had subjected myself to since leaving his side, those one-sided conversations sewn in on themselves. My bones would quake with the sonic boom of our meeting, and a single word slipping past his tongue would induce vertigo, countered only by the intoxicating dosage of motion-sickness patches secured on the soft, fleshy spots behind each ear. I would fall in on his umber arms, lighter underneath, yet still darker than mine. And his incessant fingers would find their way into my greasy hair, pulling back till my chin fit neatly into the hollow where clavicle met sternum. Bones would

melt, molars would decay, fingernails would paint themselves black over and black; and when we stood naked in a white-washed room, carved icons looking on, the walls would sweat calcium, and each year would gain three seconds.

Flyk ran faster when someone clapped for her, tore around the corners of the house with the added stimulus of applause. She was a Kleenex box cover, a child's sleepytime stuffy. I could pick her up with one hand and slot her under my arm for safe keeping, hide her in the clothes dryer or the soup tureen. The size of dog most people hate. Her burred fur smelled of dandelion milk, her breath of balsa wood.

A cloud of flies hovered in the passenger entrance to boat #8 -- the *Parhelion*, bound for the Cyclades. In my hands was a gastronomical discovery which smelled of warm comforts and down quilts - mushroom pie. I found a third-class seat in a stifling room and satiated this hunger. It was Campbell's cream soup wrapped in filo, lukewarm enough for me to lick the overflow from my fingers. I should have bought more than one, but my stomach was already filled with memory, exhaustion, the exhaust of a thousand diesel engines.

Someone asked if I knew when the boat was leaving. They might have been Australian, this shining couple in cottons so clean and pressed. They sat across from me; the wife set up a pillow and tried to sleep. I told them it would leave at eight. The husband asked if I was American; I asked if they were Australian. They were from Wellington.

They were going to Naxos, I could see this on their tickets. I asked if it was their honeymoon. The husband said it had to do with love. He wondered if I was travelling alone, and I told him I was meeting Thom. As I searched the lexicon I realized that none of the words seemed appropriate: boyfriend, lover, partner, mate. There was a gap where Thom's synonym should have been. Like the word that doesn't exist which would explain the reaction of flesh when you dive into a cold lake; like the expression that describes the smell of a dog's paw. All clarity was lost in approximation, sliding us down metonymical snakes, up metaphorical ladders, but always away from the desired square. The wife had fallen asleep. There was a rash on her face shaped like a butterfly across her nose; it was as if a red monarch had rested on her nose, spread its wings down onto her cheeks. The husband explained to me that this was their last big trip, that his wife wanted to sit on a beach somewhere far from home. That they went to numerous travel agencies, but when Miriam saw the pictures of Santorini, she knew that was it. That Miriam had lupus. Lupus erythematosus.

I nodded as if I knew what it was, though I didn't; only the roots of the words: wolves ripping into bloody flesh. I realized then that I had not seen any pictures of Santorini, outside of the green half-moon of the island on Thom's map, highlighted by the half-moon of white fingernail pointing to the paper sea nearby. ("This summer...", he had said.) I did not know what to expect, and so I envisioned Santorini as lush, with grape vines hanging down the sides of mosaiced buildings; children with olive skin and olives in their mouths running shoeless after donkey-drawn carts filled with spring apples and figs; open doorways revealing dozing pantries and occupied beds; finches in branches fighting over shade. Thom and I enclosed in our cool room, entangled in afternoon napping, bellies filled with tomatoes. I imagined 1289

shades of green, 14 degrees of shade from the sun, forest moss carpeting everything, negating the need for shoes.

Miriam awoke then to swallow a pill, and I wondered how many dead were in this sea. How many sailors, sinners, were caught in the eternal ebb and flow beneath the surface, bones crossing the distance between islands with the current. And what treasures were to be found there: trunks pried open to reveal the conscious values of a long time past. If the Parhelion were to sink, I would surely have joined the ranks of the dead; unable to swim, I could only dog paddle to my destiny.

I fell asleep when all I could see was the blue sea of Thom's map.

When I had first arrived in Calgary, I drove straight from the highway to the hospital, crossing the bridge over the Bow River in slow-motion, waiting for the troll or a toll-booth to stop me before I reached the other side. Hoping for anything to stop me before reaching that cloistered room on the sixth floor.

There she was, skin distended, pulled full, eye holes puckered in the abundance of flesh. I almost didn't recognize her, was transfixed instead by a jar on the wall, filled with what looked like liquid abalone. I would later learn that these were the contents of her lungs, pumped out twice a day into this jar, then just left on the wall like some sort of bodily show-and-tell.

My aunt's breathing came in rhythmic rasps. And when I touched her fingers, she did not wake. I held her bloated extremity in my own bony hand; her skin was that of an alcoholic, though she never drank even sacramental wine. I could still picture her hands the way they had been: slightly dusted with flour, rolling meatballs between full palms.

Her small intestine had erupted while I was in transit from Victoria. It was all part of an ongoing process; the linings of organs corroding from use, like leather soles on slippers finally giving way to wooden floors, wearing through to the cold of kitchen linoleum.

Once daily, I would drop a pencil on a map to escape for a few hours. Twice daily, I would make trips back to my aunt's bungalow in the south of the city, pick the dead heads of azaleas from her garden, straighten the small wooden cross under the rhubarb leaves, and occasionally report to neighbours on the progress of death.

"They're trying to take her teeth now," I said.

"You can't let them. She never sees people without her dentures."

"But they worry she'll choke."

And so it became a discussion on which type of death was more appropriate: elongated and undignified, or choking on one's pride. Everyone wanted the teeth to stay. And so they remained, clacking in her mouth, slipping from her gums when she sighed.

Mother could have changed, should have at least changed her habit. Instead, she continued to smoke even after they carved another hole in her, continued to draw nicotine air in through the gap. It never puckered, never smiled; it remained a shocked "O" when it was exposed, and probably still when covered over by white gauze. When I got close enough, I could smell the cancer inside. Could I have fit three fingers in there, Flyk's tail, or one of the robin's eggs I had found in the backyard? Her only voiced regret was that she could no longer sing while washing dishes – not to be heard, anyway.

The boat made it as far as Naxos before the storm began, and so we spent the night in the small port, rain sliding in under the doors, leaking through the poorly caulked windows. The strings of patio lights hung in front of port cantinas swung wildly in the wind, looking like illuminated clogs on a clothesline. Shutters were pulled closed and closed again, latched into place from inside the cement houses.

A young soldier who had boarded at Paros, dressed in olive green, shared the short bench with me. His head rested on my shoulder, arm curled under mine. He tried to talk to me at first, but had only three words in English (hello, thank-you, and toilets), and could not find an interpreter. And so he contented himself by showing me objects: a photo of his mother (I assumed), a breast medal for some military effort, a tattoo of the Greek flag on his left shoulder -- the blue almost faded back to olive skin -- and his new Walkman, which held the cassette of a band located not far from Victoria, just across the water, across the border. I wanted to tell him that if I were back on that coast and climbed onto a ferry, I would reach the front doorstep of that singer in a few hours. But how could I explain that with only hello, thank-you, and toilets. All I knew were the roots of ancient Greek words, the building blocks, but I couldn't construct the whole, could only draw the branches of the family tree, connect blame with phoneme, chthonic with humidior, eugenic, and cosmogony.

And so, when his head fell to rest gently on my shoulder, I couldn't explain Thom to him -- Thom, who lacked definition anyway. We both slept like that, arms tangled to keep us warm, smelling strongly of basil and aftershave. Whispering stories to me in a language I would never understand.

In the morning, when we awoke, he left to comb down his hair, which had fanned up in the back overnight. I didn't expect him to return to this small bench, but he returned within minutes. The boat was back on the open sea, braving the waves, pulling us closer to Santorini. The soldier sat next to me and taught me a few words.

Hello was *Yahsoo*. *Teekanees* was some other greeting which he couldn't explain. Thank-you was *efkhareesto*; please and you're welcome were both *parakahlo*. Yes was *neh*, and no was something that sounded like okay, which was confusing.

Greek demands that the tongue makes use of space. He even grabbed for my mouth at one point, pushed my tongue into place against the roof of my mouth, then said the word again (*-kahleemerah*), but with his garlicky fingers in my mouth, my attempts to repeat the word merely resulted in garble: *khleemnn*. He laughed and released my mouth from his language.

My aunt awoke only once during the time that I spent in the hospital; she beat the morphine for only a few seconds before falling back again into the wave of the drug. Her eyes, filled with the corrupting fluids which were corroding her insides, seemed out of focus as she looked up. Her dentures were slightly askew in her mouth, clicking in and out of place. Her inhale and exhale were both the sound of water on the boil. Then, I think she winked at me. She did wink, I just think it was at me, though it may have been dust in her eye or a flinch from pain. I hope she winked at me, because I winked back, and smiled, as if something known had passed between us. I would feel like a fool if it had just been a wince, if her last thoughts had been occupied by my youthful stupidity.

I had driven to Bragg Creek on that day, inspected snowshoes in the general store, and sampled buffalo jerky, which I ended up sharing with an overzealous Irish setter chained to the front porch.

When I had returned to my aunt's, there were two messages on the machine: my Seattle cousins, wondering; and someone from the hospital telling me to come.

Thom called three days after the funeral, after I had spent the evening playing Doris Day on the Victrola. Through the crackling line he told me that he was in Thira, finally, after delays in London and Athens. He was running out of money, was searching for a job, which looked promising. He said that he missed the sound of my voice.

"Auntie Astrid died on Thursday."

"Oh, I'm sorry. Are you okay?"

"I don't know what to do now."

"Are you going back to Victoria?"

"I don't think I have the energy. I need to leave. She left me some money, not much, but enough for a plane ticket out of here. Maybe I can follow after all."

"Yah, sure, that would be, that would be great."

Within a week, I too was gone, having obtained my passport, packed those items necessary for the resurrection or re-creation of my life: t-shirts we had shared, aspirin, a poster ripped from a downtown billboard, the Russian novel he had bought for me, my dictionary. The rest was secondary, arbitrarily thrown into a blue backpack; all my other belongings left to be packed into storage with my aunt's tea cozies and tattered tablecloths.

It was late morning by the time the boat entered the cauldron of the island, the bay surrounded by crescents of land. It had not yet occurred to me that I had reached my destination. My head floated in the thick air, my hands were bloated from poor circulation; it seemed as if all of my blood was frozen in my chest cavity, afraid to resume the flow in case that would let me know I was human, alive.

The lupus husband turned out to be a geophysicist, explained to me that the island was a stronghyle. I thought he was saying "strange isle" until he spelled it out. It used to be perfectly round, he said, until the volcano erupted. He grinned when he saw me pull out my dictionary.

The closest was *strongyle* - a type of nematode worm which lived as a parasite in animals. When I looked up Santorini, all I could find was *santonin*: a compound made from wormwood used as a vermifuge. *Vermifuge*: used to expel worms and other parasites from the intestinal tract. In this way, the definition seemed to work: the vermifuge volcano of the island destroyed the whole, leaving only the few bits of earth like dead worms floating on the sea, surrounding the centre.

The town of Thira hung from the side of the cliff, overflowing in white lather, suds over the side of the bathtub. I believed Thom and I would soon be washed clean again, if I could find him in the town, surprise him with my early arrival.

The soldier slipped an orange into my open palm before the boat docked at the old port. He beckoned to me to share his cab to the town; the taxi pulled itself up the steep hill leading away from the port. The dashboard was covered with religious icons, chains of worry beads were strung from the rear-view mirror. The soldier and driver animated their conversation with saliva, hand gestures.

Outside, the land sighed in the heat. There were few trees, little shade, two hues of green and a thousand of brown.

And Thom, how would I find Thom...the cabby said to walk -- start at the top of town and walk till the end. Maybe I'd have luck, maybe not. When we reached the main square of Thira, I climbed over the lap of the soldier, thanked him (*efkhareesto*), pulled my backpack from the trunk of the taxi. And found myself emplaced in the square, limbs drowsy from the journey, backpack cutting the circulation to my extremities. The pack (my dictionary, my shampoo, my spare bra) was checked in at the counter at American Express. My fingers had just enough feeling to punch in a few numbers; after two rings, the automated recording came on:

The number you have reached is not in service. Please try again...

I found myself whispering into the line, letting the voice become a blur of words. I made it, I said, then lied. Thom is standing right here. He was waiting for me all morning.

Then I hung up, closed the connection across distance and time. It would be another eight hours before Astrid's vacant house passed through that minute, saw the clock's hand click into place.

Consider the fact that there is more than one death, more than just the moment when the physical ceases to function.

A laughing girl ran out from the narrow path into the main square of Thira. She was a white butterfly, spiralling between the passing cars until she crossed the street, dust clinging to her dress, her face, but not her eyes. They

were closed, eyelids reflecting the morning sun. I wanted to show her Thom's photo, but the one I brought looked nothing like him. Chameleon. Him resting under the Arbutus tree. It held the best memories, though his face was unrecognizable in the shade. I wanted to hustle it up to her like a milk carton photo of a lost child, an expression of want on my brow - help me find him, 'cause I'm tired. But the girl was gone then, no, in line at the kiosk for cigarettes. She was tossed up in the air by an older man, perhaps her father. He took the tobacco and slotted it into his chest pocket, under a fraying brown vest. Pushed grey hair back, slung the butterfly over his shoulder and crossed back to the narrow path. The sun almost overhead. There was a solitary orange pulp in my mouth which I rolled with my tongue, careful not to explode it, but then the sweet shock of juice was there and gone.

25th Martiou stretched to a blank point, to where the buildings thinned out to reveal a main pathway which led back through the villas that hung on the side of the cliff. In each yard was a cat, sunning itself on the patio. There were other cats, drawing back into the cover of bushes along the path. From this vantage point on the hill, I could see the still-steaming crater in the centre of the bay; the ten thousand stairs which led from the town down the side of the cliff to a small port, traversed by men on donkeys' backs; the large orthodox church at the far end of town, adjacent to a building which advertised Palace in neon. To describe anything as white would be redundant; all doors, walkways, walls, rooftops were painted in the same hazy glow, as if this place had frozen over.

Or as if it had been cleansed, or bled.

A stray dog scratched his back against the doorway to a Jazz bar, saw me and came over to sniff my pant leg. I continued to walk the path downhill, and he followed. I considered pausing, petting, rubbing the point where

rump met tail, where the fur was matted with filth. But we were content enough to walk together; he pulled into my moving shade from time to time. I could feel the heat of the cement through my thin-soled shoes, and wished for the thick pads of a dog's paw, for the hirsute relief from the heat.

We rested for a moment at the funicular entrance and watched the cable cars rise and descend from the old port. I could see the staircase which wound down, stones inlaid as a pseudo-spine, holding the town in place on its shoulders. I couldn't see Thom, just a remembrance of a jaw bone, an earring. A glint of silver in recollection.

From the funicular the town spread out in a labyrinth of pathways, vines drawing the eye in numerous directions, each holding the potential of reconciliation with Thom, or of no potential at all. To choose any one would mean circling back and back ad infinitum, retracing thin-soled steps when what I really needed was sleep. To curl up in all my manginess and let the sun justify my aversion from the brilliance of sunlight, my need for screen.

On our first night in Victoria, the scratch test had been this: Thom's nails over my skin, and no negative reaction. Not even the line turned red, though before I had posited samples from numerous lovers on notches scraped into my arm with a wooden tongue depressor. All had resulted in inflammation. I was sensitive to other things: his hand on my thigh, his lashes on my wrist. Anaphylaxis leading to shock. Our fatty acids and proteins pulling in the dust and pollen from our hair, the fever generating 180 degrees of torque in the bedsheets. I had been allergic to camel's hair and eggs, and so he coated me in harem blankets and poured hollandaise into my throat so that I might breathe him in for vitality.

We should have measured our height then. Splayed out our bodies on the hard-wood floor and converted our selves to numbers and decimal points. But any splaying of our bodies led to calculations of the sum of our parts. I wanted it only to mark change, but change is so often problematic: I'd be sad if he had shrunk, and jealous if he'd grown without me.

I wasn't asleep, not really, just resting on the ledge of the planter in front of the American Express office. The sun burned into my eyelids, leaving spots in the darkness, not yet falling behind the low buildings even though the day was growing late.

I forced myself to sit up, pull dust from my eyes, gaze up at the horizonless sky. I measured the distance up 25th Martiou to the hostel, wondered if my legs could endure the climb. My mouth tasted of chicken though I hadn't eaten anything since the orange.

A bus to Oia passed through the square, crammed with workers returning home after changing bed sheets, frying potatoes for tourists. The bus passed and I followed it up the hill with my eyes, watching it disappear behind the dust cloud it created.

When I looked back at the alley, I saw Thom.

I thought maybe it was a lie, my mind was fooling me, after sitting in the heat, lack of sleep, I rubbed my eyes to see if his face would remain. But he was still there, still across the street, and then he saw me too, mouthed my name in such a way that I knew it was a question rather than a statement.

And for that moment, I felt more connected to the cement planter on which I sat, I could feel its solidity beneath me, believe in its presence. Thom was a mirage.

I stood and he crossed the street, face in disbelief as was mine. Then his arms were around me, pulling me back to a place I had forgotten existed, a smell of soap and raw onions, of freshly cut lawns. The skin beneath his t-shirt was wet. He tried to kiss me, but I looked down and he ended up awkwardly kissing my eyebrow.

Oh Kate, he whispered, rocking me in his arms in the square in the town where he lived. My tired head wobbled slightly on his shoulder, the whole world rocked in my eyes. The foundation of it all breaking down into a sign above the barber's shop, a kiosk selling Marlboros, a fast food stand called TOAST.

I was wrapped. Wrapped in that moment. Cast into the net of his arms, bound in like shoe stitching. There was no other way to describe it -- such a connotative impact to the word wrapped -- conjured memories of Flyk and me beneath flanneled covers, concealed in an effort to create dislingua. The language we shared consisted of raised eyebrows and bared teeth.

And when we escaped the house for the Garry Oak grove surrounding the water reservoir, Flyk and I could smell the mesquite of neighbourhood bar-b-ques in the dusk air, the skunk cabbage in bloom. My hands were coated in tree sap and salmonberry stains; her fur was in perpetual mat. I was two strokes from a feral state and she was not quite human, could almost slot the cutlery in her paws and eat with mother and me at the table.

We were enveloped in flannel.

I was wrapped up in Thom.

I couldn't take my head from his shoulder, couldn't wake enough to realize this wasn't a sleeping state, those weren't stray dogs running through a foreign landscape, but one of the few human investments I'd made in the past. I wanted to say this: "Take me back to an island and salve me, grate carrots on my belly and stroke chickpeas through my hair." But we were on an island, and all my visions were probably here. "Wrap my fingers in olive leaves. And let me caress your feet with unchurned butter." I could feel myself gaining weight already, the skin around my temples slackening.

Thom purchased a packet of loose tobacco from the kiosk, then led me, my belongings on his back, the landscape passing in a blur of white as my sight came in and out of focus from exhaustion. We passed the Palace hotel down a steep path, towards the south end of the town. I tried to pay attention to the twisting route so that I could retrace my steps if need be. But I had to give up; my head was clogged with the dust and the hours lost to travel over mean times. I saw only a chapel with three bells, and then we turned left onto a different path. At the end we reached a blue doorway, a shock of pink trim on the small staircase inside.

She's here, Thom said, pulling me into the courtyard of the villa. Three people playing cards: two blonde women, a brunette man.

Oh wait, oh wait, stay there for just a sec, said the girl with shorter hair. Australian and stout. She ran through a curtained doorway, came back out with a lei made of newspaper rings. I welcome you to the house of cards, the villa Borghese, the casa de vino, she said as she strung the lei around my neck. I made an attempt to smile, to raise my hand and wave at the others; I'm not entirely sure I succeeded at either. Names were given then: Kate, Henry from Santa Clara, Stace from Denver, Leone from Adelaide.

Athimios is on the patio, said Stace, pointing up to the third and highest section of the villa. I'm sure he'll want the rent for Kate. Stace's fingers were long, thin like emery boards; a tiny bone skull on a red string around her ankle, teeth like a jack 'o lantern smile.

I'll take care of it, Thom said. He ran up the stairs affixed to the side of the building, hand reaching into his pocket to find the required drachma. At the far end of the patio, I saw the door of a small shed open. Inside were the man and white butterfly of the main square. Thom paid them and ran back down.

Does he live in that shed? I asked, surprised to hear my own voice, surprised I had spoken so soon. It was a mistake, I was sure, just my tired state overwhelming my better senses.

No, I don't think so, he's just there sometimes. When he needs money. This was Henry, tan brown hair hanging into his eyes, voice thick with California as if it was toothpaste. Thom took my swollen hand, pulled me through the doorway to the left side of the stairway.

Here are the toilets, he said, and the shower room.

He opened a slanting wooden door and threw my pack onto one of the two cots which formed an upside-down L against two walls. He pulled back the covers on the bed closest to the door, helped me untie my shoes. I didn't have the energy to undress, and so I climbed under the wool blanket fully clothed. Dug into the side of the cliff, the room remained cool despite the outside heat.

Tomorrow I'll tell you everything, he said.

I heard hooves on the rooftop and the jingling of bells.

Is it Christmas?

Those are the donkeys from the stairs down to the old port. They pass on the path right above us twice a day.

He kissed my closed mouth then, let me drift.

I believed I was on my way back to Astrid's house: old feathered fans still hanging in the hallway, amber beads powdered with talc on the dresser. I rose out of my scratchy Greek bed and ascended through a hole in the ceiling and on the other side was the prairie home. I had crossed a threshold and couldn't return to Santorini because I didn't have enough money. I wanted nothing more than to return, but instead found myself under a bridge, watching the Bow River slosh past. The dream faded, changed into the sounds of chickens screaming and dogs howling. As I awoke, I realized I was outside in the courtyard, a scratchy wool blanket around my shoulders. The night wind blew up from the Aegean, smelling of pickling and age and rotting wood. The washed sheets were still out on the line, like ghosts dancing. I pushed a chair over to the farthest wall and climbed up to look in the direction of the noise. But my eyes were filled with sleep; I could barely focus, and the dirty wind blew them shut. I could make out the yard lights of the empty factory only slightly, and the shadowed bulk of the building itself. No dogs, no chickens, but the noise persisted. The ghostsheets touched my face, wrapped corners around my ankles.

A month had been lost, or so it seemed, just a day of sleeping but a month since I'd tasted Thom's skin properly, since we'd even exchanged words and fluid. It was early evening; the air smelled of soap, of musty

blankets. And so I pulled myself from sleep, from the squeaking cot, out to the courtyard.

I hazily recalled the commotion, the din from the factory. In the sun, the building looked benign, just an empty edifice, a dirt road leading from the huge entrance up to the main road.

Heya, good morning, a voice called. I turned to see Henry standing on the patio, the sun behind illuminating the outline of his body, reflecting off the white all around. I wasn't sure if we were going to see you again, he continued, or if you were going to sleep all summer.

Oh, I said, climbing the stairs to the patio. Two plastic chairs were set up around a small folding table, all painted the same blue as the door, as the trim, as the vases weighed down with sand atop the edge of the patio. Henry sat and continued cutting his loaf of bread, buttering both sides. His skin and hair were the same tanned colour, like amber, insects and twigs trapped inside. From atop the patio, I could see clearly from one end of the island to the other, from the port where I had arrived to the northern tip. On two sides of the villa the cliff dropped straight down to the blue.

The cliff's a little intimidating, he said, I lost a pair of gonch already. They blew straight over and down. Permanent loss, as far as I'm concerned, but Thom offered to retrieve them for me. I told him that was crazy, slinking down a cliff for my shorts.

He offered me a slab of bread -- sultana loaf. My stomach had forgotten the need for such filling, having concentrated instead on containing its meager contents despite the rocking of the boat, despite the adrenaline of forward movement.

There's water too, he said, hoisting a bottle onto the table. You'll need one of these a day, otherwise you dehydrate. Oh, shit, what time is it?

I hadn't changed the time on my watch; though my body had leaped over ocean and land, my wrist still remained in the past, eight hours behind. I turned my wrist so he could see.

We're having dinner at seven, he said. I should have woken you up earlier, but I went in the room and you looked so damn happy to be asleep. Thom told me to be there at seven. Henry pointed towards the north. They work in that restaurant, Prokyon, next to the cable car, all of them -- Thom, Stace, Leone, Bess. But I think we're going to this other place, the food is better.

I couldn't make out this building from the sea of white; all seemed to be connected, to form a single dwelling carved into the side of the cliff. There were no markers to indicate where one building finished and another began.

Henry and I were on the path to the centre of town, past the chapel of the three bells, past the Palace, and up onto the boardwalk. My hair hadn't been washed for days, was matted in the back, and so we stopped for a hat. Just a simple canvas hat, but I ended up buying new shoes, too, little green runners with glistening white laces. Greasy hair hidden beneath canvas and stitching, we continued.

The walls of the restaurant were lined with wine casks and fish netting. Thom sat alone at a table near the kitchen door; there were five, no, six cups of water waiting. Thom stood when we approached, kissed my cheek, left a wet mark on my skin where his lips had been.

She slept all day, Henry offered.

Thom pulled out a small package from his bag. Unwrapped the foil to reveal a bar of Greek chocolate. He fed me bites of the brown until Leone and Stace arrived. Water was replaced then with red wine. When the chocolate was finished, Thom held my hand, ordered cabbage rolls for me, said I needed

my protein. Platters of food arrived, dips both pink and white, the smell of garlic was all around, seeping into our cottons like the smoke of an old man's cigar.

I must have been still in a sleeping state, the conversation seemed that vague. I recall Leone's elbow in my ribs, her declaration on the beauty of Greek men, then Stace's glare across the table. She told Leone to have some respect for Thom. Leone scooped up some of the pink dip -- fish eggs, I think - on a slice of pita. Stace and Henry were in their own conversation about her boss, how he wouldn't pay her any wages until two more weeks.

That's okay, honey, I can cover the rent for the room until then, Henry whispered to Stace.

You should come to work with us, Leone said. Her hand slapped down on my shoulder. Join the ranks of the indentured.

I don't think I want Kate there, said Thom. If you don't have to work, then don't. There'll be plenty of time for that back in the real world.

Yet, this world seemed more real than any I had been in before. The taste of cabbage, the smell of garlic, Thom's hand on mine -- these were sensed more perceptively than any sensation from back home, than the sound of my aunt's tortured lungs, than the spikes of salmonberry bushes in my kiddie thigh. Here, the aroma of smoldering cigarettes was more pleasing than the stale smoke that lingered in my mother's brindled hair. The sauce for the cabbage rolls was more aesthetically pleasing than any bottle of abalone on a hospital wall.

And the clarity in the next moment was absolute: Thom stood suddenly, released my hand and called out, Bess, we're over here.

I turned to see her approach, brown curls hanging into brown face, and a smile directed at Thom. She came to him and he kissed her cheek.

Ah, you must be Kate. She extended her open hand over to me, then sat in the vacant chair, drank from the unclaimed water glass. They all spoke of the restaurant where they worked, of their withheld wages, of the fact they had to live off their tips. As I reached for Thom's hand, he pulled away to grab the flask of wine, refilled each glass. His teeth were turning red. He and Bess continued to complain about work, and Leone nudged me.

I hope you won't get bored with us, we all seem to have one topic of conversation.

Why don't you quit then, I asked.

I need the cash, she said. Besides, what doesn't kill us brings us closer.

I wanted to correct her, but didn't. What made us stronger was the wine, the warmth, the steam pouring into the dining room from the kitchen now and again, the cabbage. Thom's hands gesticulating his statements about working conditions, and so I placed my palm on his thigh, felt the edge where his shorts left off to flesh. He didn't pause for a second, just continued on with Bess.

When we left and walked down the path to the villa, Bess walked with us too. I realized once we were through the door into the courtyard, once she started to pull the sheets from the clothesline, that this was her home as well.

That the walls between rooms were not so thick after all. I could hear voices through the thinness of the particle board patching.

And so, when Thom and I fell onto his small horizontal cot, I felt the need to speak his name, though I had never done so before in such circumstances. All around we were surrounded by plaster, by particle board, and yet other walls crumbled, were razed when his hand came to rest on my collar bone, when his fingers dug into the skin there. My teeth were upon his throat. And again I spoke his name, the cot sounded the rhythm of our

actions, and I felt no shame in the knowledge that we could be heard throughout the villa. That our noise permeated the wakeful sleep of the four in the next room.

It was much later when the barking started up again, when the chickens screeched. I climbed out of the horizontal bed, pulled on clothes, and lay on the wool blankets of the other cot. Out the small window near the ceiling, I could see nothing but the night sky.

Thom was already asleep.

On the first night together in Victoria, there had been a need for darkness, covers drawn high. We could have climbed right underneath the flannel rather than expose the reality of the situation: that Thom and I were going forward despite his imminent departure for Greece, despite my dying aunt. There had been a need for darkness, for silence, a need to conceal the shape of things, to draw curtains and hide from what was to come. My body quaked not with cold but with fear of progression, of imminent loneliness. I wanted to press in so close that I would take the shape of him, extract an impression of his form. In the dark, in the absolute dark of the room. And it had been Thom's hands over my body with a warm, wet facecloth, displacing fluids on my skin, the area around his mouth tasting of my every nook.

In the darkness, I waited for him to tell me stories. He started with, "I was eleven and my brother was nine and we stole all the mail on the block..." He smiled in remembrance. He wanted me to open up, but all there was to talk about was the shocked "O" of her throat and the crick of Flyk's spine. I tried not to remember these things, didn't want to speak of them at all.

He ran sweet sodapop fingers over my scars, smelled of wood, of cedar hope chests or Lapland saunas. He was a Carmannah giant, a seedling, a foster stump. He was coniferous, carnivorous, a carnival Ferris wheel who spun me into the sky even though he knew I was afraid of heights.

I had danced in his shower in the morning, discovered the rubber cockroaches hidden under the bathroom radiator. He allowed me to shave his chin, pull metal over his skin, and lather. He poured slippery elm bark tea into my being, nourished me with peony frittatas and calcium candies. Our few days together before separation passed like that.

On the way to Prokyon's with Thom's note in my head: 'come for breakfast, try my Turkish coffee.' My thigh muscles were tense, balled up under my flesh like spring apples as I skipped two steps at a time to the boardwalk.

I bought a postcard picturing lower Thira at the news stand. The papers were all covering an environmental conference in Brazil. No news about Canada, not even hockey. Next to the news stand, the sign in the window of a t-shirt shop read "Other motives inside." Across from the rows of t-shirts was a small path leading down to a grand courtyard, pebbles inlaid in the cement in a mosaic, and on the path were four puppies - strategically placed to stop tourists from passing the t-shirts without any notice. People would stop for puppies, and so the shop was ensured a summer's worth of sales. Once fall approached and the puppies had become gangly and too big to be termed "cute", they would no longer be needed.

Two dogs were feigning sleep in front of the entrance to the cable car. A gecko ran past one and disappeared under a dusty bush. The dog sniffed, ticking his nose, but didn't rise.

When I reached Thom's roof, he was in the kitchen. There were a few people upstairs, drinking lemonade and watching the ferry cross the water to the volcano, fumarole steaming at the centre. I pulled up a chair at the bar, reached over to grab for Thom's black pen, and addressed the card to my aunt's house:

It's Wednesday. I called you Monday night but I don't think you remember much of the conversation. It's so beautiful here. And hot. But a nice wind comes up from the sea. We live by the arrow on the front. You can't see our place. It costs five bucks a night. I wish you were here. I'll write again soon. K.

I had cycled to the Bow River on my aunt's rickety bike that night, the night I decided to join Thom in Greece, wished the river was the ocean along which we had walked in Victoria, and so I closed my eyes and tried to picture its green. I wanted just to smell the Pacific again, cold and polluted with the bodies of lost explorers, to imprint the black waters on my memory. I knew the Aegean would be different, smell different, perhaps flavoured with cumin and turmeric from the south, rosemary from the west. Kelp heads would not litter Greek beaches, not caught in the rocks along with beer-bottle glass smoothed over time and action, the shells of tiny crabs licked clean by gulls' tongues.

I looked at the postcard photo and realized I should have bought a different card. This one showed nothing of distinction: the chapel of the three bells and the wall leading down the path from the stairs below the White Palace. In the distance, the south shore of the inner harbour could be

made out if one knew to look for it. I could only see our villa in my imagination, below the flat rooftops of other homes, stretching around the corner from what was seen. Buildings stacked one on another, cutting off others at the edges like a cubist painting of children's blocks. And the town was devoid of life, no humans, dogs, cats; all was hidden from the oppressive silence of the overhead sun, the heat, unchanged by the winds that blew clotheslines east.

Thom was mixing his coffee concoction, darkness settling down into the bottom of his glass mug, swirling down. See those guys at table three, he said, marine biologists. I think they're French. Supposedly there's a baby whale in the port today. They're trying to coax it back out to sea.

And before Thom could speak further, I collected up my bag and stuffed the postcard inside. I tossed him the pen. Be back in awhile, I said, running down the kitchen steps. I desired transcendence from the one-dimensional world of television nature shows and replacement with reality.

Hey, Thom yelled at me, take the cable car, tell them you work here, they'll let you on for free.

The two dogs were still sleeping out front. One had moved further into the thin strip of shade given off by the columns out front. There was a car ready, just about to leave, but they held it for me. I was the only passenger.

At the onset of the descent, the town of Thira panned out before me. When I turned around, I could see the lower balcony of Prokyon's pull further and further away, becoming a miniature, like a doll's restaurant in a doll's town in a child's blue bedroom. And the port grew larger, the magnifying glass drawn closer to the eye. The car bumped over the first tower

arm, cogs grating against wheels, iron cords last greased years ago. I was trying not to look down, to measure the distance between dry grass and my eyes.

When I reached the bottom and was extracted from the car, I ran out onto the pavement of the port. A sailor looked up through the mesh of his netting; he was underneath searching for holes, a large silver needle in his hand. He looked like an octopus, formless in black, with one dark eye staring out between oiled rope.

My new running shoes did nothing to block the heat of the cement. But the water was clear and cool as I watched their colour change below the surface to forest green. Then I stood and slosh slosh sloshed across the length of the port, only a few hundred feet long, the length of two restaurants and a small stable for the donkeys. Nothing moved in the water. The boats moored to the dock were set in concrete, there was no wind to take away the persistence of the overhead sun, and I could picture my hat forgotten on my unmade bed.

A figure sat at the far end of the dock; as I approached, I could see it was a man writing. He had a small bag with grapes spilling out from the open pocket on the side. Spilling out, but held tight at pursed ends, hooked there onto vine wood. Red grapes, bulbous and dusted still with earth.

He heard me coming towards him and looked up, shaded his eyes from the sun. His face reflected the colours around us: sea blue, aged-wood brown. Reflected his youth, and yet in his eyes there was something undefinable. Or perhaps it's too easy to call that look undefinable -- it was something close to unwavering. Like honey. Thick and smooth and sweet. He coated my body in one downward glance and I felt wonderfully sticky with his gaze.

I sat next to him on the dock. He took his hand, blunt and tanned, from his face and pulled a single grape from the bunch, offered it to me. I shook

my head, so he rolled it on his tongue into his mouth. And we stayed like that, my feet beneath the water's surface, his eyes fixed on the still water. The sun burnt itself into my forehead, branded heat below the flesh there; my nose had become the most perceived part of my self. I could smell the body beside me, his upwind odor like raspberry puree, like perspiration that is not yet dry.

It is not the approaching, not even the intimacy of relationships that intimidates me. It is not the approaching, certainly, the decision to cross whole rooms to be within proximity is never questioned. There is no hesitation. It is in the words, the opening words, that I am at a loss. The options are overwhelming: the standard greetings, the pointed inquiries, the witticisms. We are rooms, individual rooms, and "hello" is our master key. We all open up to it, we are invited in with one simple notion. One generic notion, translatable across all languages. It was the single word that Thom had mouthed to me across the crowded university cafeteria, and it had worked well enough then. Had taken me from my uncomfortable chair, my metal frame foundation, my bowl of vegetable and barley soup, had taken me from these things to the other side of a room, a different place-setting. Plastic spoon and dirty napkin. An awaiting grin. An unexpected turn of events. Words may seem benign, but a single word can change a life as much as a single action. Remember that the word "fire" often precedes the shower of bullets, that people will not fall completely in love without the utterance of the three-word cliché.

And so I began with:

Did you see a whale?

He hadn't understood what I had said. Shrugged. He spat the seeds into the water.

Whale? Big fish, here? I motioned to the water before us.

Ah, yes...big fish, yes...but ah big fish...goes... maybe it return...maybe.

He was French.

Franch...yes, he said, I come for...the big fish. And maybe I rest...if the fish return, it is good if I am Thira.

And so I suggested our villa, the empty room facing lonely curtains onto the courtyard, the vacant creaking chair propped against the locked door. Athimios, I said, ask at the kiosk in the main square.

He passed me his journal and I wrote the name in the column. His handwriting was chaotic, wild, the lines on the page were there for suggestion only. The drawings of the whale were perfect though, the lines of the dorsal fin conjured as if he had stroked his palm along the length of the whale's flesh itself, then committed that sensation to paper. I gave him his book, he slipped it into his bag.

My colleagues, he said, standing and sliding the grapes back in their pocket. I return to my colleagues.

They are up there, I pointed up the side of the cliff. I know where. Come.

And so the two of us walked the dock, down the waterfront, me still sloshing in my wet shoes. When we reached the foot of the stairs, he motioned to them. I had not walked the stairs, though I wondered about their weight, the stride it took to clear a step. The stones were rough in places, I could feel their juts beneath my thin-soled shoes. He was only wearing espadrilles, twine on stone, bending his skin into place where a rock projected underfoot.

When we reached the first corner he stopped, glanced back down the short flight we had climbed, and said c'est parfait, though I thought he was

saying "separate" and I couldn't understand what he meant by that, but when we reached the second rounding and he said it again, I recognized the words. He was almost skipping up, at least five stairs ahead of me. At one point, he stumbled to the right, twisting his ankle slightly, and a solitary grape fell from his bag. It rolled past me, gathering speed, not creating a difference to the shape of the rocks, the stillness of weeds jutting through. He stopped to rub his ankle and continued upwards. Then he reached the third corner and waited for me to catch up to him. We were both sweating, both panting slightly with mouths open; he took my swollen hand in his, and we walked together, though our strides were not the same; his gait was longer, more pronounced.

At the top of the stairs, he pushed past waiting donkeys to a vendor's stall. He fingered strands of worry beads: porcelain baubles, plastic tranquilizers strung on a single line of fishing wire. There was a single line of wetness pressing through the back of his shirt, traceable from nape to belt. He chose a necklace of wooden beads, marbled cedar, veined with a darker brown. 750 drachma: the price of pacification, beads pulled between fingertips, stroked by thumb for ease. 750 drachma: the cost of one night in a room with Thom, our heads on pillows forming the oblique space between two arms of the L that was our beds. If the beads were lost, though, they left only an empty pocket and edgy nerves. A relationship did not spill like that, beads pulling off the thread in one swift go, days and memories scattering on the pavement in all directions. It was more like each bead was silently stolen over the course of time until only the barren filament remained.

Thom wasn't behind the counter, was at the dumbwaiter in the yard, calling down the shaft to the Turkish prep-chef that he needed another Greek salad, extra feta. He was affecting an accent, like he was Greek himself, but

speaking English. The yard backed onto the cement walls of the basilica, arched windows filled now and again by tourists snapping photos of the volcano.

The French man found his colleagues, sat with them and sipped coke up a straw slowly, then passed the glass back to the middle of the table. They spoke in hand gestures, noted particulars in journals, pointed out to the water every so often.

Did you see the whale? Thom was back at the bar, mixing a blue drink, cutting bread for the salad.

It's gone away for now. He thinks maybe it will be back.

Who thinks?

Name. And I realized that he held my hand, offered grapes but no name by which to call him over, to whisper into lined pillows. When I glanced up at Thom, I could see the French man mirrored in Thom's sunglasses. But now here was Thom, object of my travels. The counter top was thin enough to lean over, hands grasping edges, to grace his cheek with dry lips, to lean my belly onto the wooden top and grasp his face in my hands, lick his mouth before sinking in.

Kate, I gotta serve those customers. I can't be all kissy and shit at work. I should be finished by seven. Why don't you meet me at home?

Am I in the way?

I'm not saying that. It's almost lunch anyway, and we'll all be eating. I can't get you a free meal here.

All around this island was the aqua blue water, sea water, liquefied salt surrounding hardened molten stone. Sixteen layers of earth shown in the hills outside of town, layer upon layer of colour, ochre through midnight black at bottom's edge, black land pulling into ocean blue, meeting there then falling into blacker earth below water's surface. At some level, all masses of land must be connected. But here, floating above the water table, this island was all that existed; though telephone lines were strung in the sky, though mail may have arrived for others, I was without permanence, without address or phone number.

And in the space between Prokyon's and the villa, in the distance of time between leaving Thom's rooftop and when he returned, I knew I was safe when I uncovered his journal on the rickety shelf in our room, when I sat on the scratchy wool covers with the book on my lap, hand on the cover, staring up at the boarded hole in the ceiling above his bed.

The last entry: 'Kate is coming. Again, a mistake. Again, I have not run far away enough from all that binds.'

I had never wrapped nylons around his wrists, never pulled them tight against any headboard of any bed, had never tied his shoes for him, had never bowed his housecoat belt, had never even commented on the day his patterned shirt and tie clashed. Binds. The ties that bind a binding contract a binding pain in the bowels binding convention pages of any book fused through binding. So many ways to define our relationship; yet, for him something which bound, another mistake.

Memory: Thom and I were riding our bikes home from university when he swerved in front of me, kept swerving in front of me despite my yelling, despite the traffic passing down the hill. In the instant of one wheel revolution, Thom's rear tire grazed my front one, rubbed rubber, made a low

buzzing noise. It sent me riding up the graduated curb, into the bushes and out again. I didn't fall, but my shin had connected with my steel pedal, blood sliding down skin. And so we rode home like that, Thom's head hanging low and my shin glowing red in the afternoon sun. When we reached his couch, he wiped the red clean with a damp tea towel, wiped away his infraction, cleaned it away but left the infrangible action of cleanliness, of wiping clear his mistake.

I was planned, scheduled, slotted in to appear nine months later, after my conception. I know a few things about that birth -- I was born at sunrise, when the light through the blinds traced glowing lines on the floor. And I know that my father had already left for Argentina, and would not return.

Is it possible that I remembered her rasping voice, her cooings of "my baby, my beautiful baby girl"? I shouldn't be able to remember that, the receptors for memory had not been formed in my newborn brain, and yet I can remember a voice, her voice before the hole was cut, before the buzzer was placed where the voice box had been. My head had rested against her Adam's apple, her words had vibrated into me as I half-slept there, were no longer words but the reverberance against my skull -- sound transferred into sensation. It's possible for me to remember this, the hole having been cut when I was nine, though the whole of my memory seems to be filled with that opening in her throat and the closing of her bedroom door on nights when she fell into a silence, closed herself off from Flyk and I to refold the sheets she had set aside in her hope chest. I could watch her through the key hole, could see her yellowed fingers against the white linen, tracing the faded patterns.

She never spoke of my father, there were never photos of my father on display, but I was certain he was right-handed, did not have black hair or brown eyes: the things I did not share with my mother.

During summer breaks, and then after mother's death, I was sent to stay with her Aunt Astrid, Flyk and I picked from the cold linoleum flooring of the airport in one swift motion into her flabby arms. In those summers, I became familiar with the alabaster vases and Christmas cacti of that bungalow, learned what I could touch and what I couldn't. The entire house smelled of cinnamon, of poinsettias in perpetual bloom.

Because they never spoke of him, never explained his whereabouts to me or if he was still alive, he remained a larger figure than if they had just said your father is dead or he's not coming back. Without such information the imagination takes hold, creates a figure with more than three dimensions. My father was more tangible than my aunt's dour breath, my mother's stained nails. His life was in continual flux in my mind.

I was awoken at seven by the din of returning voices, laughing, of which I could only identify Thom's insistent giggles, coming louder now as he approached our door, the other two fading into the room beside us, the room beyond the wood panelling. Our door pushed open, Thom still looking back over his shoulder at the space where the others had been. He turned.

Oh, hello, Kate. Did we wake you?

I shouldn't be sleeping anyway.

We're going to the port, to try to see the whale. Do you care to join us?

And so I stood, paid attention for only a second to the fact that I was not a part of "us", that I had to be invited into "us", and traded shorts for pants in

the knowledge that the mosquitoes would return soon, as they had every night. My blood, being a concoction of 10% milk-fat banana yoghurt and paprika crisps, seemed particularly appealing to them. Thom did a nightly dance in our room, swatting curtains and shirts on clothes hangers, flushing them out from every corner and splattering their bodies against the white walls with a rolled USA Today. He couldn't sleep with the constant buzzing in his ears or the sound of me scratching throughout the dark hours beneath wool blankets. That particular scratching was limited to the bites now, no longer the blankets, after having run a flannel sheet under the bedding like a cocoon in which I found shelter from the wool. Thom's dance would not come until after the port, until we were ready again for sleep.

The "us" of the party consisted of Bess, Stace and Leone. Henry had decided that the whale was a fable, constructed by the donkey tenders for more business to the port. He wanted to stay on the upper patio, look down upon us as we descended and became tiny figurines as the stairs pulled further from his eyes. I should have stayed too, having been down once already that day, but there was some insecurity, some longing for Thom's company. Just to have felt his hand on my bicep, his skin on mine, protecting that small area from the night chill, from mosquitoes. These small things led me to join those going to the port. Thom's skin, his grip, and widening pupils.

The night sky in Santorini held both the sky and the moon. The colours faded from brilliant orange to coral to cream to cerulean to pitch, the sun and the moon being only a few shades from each other. At one horizon, the land was dark nothingness, hidden in recesses of night. At the other, the land glowed in shades of melon, like the blaze between pressed fingers when viewed in front of the sun, the halo of light that forms around the entire

hand. I wondered if that orange appeared only between fingers, or if it also showed when two stomachs were barely touching, when two left cheeks were brought within peach fuzz distance. That orange could only be witnessed by a third, a shaded onlooker blinded by the joining of bodies. It was too dark in the villa to see if that orange was present at the small of Bess' back, at the point where Thom's hand rested as he guided her out the main door before he turned and waved us all to follow, caught my eye and just smiled -- that smile which had pulled me across a crowded cafeteria to his table, to an already familiar place, the closure of the distance between two points, though our distances grew as Bess skipped ahead and I waited for Leone to lace her shoe.

Thom says you went down this afternoon.

I didn't see anything. There was a marine biologist there, waiting. He said it's gone away, but it might come back.

Leone said she'd seen them on Thom's patio when she went up for lunch. Her stride was the same as mine, we walked in unison, longer than Stace's who walked in time and a half to keep up. We quickly reached the stairs to the old port, but Thom and Bess were already on their way down. I could see them in animated conversation as they turned one corner, their faces hidden in shadow.

There were 587 steps in all when we reached the bottom, an odd number, a number odd in its conception. Surely 600 would have worked just as well, if not better, most steps being longer than a single stride. And I guessed it made no difference if they were built from the top down or the bottom up, but the constructors felt no need to round off, to end on a whole number. Five hundred eighty-seven -- a sum which seemed more fitting for a raffle jar of jelly beans than architecture. I had noticed, though, that the

angles here were never right, the corners never at ninety degrees. The rooms tilted in at all angles, the stairs were inconsistent in length. The cobblestones jutted up and were flat. But the boardwalk of the old port dropped off into the sea at a perfect angle, so perfectly did the cement meet the water's edge. I'd never understood how cement was able to set when confronted with water like this.

Bess and Thom approached from the boardwalk's end; we met halfway at a cantina patio and then the loud single crack sounded, the crack and the yelp and the cries of glee. I turned to see thirty, forty small explosions of light, and the dog at the centre of the sparks, running down the boardwalk, trying to escape from the fireworks tied to its hind legs, running towards us, chased by five young boys. Stace screamed stop that, stop that. She kept yelling as the dog neared us, veered to the right, and dove into the water. I ran to the perfect edge to help it back to the cement as Leone berated the boys.

What the fuck are you doing?

One of them smiled and said fuck. They all laughed then and walked away.

The dog allowed me to hoist it back onto land, to untangle the string from its hind legs, from the tawny fur. It smelled my palm then, and ran into the bushes. We whistled and called for a few minutes, but it did not come out again, hidden in shadows unreachable by the light of the stars, though I swear I could see its eyes staring back.

When we returned to the villa, Henry, his shirt buttoned up wrong, was waiting with glasses of retsina and slices of baklava, dripping honey onto our fingertips, forks slipping between layers of pastry and nut. We waited for bats in the night sky, not knowing if bats existed here, wishing for some predator for the mosquitoes which were attracted to our honey-laced blood.

Our blood thinned by wine, thickened by the still presence of adrenaline caused by the eruption of fireworks.

I wish we had music, said Henry. I wish we could dance now. Two men and four women.

He danced in bare feet then, shuffled on cement to any arbitrary tune -- Hank Williams or Sam Maghett. He held his arms in front as if the space wasn't vacant.

Stace stood and joined Henry in his silent dance. The rest of us watched. Leone left first, pulled shut the door to the bedroom she shared with the others, left Thom, Bess and me alone. Sitting in a row like that: Thom, Bess and me. Then Thom rose, stood over me, offering his hand to pull me from the cement. He led us to bed, to the L-shaped beds, to another mosquito ritual dance before sleep.

He locked the door and fell on his knees before me, face in my stomach, arms reaching up my back. His hair was stiff in my fingers from the lemon juice he squeezed into it after showering. We stayed like that for minutes, in uncomfortable silence, the sounds of water running in the pipes in the walls, the bells of the last donkeys overhead.

This was what I'd been craving all day, just his touch, a finger on a collarbone. A closure of the distance.

I noticed the sheen coating of honey on my thumbnail, remnant of repast, embroidered by a single winding hair inlaid in the muck. When I pulled the hair away, the pattern remained; my embossed thumbnail was cleansed then by a simple stroke against my tongue before our bodies fell onto the noisy cot.

There was a stage in the mornings between sleep and wakefulness, a place of confusion, of possibility, of screaming chickens by the old cement factory, or donkeys' hooves, or sudden conversation at the sinks. I could see Thom shaving at the sinks through our open door, Bess brushing her teeth at his side, then the slow stroke of his foamy razor down her forearm, her bending to spit out her toothpaste, then her hand upon his throat. They remained in that position for too long.

I had three options: cough, or walk past them on my way to the toilet as if nothing had happened, or return to sleep and hope that I could ignore the persistence of my full bladder. Screaming was not an option, nor was cursing, standing naked on the rickety cot and cursing their actions while the matted foundation rocked beneath me. It would just have been words thrown across the room, words unable to bridge time, to bring Thom and me back to a campsite on an island in the rain, the taste of marshmallows on his lips, the smell of mesquite on his skin.

It was Leone who saved me with her calling, called us all to the upper patio. Thom and Bess ran out to see what she was yelling about. I dressed and followed close behind. The door to Athimios' shed was open just enough for us to see the face in the shadows: black eyes and wet nose of the fireworks dog.

Does she live here? asked Bess.

She can't. We'd have noticed her before, said Leone.

Henry took one step towards her, but she pulled further inside the small hut. I think they're all strays, except the ones chained up. This is pure stray. Probably won't let us within ten feet of her.

It's probably so flea-ridden you wouldn't want to get close. Thom descended the stairs back to the main patio, shaving cream still covering half of his face.

Stace called up to Henry, asked if he was ready to go to Kamari beach. If anyone else wanted to come. Thom volunteered, and so did I. Leone and Bess had to work the lunch shift, serve the cruise liner crew grilled octopus and pleasantries.

This dog, like most of the dogs I had seen in Greece, was of poor proportions. Its legs were an inch too short for the length of the torso so that its tail almost dragged on the ground. Its fur was made of the bristles from old paint brushes and its bark sounded like smashing fluorescent lightbulbs. The dog needed a name, some sound by which to beckon her inside when the winds blew, by which to call her when leftovers were at hand. I chose Kynikos -- literally dog-like, and so Kyno for short.

Kyno wouldn't move, wouldn't approach my outstretched hand, though there was the sparkle of recognition between us, perhaps as between two passers-by on the street who happen to be wearing the same shirt. When I turned to leave, to join the others pulling wet towels from the clothesline, Kyno came out into the sun, sniffed at my ankle, followed me as far as the top of the stairs. She stayed above on the patio, watching us leave the courtyard, and continued watching until we had turned a corner on the path toward the bus depot.

Henry and Stace were wading out, knee-deep in the water now. Henry reached in and pulled something out, held it dangling and dripping before Stace. She shrieked and tried to run through the water, but the weight of the

salt seemed to drag her down. Thom turned from where he was laying on the sand, waved me over, but I'd brought the wrong shoes. I knew it then. I didn't want to take them off, didn't want to burn my feet on the scorching sand, didn't want the grittiness to walk with me for the rest of the day.

There were moments in my life when I could stand outside the action and feel like I had been placed arbitrarily in a situation, into someone else's life, and that I could just as easily be arbitrarily replaced by another, perhaps more fitting, subject. It was at these times when I could look at Thom and picture him with someone else, realize that he would be better off with anyone but me; that we had become a cliché, a coupling which no longer held meaning. If Bess were there, surely she would have been next to Thom on the sand, perfectly joined on the sand. My lines were static, I'd said the same words so many times that they'd lost use, had become repeated sounds, as if I'd memorized lines in a language I did not know: *ey luv yu, eye adoar yu.*

But I'd felt this way before with Thom. Felt like someone just dead, soul hovering above, watching the two of us fuck under some arbutus tree in the foothills overlooking the Saanich Peninsula. What other word would I use? Certainly that one sounded too strong, too much like there was an action taking place. I didn't remember the sex at all, only in the context of the day, and in the disconnectedness that I was trying to shove aside. There was something flying overhead, an eagle perhaps, or a hawk, just the shape of freedom soaring there. Later we saw the decomposing carcass of a deer, washed clean of smell.

Thom stood, brushed black sand from his shorts and walked back to where I sat on the pavement. He pulled his sunglasses down his nose to view me through naked eyes, then pushed the glasses back into place.

Are you going to get a tan? he asked, sitting beside me.

Do you remember those deer bones?

I watched Henry and Stace wade out of the sea. They stopped to wipe the sand from their feet and put their shoes back on.

The deer bones?

That day we went up the Saanich Peninsula.

Oh, yah. That dead deer. We should have kept the skull. I could have boiled it, boiled the gristle off, then put it someplace. On the mantle.

I could picture Thom's mantle, black wood over white tiling, lips of a mouth that spoke in tones of carbon. Photographs of strangers, and an odd phallic sculpture, reaching for the stucco ceiling. There should have been a mirror, too, to make the room seem bigger, to create an illusion. Somehow I knew I'd never see that room again, never sit lotus in a leather chair listening to the stereo while he tried to take a picture of me and I pretended not to notice. I couldn't pretend not to notice anymore.

Thom glanced at his wrist, saw he'd forgotten his watch on the table in our room. No one was wearing watches, so he stood and went to one of the postcard shops which lined the beachfront to search for the hour, returned with information. He extended a hand to help me up, locked fingers around my wrist and pulled.

Hey, it's almost five, we gotta go.

Stace and Henry walked up the sand to us. She was talking about quitting the restaurant, he was talking Turkey and the price of boat tickets.

And a rug, we could ship a rug home.

Thom and Stace hitched a ride back to Thira; the truck sped down the road, leaving Henry and me in a momentary cloud, grit in our nostrils and eyes. We decided to walk, having nothing else to do but dwindle time, fill it with the lint from our pockets. Follow a trafficless road out of Kamari. But at

the first turn Henry spotted a sign, the painted brown vines twisting to spell "Tourists Wellcome - free Wine" and we both needed a drink.

The bar was empty, covered by trestles of vines, leaves blocking out the lowering sun. We sat at a high table, the seat of the stool just a bit higher than what was comfortable, so I jumped up to sit. Those stools always made my legs fall asleep, like dozy bumblebees were flying inside my calves, bumping into the fleshy walls that contained them.

A man came out from the back room, saw us. He took six glasses from the overhead slots, poured the great liquid from three bottles and approached our table. His sandalled feet were stained purple, the colour advanced up inside his pant leg. Feet disgusted me, but I drank the wine regardless. Perhaps it was just growing up in coldness, the reliance on footwear, extremities trapped beneath layers of wool and leather to ward off the numb, and the affect that such bundling had on flesh that caused me to gag at the touch of a foot on my forearm. To live in warmth, without need for layers, naked pads upon cement, seemed more desirable.

How long have you been with Stace?

You can tell? Here I was thinking we were being subtle.

Not at all.

He laughed. We met two weeks ago, in Megalochori. Just buying fruit, and there she was, sitting on her scooter and drinking water as if she had just crossed the desert. I had wanted to live in Thira, but didn't think I could afford it there. The price of rooms is twice as much in Thira, but Stace said she knew of a deal. I moved that day, into the third room. I had that room all to myself at first, and Athimios charged me the same as the others, five bucks a night. And when I slowly moved from that room to Stace's, the price stayed the same, but everything else changed. That was about a week ago.

Stace is worried about us being too much of a couple. We try not to be too touchy around anyone else.

Two weeks...

Henry choked on the wine, then said, I know it doesn't seem like much, but time isn't the same here. Everything occurs with such intensity. Life at home happens in half the speed, as if in slow motion. Weeks pass and nothing changes there. But here, a week marks the end of so much, the beginnings of multitudes. I bet by the time I get home, nothing will have changed. It will be as if the place froze. My mom will still be wearing the same dress that she wore when she took me to the airport. In fact, she'll still be standing at the gate, waving.

It was true, too, that time had been altered, that what passed for a second here was three minutes back home. Water came out boiling at the twist of a tap, eggs hatched the minute they were laid, my hair grew an inch each day. What would have taken months to die in Victoria took an afternoon: Thom had left me on the dirt road without the simplest of gestures, a kiss on a cheek, a touch, a wink. He had climbed into the cab of the truck without looking back.

Henry went up to the bar for more samples and returned with a tray of the red toxin. We should have eaten more before indulging in wine under the afternoon sun, but there was nothing to eat there except three varieties of grapes.

Henry held one small plastic glass in his beefy hand, swirled the wine around inside.

Shit, we've drunk a lot, he said, staring into the glass, watching the kaleidoscope of red and orange tints. He looked back at me. What happened to your nose?

I reached up and felt the bridge between my eyes. Dried blood. How long has it been like that?

A while. I thought you knew, that maybe you were waiting to wash your face.

The skin must have broken there. It's so damn dry, you know.

A scab had formed by then. I stumbled to the bathroom just beyond the bar to search for a mirror. In the grainy reflection of myself was this wound between my eyes, and still some dried blood. I licked my fingers and wiped away the deep red flakes until just the scab remained, there, on my face.

Change begins in such small ways, but then is upon everything.

The Etesian winds, the meltemi, which arrive each May from the northeast, shake the trees from their foundation by mid-summer. Grape vines are not stretched upon trellises as they were on the roads leading from Vancouver east. Here, the thick vines are braided in on themselves, twisted in bundles which lie close to the earth, like large nests or forgotten baskets. The wind is annual -- it is expected, watched for, prepared for. Outdoor vases are weighted with sand, signs are secured with twine. Etesian -- from the Greek *etos*, or year.

There must have been, so long ago, a first occurrence of the winds. There must have been a time before the winds were Etesian, that first May when all plans were ripped asunder by the gale. Back then the island was called Kalliste, the beautiful one, and Stronghyle, the round one. Before the explosion. Before the first inkling of the turmoil that lay beneath the surface; the lie of stasis.

Shift. Flux. The tectonic plates slammed into each other, pushing earth above the water table, pressing down the lahar deposits, the pisolites sliding down. And within seconds, a world became molten; the round one, the beautiful one was no more, became the nematode worms floating on the surface, the crest of land encasing the burning mountain, flamed by the Etesian winds.

What was once one became three when the land crumbled, fell into the sea, or was blown to the Turkish coast. Thirteen centuries later, another island rose to the surface after four days of sea fires, rose from the boiling water, and was identified as Palaea Kameni, the old burnt. Nea Kameni, the new burnt, erupted up in 1707, though it falls and rises during volcanic activity: it has disappeared in the years 1866-70, 1925-26, 1928, 1939-41 and 1950.

And what was Kalliste became Thera when the son of Autesion landed upon the shores, when he glanced up the sixteen layers of earth before him, the space for 587 stairs, Spartan sailors casting anchor into the scalded harbour.

Became Santorini when the Venetians ruled the Cyclades, when they claimed a vacant chapel for St. Irene, strung their doe-eyed icons over the frescoes of Hellenic figures; St. Irene on wooden plaques blocking Cadmus and Telephassa sailing to the island. Choruses of hymns for the saint louder than the advice of the Delphic oracle: "Follow a cow and build a city wherever she should sink down from weariness."

Henry and I scoured the island over the next few days in search of free wine: the tour at Boutari where we posed as journalists from California; the

family-run retsina distillery at Perissa. There, a boy danced for us in the great vat of grapes, hidden from the knees down in the muck, singing along with the bouzouki songs on the radio strung from the rafter overhead. We circulated each combination of the thirty-six grapes in our mouths, tongues suffused with the products of zymosis.

With our discounted bottles of Lava wine, fisherman fresco on the label, Henry and I were welcomed home to bowls of paprika chips and Leone's endless Australian card games, and news one day of a new villa-mate, an inhabitant for the vacant third room. It had been a find, discovering that deck of cards under Leone's bed in the big room. Forty-eight cards, four short of completion, and so postcards were cut to make the missing ones: the three and eight of spades, the ten of hearts, the jack of clubs. Everyone was collecting spades, making it impossible for anyone to win, to finish the game. With the wine and the late afternoon heat, Bess claimed to need a nap. She folded her hand, stumbled into the big room from the courtyard, pulled closed the blue doors. Thom was away still, working extra hours at the rooftop, avoiding home.

All the while the shower had been running, only I didn't notice until the water stopped, until I could no longer hear the crackling of water falling on pavement, could only hear the clicking on the upper patio: the nails of a dog's paws as Kyno approached the stairs down to the courtyard. Slowly, over those days, she had come closer to the courtyard, had accepted food from us when it was placed at the top of the stairs. At night, she took to sleeping under the linen cabinet outside the door to the room I shared with Thom.

We had nothing but the loaf of sweaty cheese that Thom kept on the shelf next to his diary, the strong goaty stuff he spread on his morning sultana loaves. I passed into the corridor to our room, cut off a handful, was on my

way back to the courtyard when the door for the shower opened. Wrapped in a towel, hair wet as at birth, the French man emerged.

Ah, allo, allo, he said, grasped my shoulders and kissed at the air beside both sides of my face. Almost a week had passed since we had met at the old port, since he had held my heat-swollen hand.

I thought you were gone.

The man...Athimios. I find him today.

He looked down at the cheese in my hand.

Oh, this. This is for the dog, the dog upstairs.

I pointed at the ceiling. He shivered then, rubbed his arm with his free hand, the hand that wasn't holding soap, wasn't hooked at the place where the towel tucked in on itself.

Come, I said, placed my palm on his shoulder blade, escorted him from the shower door to the courtyard. His skin was cold on the surface, warmth coming from underneath. He sneezed when we moved from indoors to the sun's light, a silent sneeze where only the convulsion of his body indicated the action.

This is the whale watcher, I said. This is...what's your name?

Didier.

And as each of the others introduced themselves, explaining the places in the world where they were from and the proper spellings of their names, I glanced upon the spot where my hand rested on Didier's back, noted the glow of orange between our skin: rufous, saffron, titian.

Didier dressed, held fifteen cards in his right hand, wine swirling in the plastic mug held in his left, trying to learn the rules to Leone's game. I sat close to him, watched his cards, pointed out the best combinations of suits.

My aunt and I had sat like that, cards spread on the table-top in the garden, hummingbirds flitting in low to steal sugar-water in the plastic feeder. She was in her late fifties then, spoke of getting a breast reduction so her back would stop its slow progression of hunching forward, stop her cervical vertebrae from jutting out, rubbing against the steel teeth of her dress zipper. Her card games were simple to learn, her icings always tasted of fresh lemon rind.

It had been days since I had seen Thom, since we had been in the same room in the same state of consciousness. When he entered the courtyard that evening, into the 60 watt bulb lit world of Lava wine and cards and Bess napping still, it felt as if years had passed, as if his hair had grown two inches in the time he had spent away from the villa. There was a stain of something on his white shirt, perhaps olive juice, perhaps coffee. His ears were sunburnt, his left hand bandaged. He stopped at the entrance to the corridor, glanced at each one of us, eyes resting upon each feature of our gathering, then passed into our room.

I followed.

Are you feeding that dog again? He was closing the plastic cheese bag.

I forgot to get food for her. I'll get it tomorrow.

She can eat garbage like the rest of them. Like the ones that come around the restaurant each night.

Do you want us to deal you in?

No, no I don't. I just want to rest, to read. To be left alone, okay.

He pulled *Walden* off the low shelf, kicked off his oxfords and sat on the edge of the bed, head in hands, bandage wrapped tight while the book rested on the scratchy wool blanket.

What happened to your hand?

I cut it.

Is it okay?

He said nothing then, lay on the bed and turned to face the fake wall at the back of the room, the wall that shook when the donkeys passed overhead each morning, the wall which was painted a shade darker than the rest of the room so that it stood out, obvious to the naked eye that it was constructed of some other material: wood rather than the plaster that formed this world, the stucco that created the human landscape.

When I returned to the card game, I noticed Leone's teeth were red from the wine. Didier had advanced to the third round, two hands behind the rest of us. And curled under my metal-framed chair was the dog. She didn't rise when I approached to sit, just raised her head and glanced up my shin bones, sniffed at my ankles when I sat and resumed my hand in the game.

There were moments when it all seemed to fall apart, when nothing made sense or adhered to any logic, when the entirety was called into question. That night was such a moment, when I pulled myself into the flannel cocoon of half-sleep, bewildered by my presence in that room, in that villa, on this island. All that I had from home fit into one small bag, 45 kilos worth of belongings -- clothing and toiletries, nothing of real worth. I had no photographs of my mother, my aunt, none of the brooches Astrid had found at neighbourhood garage sales, or the letters Thom had hidden in my textbooks to be discovered during lectures on the arbitrary nature of the sign.

Thom shifted position on his noisy mattress.

There was nothing to root me in that time, that room. When I reached my hand to touch Thom's shoulder, he awoke.

What?

Can you talk to me?

About what?

About deer bones and egg whites and the odour of rest homes and the scar on my shin and arbutus branches and curtains the colour of inner mango and the way the water broke over Beach Avenue and the skin of chickpeas and boots filling with rain water and the insistent noise of wasps trying to pass through glass panes. About sweaty cheese and banana yoghurt and the smell of a dog's paw and the scab on the bridge of my nose and cypress roots and the brilliance of the overhead sun and the degree at which the walls met and the gyro vendors who thought I was from Quebec and the blisters on my heels and the thinness of the walls that surrounded us. About the way it was before, and the way it had become.

But I could say nothing. If by some wish I could have become all speech, tongues in my arms, hands that talked, spoke, cried from my hair and feet, then I would have fallen from my cot and touched his knees, imploring with a thousand tongues. Even such an action would not have been mine, would have been translated, stolen from a noble source.

I gotta sleep, Kate. Can we talk in the morning?

It wasn't talk that I wanted, but touch. To spread my hand flat upon his chest, scratch his flesh with my thumb nail, pulling fingers into a fist. He remained on his cot, stoic in profile, indifferent to my sense of displacement, to my silence.

It is impossible to cut one side of a piece of paper without cutting the other; top and bottom are severed in the process. In the morning, when

Thom found me on the rooftop patio, my eyes blackened from a lack of sleep, his cutting words altered our presents, severed one road into two. His words came at me without individual meaning, just sounds making a whole: he didn't want this, he wanted out, and on, and on. He spoke in bargain-brand sentences, generic sentiments stolen from daytime dramas.

The donkey bells sounded in the distance, the scent of frying garlic all around.

Of course there are certain things that I know now: Thom had cut his hand when he had been thinking of something distant and let a wine glass slip from his grasp, a single shard sliced a straight line across his palm; that straight bloody line severed other lines -- the head, the heart; Thom's thoughts had been with Bess.

I had suspected as much already.

It had taken two weeks for it all to end. Fourteen days in two weeks, twice the length of time in which Thom and I had been apart before I followed him to Greece. In the length of one month, one female aphid reproduces 7500 times; a cellar apple decomposes until it is unrecognizable; someone dies, and the house erupts in mourning; the morning sun comes thirty times, and we lay heads upon lined pillows and sleep for two hundred forty hours. We fall in love. We fall out of love.

It wasn't that which drove me to the cave. Such unexpected turns occur, and we cope, we manage. It was his words, followed by his silence. I tried to explain the silence to Leone, that he was his same self when the others were around, but when he was alone with me, all words fell invisible.

Our room was a monastery, sworn in some strange pact to silence. Cloistered in dysphasia and sulk.

Bess found me still on the patio, started to rub cool sunscreen on the back of my neck.

You're starting to burn, sitting up here like this.

The harbour was empty and so Bess had the day off. She suggested we spend it together, walk the distance from Thira north to Oia.

While Bess bought an orange drink, I was in the bank changing money. If you held a drachma note to the light, the face of some Greek hero would appear in an otherwise vacant spot. This was the validity test: the presence of truth in the light.

Bess met me in the bank, orange drink in hand, and one for me too. I was watching her as the fluid disappeared into her body, fake orange against all-too-true pink, the colour of her lips against clear plastic, her tanned face pressed against clear plastic. Money in my pocket, hidden Greek faces embossed in the paper; we descended to the main square, to the heat there, and the action of sandwich presses and scooter rental agents.

We passed off the streets, found our footing on the inside paths of Thira. Bess stopped to window-shop for lapis lazuli, thinking it to be black rather than blue, the blue of the sea here, and not the black of orthodoxy. She pointed to a ring of onyx which she said suited my bony hands. But we didn't go in, didn't try anything on; she wanted to get to Oia before the sun and moon coincided in the sky. She was talking about putting in extra hours at the restaurant so she could get to Bucharest before the end of summer, before the weather turned and she had to start making her way back to Egypt, or

Israel. And I had thought at that time that she wouldn't go to Egypt, since she had found Thom, since he had whispered rainforests into her subconscious.

On the path out of Thira was another flawed sign, no motives inside this place, only an extra dash in an apartment vacancy. "Apart-ment." A strange word which pointed to a non-existent separation, unless considered this way: my room was bigger than the building in which it rested. Inside my room, no matter which way I faced, I was faced with the walls of that place; I could not escape its presence once inside. But once outside, facing the edifice, I could merely turn a few degrees away, and the building would be gone from my view. Inside the apartment, then, I would be apart from the world, closed into a closed space, cut off by the four walls surrounding my body.

The path pulled away from the town, buildings ceased as if a line had been drawn to make the boundaries of civilization. Only, one building remained ahead, walled in mosaic. When we neared the structure, a bearded man gazed out between the iron bars of the gate, whistled like a finch. He waved at us; Bess waved back. Then he waved again, differently, beckoning.

The courtyard in bloom in purples and yellows, bees the size of fists carried pollen bombs over our heads. The man closed the gate, passed us each a sarong to cover our knees, and led us to a display of small, tin squares. Each was stamped with a different part of the body: kidney, lungs, ear, eye.

Tamatazos.

He said it again, then smiled and nodded, held his hand to the display in gesture. When Bess looked at me, I shrugged. She selected a neck, shoulder and arm which stretched the length of the tin plate like a skeletal wing, muscles indicated in the contours of the metal. I chose a thumb, disconnected from any hand, unbent at the knuckle, perfectly manicured. Disconnected in any sense through language -- fingers stemming from "five",

though thumbs always feel prey to childhood games: how many fingers am I holding up? Five? No, four and one thumb. Finger - penkwe - five. Thumb - teu - to swell, increase, though in the Latin it was referred to as the thick finger. Opposable in manner, in definition; in tin dislocated, presented as a solitary digit of enough weight to warrant freedom from solidarity of extremities.

And in my hand, caressed by a still-connected thumb, the thin edge of the tamatazos cut into my palm, swollen in the heat of the day. The man led us into a darkened chapel; we entered, and he pulled the solid doors shut behind him as he departed. Blinded by entry, I waited until my sight adjusted, until I could make out the oval eyes of the orthodox saints staring down upon us where we stood on the cement aisle.

What do we do?

Bess' voice was clipped, chipped as the cheeks of the sad faces on the wall, robes ending in crumbling edges and the gaps between moments of enlightenment illuminated by the candles, thin white wax held alit in boxes of ash, of sand; three levels of light in each box, and the perpetual drip of melting prayers. Above one such collection, my eye caught the glint of tin behind flames, then when I neared the candles I could see the tamatazos there, stacked behind prayer candles, left behind as reminders to the saints, as memos for miracles. Bess stacked her tin shoulder with the metal organs in this silent basilica. My thumb remained with me, tucked away in short's pocket: a souvenir of pollical days.

We continued on the path, clearly marked in the soil as though over the thousands of years the passage of space had only occurred on this one line, this one scar to Oia. From the top of the hill I could see the entire island, the outline of the shape it had once been. It was easy to imagine it as whole,

though just as easy to accept the scattered bits of land, the sprinklings of brown amidst encompassing blue. Once we'd started downhill, I couldn't stand my cheap shoes, my feet swollen in the heat, rubbing canvas with each step, shifting in the small space allotted between toes. I couldn't bend my knees any more, the movement somehow affected my feet, and so I was trying to negotiate the descent with fixed legs, unbending, until Bess noticed.

Do you want to trade? You can wear my sandals.

We sat on large rocks, passing footwear between us. Her sandals consisted of one strap which reached across the top of the foot. It felt good to be free from my own, to be in Bess' loose sandals. Soon after, the path turned to pavement, to sidewalks drawing us into Oia.

The town was smaller than Thira, was set up for tourists who flew to the island and were taxied to awaiting villas with their own staff, smocked housekeepers and chefs standing at the open gates. Batiked scarves lined the windows of stores filled with designer clothes, embroidered slippers. The restaurants all served octopus. Bess walked us past all of this to a staircase down, to a path that snuck around the rocks to a secluded beach. The sun was lowering, held at shoulder height in the sky rather than overhead, held in supplication of the afternoon heat. And Bess' shoulders were browning, further demarcating the line between exposed skin and that under her tank top.

We lay on the sand, dug our toes beneath its covering, stared out at the small blue boats floating in the harbour, the fishermen napping on board.

Do you want to talk about it? she asked, not turning to look at me, still fixated on the boats. Thom told me before he went to work, I hope you don't mind.

The only thing I mind is a lie.

I knew I wasn't angry with Bess, didn't even know if she had done more than glance at Thom by the sinks, hold his throat in her wet hand -- a position of pure trust and longing. Flyk had allowed for the same trust, her teeth at my throat, mine at hers, in play, in supplication, in connection. But there was that bond between Bess and Thom that I could not deny, could not imply it was anything other than it was: our pavements had cracked, our paths had split when Thom had found something in Bess which I did not possess. A liking for dangling earrings, perhaps, an accent, a collection of Indian cottons.

The water was so still it was solid, a blue platform stretching away from where we sat on the sand's edge. Bess' hand was on my forearm, doubling the temperature of my skin, calefaction burning the epidermis in a gesture of tenderness; I wasn't that way, never had the right words for the moment's situation, couldn't raise spirits with the raising of an eyebrow, a grin, or any other customary expression.

She stood. Come, she said, let's swim. Let's forget it and swim. She held a hand down towards me, an open palm waiting to be filled with my grasp.

I can't swim.

You just think that right now, but it will help.

No, I mean I actually can't swim. I don't know how.

Come, I'll teach you.

But swimming lessons were the furthest need, the most distant desire. The weight of Thom's words still rested on my sternum, pressing from manubrium to xiphoid process, weighing, resting there where my ribs curled around to the front, encasing a still-beating heart and lungs which inflated and deflated to no one. When I didn't grasp her hand, Bess sat back down.

Some other time then, she said, slipping her feet back into my shoes. On the hill behind her a windmill spun slowly, the four wooden arms of the vane clocking the dying wind, the sails flapping at the occasional gust. Soon, patrons would start to fill the outdoor patios, wait for the sunset, assuming the arrival of the sunset. That was an event which could be relied upon, predicted, forecasted down to the nearest minute. I always just assumed that those calculations were correct, never had the curiosity or wakefulness to check the fallibility of such figures. Instead, I threw all my trust into a few words spoken, a few letters received, but nothing that could have been tallied with calculators, dials, fingers and toes. There was no divining rod to mark the point when a bed became a dry river, when kind words ceased to flow.

I didn't want to swim, wanted to be cleansed by standing under a tepid sheet of water rather than float in its saltiness. I had been existing on sponge baths since Henry warned of the frigid temptatures of morning shower water. The barrels of water that sat upon the rooftop warmed by the afternoon sun, making it possible to shower only during the height of haziness. There was still a streak of honey in my hair, his prints on my skull: the stuff that would only come clean under the force of gravitational fall.

A story which Leone was surprised to hear:

The March rain had poured maniacally for days on end, trapping Thom and me in his apartment, letting up, then catching us during an excursion out for aubergines. We pressed into the phone booth at the far end of the parking lot, watched the rain slide down the glass panes like clear paint, varnishing everything in sight, every pine needle, every car radio antenna, every gravestone in the cemetery across the street. The angel in flight had

already darkened three shades of slate. He held my head to his chest, twisting my hair between his fingers while he dialed weather information. A car drove past; the driver was someone I had dated one fall.

Don't you know that guy? Thom asked. I think you used to date him.

That was over a year ago. I hadn't met you yet.

I know. I was watching. You had lunch with him most days, in the upper cafeteria. I was there, too. We had the same free block that semester, you and I. But I don't think you noticed me.

Why didn't you...

I wasn't ready. He listened to the recording on the phone then. It says the same until Saturday.

We ran under the rain, our jackets pulled over our heads, wool staving off the wet, the incessant drip of water from the branches of Garry Oaks. When we reached Thom's apartment, we laid our socks on the radiator, placed the aubergine slices on broil. I thought, then, of the many faces I had seen but not approached, those aspects I had desired to meet, but did not. I would never know their names, siblings, favourite fruits. I would never run a soapy washcloth over their shoulder blades, nor would I know their lung capacities: if any were capable of remaining under water for more than three minutes. I would not know any of this because when my eyes met theirs I always looked away. And I guess I must have felt some measure of respect then for Thom, who, when I happened to reach for my jacket from the chair's back and saw his face across the cafeteria, did not avert his gaze, but smiled and mouthed "Hello".

If there was memory of my mother's voice before the hole came, there was nothing of my father's. Perhaps he had phoned our house weekly, disguised as wrong numbers, and I would have never known. Never known his voice pitch, his laugh, if he had a serious or comical sneeze.

I thought of Bess left behind on the sands of Oia as the bus pulled away from that town: she wanted to watch the day end. Her brown curls hung in her face, over her eyes; I saw this when I paused on the staircase and glanced back. She was staring in the direction of the windmill when I turned and continued the climb up to the road.

The walk had taken three hours; the bus ride took fifteen minutes. In his bus lined with paper money from a thousand nations, the driver sped down the dirt road, scattering Fiats and mopeds into the ditch with the continuous blast of the horn. He turned off the engine as we neared Thira, coasting us down 25 Martiou, but not easing to a stop when we reached the depot. We became stationary in a single, jarring moment. Dust surrounded us.

Didier was on the upper patio with binoculars, fixing his gaze on the waters far below. When I entered the villa, he looked down at me, binoculars still held to his eyes. I imagined he could see my dust-filled pores, dried blood where my scab still remained, my sunken sternum bone. He came down to greet me, kissed my cheeks. A bottle of red wine sat opened on the table, unfinished, next to English texts.

I want to speak, he said, pointing at the books. I want to know...to know...votre langue.

Kyno came from the corridor into the weakening sun, came as if to approach us, then stopped short to scratch behind her ear. She paused, sniffed her paw and licked the nail, then scratched again. She stank as if she had rolled in something dead, the stench of decay caught in her fur, a bouquet of rot like an old chicken carcass or ripe durian.

I want to clean the dog, I said to Didier, motioned in her direction. We can carry her to the shower, if we can grab her. Can you help me?

He didn't understand, and so I found the words in French, a language which I had learned in high school, uniformed teachers' pacing, never quite explaining the verb tenses, taking some secret pleasure in the difficulty of the language, the irregular tenses which changed in illogical ways. I remembered "chien" and "douche" and "maintenant", which seemed all that was needed to suggest my idea to Didier.

He disappeared into his room, emerged with half a sausage in his hand. Kyno caught a whiff of the meat before Didier tossed it straight past the sinks into the shower room. And she followed, trotting into the cement room, not noticing Didier and I behind her, closing the wooden door behind us. The room was a scalene triangle, held our three bodies, our bending necks where we looked at each other before Didier reached above our heads and turned the faucet clockwise.

The fall of lukewarm water filled the silence, sending Kyno cowering at the far corner, beneath the small hole in the cement -- the paneless window overlooking the harbour. Didier pulled off his shirt, threw it towards Kyno, towards the window. It wasn't until after he grabbed the dog and pulled her under the shower that I noticed his tanned chest and the four nipples in darker brown, the polymastic state of his sun-browned front. I stepped into the fall of water, lathered her fur with the bar of oatmeal soap. My need for

Thom had been cut short, had been stolen from my hip pockets by he who had slotted it there. And I realized then that I could see no further than the current day; the actions of tomorrow were unknown. There had been a plan once, I remembered a plan, a blueprint for the years to come involving Thom, the Gulf Islands, five children and Ovaltine. And now there was nothing save for the dank stench of fur being rubbed clean, Didier's hands working in the soap. Had I been back home, rainfall on the windows and date squares in the cupboard, it would have taken weeks before I'd have felt prepared to move beyond Thom. But this was a different world, and I was becoming a different me.

He extracted a penknife from his pocket, flipped it open and bent over Kyno, located the spot again with his finger then dug in with the tip of the blade.

C'est une tique.

He held the knife to my face. The water washed it clean before I could twist off the faucet to see his intended object of display, but I knew he meant the dog had ticks; her skin was almost like braille for the number of ticks embedded beneath her flesh, and Didier and I worked with the blade trying to eradicate the epidermal words, trying to bring about the end of the tick lexicon upon her back, in the folds between legs and torso. The ceasure of the synchronic vocabulary of itch and scratch.

Kyno stood still, let us work around her, extracting the blood-filled mites. When she began shivering, though, Didier turned on the water, washed her fur clean, then pulled me under. His hands tugged my shirt out from where it was tucked in, brought the seams over my head until I was naked of cotton, unzipped and loosened fibres, peeled wet shorts from my abdomen as he kneeled in front of me, his eyes focused on the steel teeth and

the space where they had been. I stepped one foot out of khaki, then another. When Kyno shook, Didier placed a soapy sea sponge on my nape, pulled down my skin until the sacrum swell: the curvature of the spine and point of coccyx inward to areas affected by his touch. Under the water spray of gravitational fall, of dog shake, six nipples hardened as tanned hands scrubbed me clean. No other part of his body met mine, not mouths nor eyes, just tips of fingers, prints lost in the wash. Except for his teeth, which clamped gently around my Achilles' tendon after he had rubbed away the dead skin and dust. He knelt behind me, lifted my heel to his face, and bit there, remained like that for a minute or until he had to swallow. His breath was sixteen degrees warmer than the water.

After, I stood naked in my room, holding that position and remembering his teeth upon my ankle. I had not towelled off, stood in a growing puddle on the floor as the water ran off my skin, my hair drying too soon before the squeeze of lemon into follicles. Thom caught me in that position, hands working lemon into my hair and one heel lifted into air, held still by the memory of Didier bearing the weight of my fibula as it fixed into the curve of his palms. Thom said nothing, grabbed his pen from the table by the door, left me with one foot suspended in air.

I did not play cards that night, but remained in the room, Kyno curled under my cot. I tried to read some of the Russian novel, tried to displace myself in some other world, but the words grew meaningless as the sun's absence darkened the room, as I lit one candle, then another, when the darkness deepened. I was reading the same sentence over and over: "As in every place where people gather together, so in the small German spa, to which the Shcherbatskys had come, the usual crystallization, as it were, of society took place, each member of that society being assigned his definite and

unchangeable place." I could feel Didier's breath through the walls, on my ankle still. The walls glowed in infrared around us, making it possible for me to see him through the plaster of two rooms, straight past the room which separated us, Leone's postcards of Kenya taped above her bed, Henry's maps of Turkey. I imagined I could see Didier as he lay upon his bed, cleaving an apricot in two with his thumbs, biting out the wooden pit and placing it on his night table before depositing the pulpy side of one half on his tongue to catch the juice before sinking teeth in.

I was awake. My ears were plugged and my eyes were trapped closed. All I could smell was the garlic in the room, the morning breath of one already gone, and I wondered too if I smelled of Thom's odours. If I had mistakenly osmosed some part of his being, if he had managed to leave a mark on the outside too.

There were two holes in this room -- one was in the ceiling above the quiet bed, above Thom's bed. Based on the dream about returning to my aunt's, I had decided that it led to home. The second was in the wall behind the quiet bed. It *was* the wall behind the quiet bed. There was a fake wall that shuddered when the donkeys passed overhead every morning. I could have pushed it through if I had wanted, the wall was not so strong. This hole grew further inside the cliff, perhaps twisting into an intricate system of tunnels under the town. Perhaps it led to the cement factory, or to nothingness in a few feet.

Kyno yawned at the foot of the bed, picked herself up from the concrete floor and came over to where I was standing, then scratched. She must have

come in the room when Thom left -- all night she had been out running with the pack. I searched her fur for more ticks, pored over the folds of skin, those recesses where it was warm and where the blood was close to the surface.

I could hear Didier outside. His legs blocked out the sun of the small window as he paced up top on the patio.

Du yu lyk bassball? I lyk bassball.

He repeated the phrase over and over as he paced. Then he changed.

I lyk Yankees bassball.

There was a pit in my stomach, empty and yet filled with bile and all other juices. It was different, though, from the emptiness behind the walls, the unknown chasm there. Just the sound of English lessons and the light pouring in through the window were enough to replenish.

There was a hole in that room. It echoed louder and louder with the tones of Didier's voice, words reverberating through the empty spaces between the walls, shaking the fake wall. His voice was caulking, and I realized that we were the only two people home, and that my nails were red with the blood of crushed ticks.

When I reached the top step to the patio, Didier was at the far end, gazing north to the volcano. He didn't hear me, or didn't turn, remained facing in that direction, practicing.

Du yu lyk spor-t, du yu lyk spor-t...

I placed my right hand on his shoulder blade, stepped closer, reached around to his chest with that hand and pulled myself in. Polarities not opposing, but attracting, the heart-spaces parallel and I could feel the blood pumping through his whole self. The electric energy that raced through him as he tried to locate what was happening. He turned around.

He searched for words he could never find, did not know, but I liked his silence. And these blood-painted fingers were not mine, those hands were dislodged from some other self and attached at my wrists. I watched them trace down his chest, they stopped at each nipple and pinched there, and again, and Didier sucked in a mouthful of air. I filled his mouth with my own, and the sun oppressed us, pressed us to the wall, so direct above that I was guessing we weren't casting shadows on the white-washed cement, only the shadows our hands left on our bodies, the remnants of a string of saliva on a chin.

He turned me around and pulled my back into his chest, his hands on mine. An orange hue must have surrounded us then. I felt thigh muscles flex to hold us into position, and the heat of the day on my face. The jingle of donkey bells sounded in the distance, followed by a man yelling hie. And the smell of dank straw blew up from the direction of the vacant factory. Didier kissed my nape, drew his tongue till the fabric began. I was laughing in a voice not my own.

There was a clicking noise then, fast and precise, and Kyno appeared at the top of the stairs. She glanced at me, then laid with her head in the shade of a deck chair. I'd forgotten to fill her water bowl. She was pretending to sleep, but tried to open her eyes without me noticing, tried to observe my falling hands and open mouth, and when I caught her at it, she closed her eyes again in an instant.

French man, Greek dog, and I could have spoken then of anything and not been understood, could have talked of algorithms or algophobia, the truths in numbers and pain, could have lied if I had wanted to and said that I still believed in such things, and would not have been questioned, not have had explanations extracted from hollow bones. But instead of speaking, I was

acting, dog's eyes on my skin and his hands there; there were no lines that I'd memorized, nothing came to mind freely, and so I stayed silent.

But Didier took one tanned palm and guided me to his straw mattress, indented over the ages to fit bodies together, to pull all to a gravitational centre. His blankets did not scratch. The aroma there was of chocolate and yeast and plankton. And his hands held my shoulders in place while his face rose over mine, features distorting as in circus mirrors when he pulled close to brush lips against lips, the quick in-dart of a tongue; the wind banged the window against the frame, curtains quivering at the touch.

We remained in that room all day, rising from the sheets only to peel oranges or slice bread, fill ourselves with juice to keep our lips from parching. When we had to pee, we went in the trash can, the ink on crumpled papers running in black streaks against the white. It was as if we knew that leaving the room meant leaving an entire world, a silent planet floating in a chaotic universe. Such a pretty garden, cakes iced with lemon rind. We had constructed an alphabet that only we could use: the words were formed in the joining of our bodies. There were numerous s's in our phrasing, our limbs twisting in the sheets sounding out our syllables. His hip bones were the k's pressing out the kinks in the quilt, silent as knights once my hands covered them. This was a language I could grasp, the edges were not mapped; the diachrony of our sex was fresh, untraceable back through any lost positions. Nothing had been abandoned over the time we spent in that room, no placement of a limb, or insertion of a phalange. Didier's index finger held the odour of our whole vernacular: the adjectives to describe it, the verbs which had produced such a melding of fluids.

When the others began to return home, our absence was questioned, then forgotten. Thom noticed that my shoes were still placed beneath my

bed, a detail which I had not thought of before sequestering myself in the confines of Didier's straw mattress. I had not worn my shoes since the shower yesterday, had not wanted to cover my tendon with any form of canvas or leather, had wanted only for the impression of his teeth to remain. That was enough to harden my soles to the jutting cobblestones, the dirt and pebbles along 25th Martiou. While they deliberated on the reasons for my shoeless disappearance, Didier held his stubbled cheek to my mouth, his temple at my forehead. We were perfectly still like that, even when Stace noticed Didier's books on the table, pages turning in the wind, and the opened wine bottle. She asked if they belonged to anyone, and Leone suggested Didier. We were perfectly still when the latch lifted, when Leone's head and one shoulder appeared between the two doors, when she placed his things on the floor just inside and then saw us from across the room. Didier simply lifted one finger to his lips. She winked slowly, backed out, pushed the latch into place. Then I heard her propose to the others that they splurge on a restaurant meal, that she craved the skordalia at the tavern in the main square.

I was back in the room that I shared with Thom, unshod and reading the Russian novel, when he returned from the restaurant, found me reclining on the quiet bed.

Where've you been?

He said nothing, just shrugged, fingered through his things on the shelf, seemingly in search of no particular item.

I was out, walking. Walking around.

He shrugged again, unconcerned with my explanation, exited the way he had entered.

I know that dogs feel disappointment the same as us: let down after promised walks are not fulfilled; when empty hands are shown, hands that only moments ago were filled with some culinary treat.

I know that the soil in this cave is older than me, older than any convictions I may have had now or in the past, that it has been pushed up from a far deeper place than my current creeds.

I know that when Thom parted futures with me, something occurred to his character: all his magnets fell from his fridge, the hue of his skin turned ashen. How many hours have I been in this cave, thinking on it, thinking on it.

His first word was "Hello"; his last, "Resignation".

There are objects I am willing to resign, to relinquish: physical properties constructed of flesh, bone, and an intangible yet inextricable system of...they finally did take Astrid's teeth, then kept pumping her so full of morphine that she never spoke again, just winked that one time. Winked, winced, it all seems the same now. More silent than mother's silent moans.

It was dusk on a Friday night; time and days had lost meaning to me, all had fallen in upon themselves, creating a single endless day punctuated in ellipses by the darkening, lightening of the sky. My teeth needed brushing regardless of the lack of food I had taken in.

I returned from the market with banana yoghurt for me and eggs for Kyno, which she lapped up straight from the halved shells, tongue scooping into the calcium to extract orange yolks and the clear, runny surroundings. I could almost see her coat take on a sheen after each swallow.

All the doors in the villa were closed. Thom was showering. Didier asleep. Bess, Leone at work. And Stace and Henry were packing, though none of us knew then that within hours they would be gone. They had booked tickets that morning, and were on the midnight boat to Crete. From Crete, they were to take passage to Alexandria, their sweating bodies stowed beneath decks, pressed together as the waves passed, as the water passed around them, the ocean bottom an arc beneath, the sky an arc above as they moved from heat to heat, from dirt to sand.

When Thom finished showering, he dressed, left for the laundry on 25th Martiou with his sack of dusty t-shirts slung over his shoulder. He said nothing on his way out, made no facial expression as he stopped momentarily to watch Kyno push an empty shell with her tongue.

She had integrated well into the villa, but still the sound of any bang reduced her to a quivering heap. Everyone learned to close the doors like a mime, and so when Thom shut the door to the courtyard it sealed with an almost silent click.

I collected Kyno's shells, stacked them on the tabletop, one inside another, making a tower of spent pods, wondering if shells were bones, if the fact that both were made of calcium equated the two.

A gecko ran past.

I could see shadows of movement behind each of the curtained windows. Stace and Henry passing back and forth between beds, Didier at his desk for a moment, then not. He creaked open his door, rucksack on his back.

I go to the sea, to hear. To listen? To hear?

Listen.

You come too?

Prayer beads around his neck. I could have reached out, pulled each bauble between thumb and forefinger, could have made fifty-six wishes for the same number of bones in my spine, teeth shared between us. One could be true, though only if Didier had given over his wisdoms, had allowed such knowledge to be extracted from his jaws. If he had learned to throw discretion out with its spit and blood.

We met the mules on the path down, herder at the tail driving them home after another day of descent and the climb back up. A symphony of bells, each note of the octave sounding as their hindquarters swayed, as they tried to shake free from the small clouds of flies that circled their ears endlessly.

The port was empty, silent. Boats remained still in their moorings. Didier sat at the edge of the portwall, took off his shoes, dangled his feet in the cooling water. His toes were forever wrinkled, as if he had spent his childhood wading in riverbeds, soaking in the cistern. In broken English, he explained: whales sing. This much I had already known, had watched my share of nature shows, could even recognize the sound. But it went beyond that. The song is language, a form of conversation. Like a totem, it tells the story of a particular whale pack; all whales in the same pack sing the same songs. The whales never forget the songs of their own.

If the whale would sing, perhaps then it could be identified, and returned home.

Too, if I am a whale, I see you in there. He pointed a finger down his throat. I see if you are sick, I see what is sick, I see if you have a baby. And you, you see me too. We are invisible. Without this. He pinched the skin on my arm.

I felt slightly sick, having eaten garbage for days. Nothing of nutritional value: paprika chips and cheese pies. Banana yoghurt. I didn't require much, spent most of the days napping, roaming for short hours before napping again. It wasn't so much the food but the building of silt inside, the mensuration of days on the calendar from moon to moon. It would be months before the sky again held the whale constellation Cetus, having recently crested overhead, but only weeks until Sirius would appear.

I wanted to see inside Didier, to chart his parasympathetic nervous system, observe the appendix which still remained intact, the colour of his bone marrow. But even more, I wanted to see inside Thom, the gap where his appendix had been and what, if anything, had supplanted that space. If there were other gaps, fissures that had not been filled, that required caulking, cauterizing.

Didier called out to the night, to the water. A sound from beneath the diaphragm. I tried to see his muscles lift to push out the noise, the whale song, but I couldn't. I could smell parsley on his breath, the charred soil of Nea Kameni, the drying nets at the far end of the port. And I could hear that his song was not returned.

From the path to the villa, I could see the grounds of the abandoned cement factory, could make out the pack of dogs chasing each other under pools of lampost light. Kyno's nightly ritual was to run with them, knock over garbage bins, sniff and tear at the earth. That was her true phratry, her mutty kin.

When we pushed through the blue gate door to the villa, we found Bess crying in the courtyard, a note from Stace and Henry in her hand.

They didn't even say goodbye, she said.

I dropped Didier's wrist, sat next to Bess and held her head against my shoulder. Didier's hand on my shoulder blade.

That's not the way it should be, she said. People are supposed to say good-bye. There are supposed to be good-byes. It's part of the deal. No one likes it, but it's part of the deal.

I can count on one hand the number of good-byes I had received to that point, even without the thumb: there had been the gas-induced wink from Astrid. My mother's silent yells. And Flyk's eyes, filled with panic. In none of those were the words "good-bye" actually voiced; after all, it isn't the words that hold the power but the action, the turning and receding. Yet we confuse the two, conflate words with deeds, and opt for other phrases to mark the departure: so long, see you later, à bientôt. In Greek, the word for hello and good-bye is the same, creates a circle of coming and going – you depart as soon as you arrive and arrive at the moment of departure. This is perhaps the closest to reality, for the introduction to any new person inevitably means that at some point that person will no longer exist in your life. Either they leave or they die, and their physical presence is erased, or you eliminate them from your social interaction, and they die another death. This is the death I suffered at the hands of Thom. It is the life in which I resurrect Flyk, my father, Astrid, the gaping "O" as it calls for deliverance from physical being.

I have no memory of my father's departure, have no memory if the worry beads spilled across the linoleum floor in one single action, or if they and days were slowly extracted from the thin filament. If there had been one grand X on the calendar or a number of small red ones that grew in frequency and then stopped altogether. There was no Hollywood moment of him and me on a park bench or a park swing, no apologies, and no good-bye.

Mother pulled herself from bed on the second Sunday of June, 1978. While other families drove in Chevy Malibus to brunch, she walked with Flyk and I to the end of the block, and back again. Oxygen tank on the cart behind her, slippered feet against summered pavement. Her voice buzzer left behind on the bedside table, silenced with the longing to press against her severed throat. I counted five houses on the block that still had Christmas lights strung from eaves. Mother placed her hand on the top of my head, mouthed something that was like 'I want it to end' or 'a walnut and.' They looked the same to me, and without the buzzer I couldn't tell the difference.

There had been a black squirrel on the powerline, pair of running shoes dangling there as they had for years. There had been crows pelting the pavement with acorns, and the neighbour's cat in heat screaming at the living room window. Flyk and I hiding in red-osier dogwood, digging, with certain knowledge held between us – always keep a supply of emergency food on hand: a bone beneath one foot of loose soil, a chocolate bar melting in jeans pocket.

Bess and I tore down the two beds, folded the wool blankets and stored them in the linen cupboard where Athimios kept the rest, the down pillows and sun-bleached curtains. All stripped down, the beds were like blank pages, tabula rasa waiting to be written over with the dead cells and hair follicles of some new person.

Bess sat on one empty bed, glanced up at the wall where Henry's maps of Turkey had been.

I'm surprised, she said. I'm surprised my stories about Egypt sent them there.

Pardon?

I was in Egypt for a year, yah, a year before I came here. I didn't think Henry would change his mind about Turkey, and I never thought they'd pick Egypt. I guess I sold them on the idea.

There was a pounding on the wall, coming from Didier's room, through the wall above Bess' head.

It's none of my business, right, but is there something...I mean...the French bloke and you...

I dropped down next to her on the mattress. One, two, three more knocks against the wall. When I left to investigate, I found Didier in his room, nailing my shoes to the wall; green canvas runners held against the stucco as if walking down the white, held against the stucco next to the portrait of the port at night. He tied the loose laces into tight bows, rabbit ears encircling each other, twisting into place.

Leone and Thom returned home from work with three bottles of wine and six orders of tzatziki fries and Kyno in tow, sniffing at the air: bounty for the day's toil, left upon the metal tabletop in the courtyard. They were in the room with Bess, three sitting with heads in hands, missing those long since gone.

That's fucked, said Leone, that's so rude.

Thom glanced up, saw me standing in the dim light of the doorway, moths circling my head. He had ripped the wallpaper from my walls, had pulled a whistling kettle off its element, yet I wished for nothing more than to crawl back onto the noisy cot with him, have his chin press into the soft spot on my crown, his fingers working out the lemoned knots in my hair.

He stared silently at my naked feet, sighed, turned back to Bess.

It was Leone's idea, and we all went along with it: hauled three mattresses off their rusted frames and into the courtyard, blankets enough for five sleeping bodies. And space at our ten feet for a dozy dog. And the six of us remained sleepless like that, limbs intertwined smelling of wine and garlic, sheets pulled taut beneath pained expressions, each mourning some sort of passing.

I would never celebrate his birthday, having met him soon after he had turned twenty-seven, and now months from his twenty-eighth. Would never cover his eyes with my palms when the cake was brought forth, would never string bows from his ears. Each year, November would pass with a faint recollection of what should have been: memories of birthdays past, lemon icing on fingertips and noses.

Beneath dirty sheets, we held unidentifiable limbs in the hopes of making our presences known, pressed fingerprints into mosquito-ravaged shoulderblades.

Hours passed and there were the screams of chickens, the howling of stray dogs. Kyno scratched at the courtyard door until I arose, let her out, watched her from the upper patio as she raced through the labyrinth of paths, then down the dirt road to the source of the sound: the pack of dogs running free. The solitary lamp light elongated their shadows when they stood still long enough to scratch, to sniff, noses pressed firmly into fur. There was the sharp prick then against my shoulder: the disengagement of a satisfied mosquito from flesh, abdomen filled with the sanguine stuff, leaving me with only black and yellow bile coursing through my body, speeding to replace the cavity where blood had been. The coagulation, the clotting to stop it all from flowing out a pin prick hole.

Kyno woke me with a cold nose against my forehead. I shook to unrecognizable wakefulness, uneasy wakefulness, as when I'd woken as a child in the master bedroom of my mother's friends' house, laughter from down the darkened hall, Joni Mitchell on the stereo, the pattern of someone's corduroy jacket imprinted on my kiddy cheek.

Eventually, we had all fallen asleep sometime around sunrise. There was a hand at my throat, another on my wrist. I pried myself from the pack, stumbled towards the sink to brush my teeth. Kyno was relentless with attention, curling between my legs in front of the sinks, not caring when water splashed down on to her back from above or if her paws skidded out from under her on the wet pavement.

There was blood on the wool blanket under the storage cabinet - Kyno's sleeping spot. I naively searched her for a cut, someplace where she may have rubbed against splintered wood. Checked the pads of her paws for glass fragments, her mouth for shards of chicken bones. Then thought back to the one pair of my underwear that mother had set aside for Flyk, hole cut at the elastic waist for her tail. Once or twice a year, Flyk wore the garment as a symbol of her fertility, or so she wouldn't spot on the furniture, the white rugs. Mother recognized the signs, could anticipate when Flyk would come in heat; I knew only the peppery smell of her paws, the heights to which she could jump.

We escaped to the dirt road behind the villa, two stacks of apartment blocks before the road carved out its trail away from town. A short walk before the road split in two: one way leading to the port, one leading down to the abandoned cement factory, the vacant building made of a darker grey than anything in the natural landscape. Kyno out front, paws kicking up small

clouds of dust in the soft earth. The road was made of chalk dust, of talcum powder from Astrid's dresser top, of cremated centuries. My feet sank in three inches before resting on solidity.

At the bottom of the road were the carcasses -- bones pulled clean of meat, feathers bloodied and dried a brownred. Gallinaceous dung and innards darkened with flies. There must have been ten chickens, ten less chickens, strewn about the yard in front of the abandoned factory. And a hole dug into the soft earth beneath the wire fence of the coop. Hens in neighboring coops scratched in the dirt as though nothing had happened, unbothered by the slaughter.

Kyno held a breast bone in her mouth, would not give it up no matter how hard I tugged at the cartilage. It was the scavenger's mentality, the clenched jaws, body hunched over carrion torn asunder, us under the sun in the open yard.

The dogs from the night were gone; their traces remained. Carcasses and shit, bones half-buried in haste. Kyno stopped to smell everything, each earth divot, each dismembered beak. Nothing had started to rot yet, still smelled clean, sweet, like cold cream.

Flyk and I scavenged beneath red-osier dogwood, dug for whatever was hidden between petrified roots. Our bellies were full of licorice and Milk Bones, our bed was always made. Had we not had each other, perhaps we would have been true scavengers, pawing the muck for affection.

Consider the fact that we are all scavenging for something.

I heard Thom's voice, calling, from the entrance to the factory. I had found a stack of old Athenian newspapers dating back to June, 1986. Mustachioed men shaking hands on each cover, the only words recognizable in my poor Greek were Cypress and Reagan.

Kate, are you in here?

I came out of the shadows into the middle of the empty factory.

The French guy's looking for you.

Did he say why?

Something about going to Akrotiri, red beach or something. Fish. I don't know. He left, though.

For Akrotiri?

For the bus, that's all I know. Leone was with him.

We walked out to the back of the factory. A goat herder stood atop a small hill, his goats grazing on the dry grass. Kyno lay on the ground, gnawing on the breast bone. It had been days since I had heard Thom's voice, since he had spoken to me. Silence was the modern language of Thom, who moved about the villa encased in silence, eyes void of anything readable.

He had written a poem on the inset page of the Russian novel before I had moved away to be with Astrid, before he had embarked on his journey, had written it in a moment of loss in his scratchy hand, trying to sum up feelings he had never really had. The words "show your nipples to no one" were about ownership, pride, rather than love. I thought I had been in love, thought I knew the definition of a word or that I could point to the tangibilities of the intangible. But the intangible remained intangible, and words were thus, too. I had put faith in such things, believed them to be binding.

There was meaning in a gesture, a finger shaking, or an expression -- an eyebrow cocked. These things had an unspoken weight agreed upon by all. No translation needed, no buffers between persons. Yet a gesture or an expression could not hurt as much as words. A finger, a sneer, would not injure like a well-placed line, or no line at all.

The goat herder blew a horn; the goats raised their heads, ran back to him. Kyno stood, but did not give chase. She sniffed at the air, the breeze that blew up from the sea below.

My hands ached, fingers curled in on themselves. I tried pressing palm to palm, eight carpal bones of the wrist seized in the daylight, tried shaking the stiff out. Kyno licked the back of one hand, oily tongue and the remnants of cartilage against my skin.

Cartilage, from the same root as hurdle, *kert* - to plait, twist together. The skeletal parts to be overcome; the obstacles of the body. Linked to the Greek *kyrtos* - bird cage.

Thom walked with Kyno and me, silently with us, but decided to trace an ancient path carved into the side of the cliff, towards the crumbling stables on the backside of the villa. Down the path the geckos ran to each side and larger pebbles tumbled the length of the cliff below us. There were two caves. They seemed to stretch far enough to contain me and Kyno and my pack and my empty future. A new Cynossema -- the bitch's heaven. I could become the crazed woman of Thira, calling out curses from the depth of the darkness, in a tongue not quite English, not quite Greek, yet recognizable in any language. Tourists in the restaurants above would think I was an ancient spirit, singing a dusty song in dirty robes with my hair half falling out of a braid. They would shift in their metal chairs, complain of the salty feta,

engage in small talk about the sunset or sunburns while I cried below. And Kyno could accompany.

Beyond the caves were unused stables. Thom reached them first, ducked his head through each doorway. The first held just a metal bed frame and straw. The second was empty. The third was adorned with small wooden bird cages, like cricket cages, hanging on all four walls and littering the floor below. No birds, only the feathers and white stains on the wood as reminders of past tenants, porcelain water bowls long since dry.

This part of the island must have slid away, must have fallen off to the sea. There was hardly room for horses or donkeys to negotiate the path between the abandoned factory and the stables. Donkeys sung to standing sleep by the songs of finches. The island was in flux that way; individual rocks were forever being dislodged by buses or boys, ricocheted into ditches or relocated into pockets. Even such small movement, such seemingly innocuous shifting of land was just that -- a movement, a shift. When the cliff fell, the donkeys were moved farther inland, and eventually that land would give way too. Such an erosion could take place over the slow course of a million years, or in terrifying seconds.

Thom reached the fifth and final stable. The furthest wall had crumbled into a makeshift staircase, which Thom ascended. He stood on a platform in the shade, protected from the sun by the end wall of our villa. He pulled a ladder from the floor of the platform, propped it against the end wall.

Are you coming?

I can't, I've got the dog.

Suit yourself. And with that he climbed the ladder over the end wall and was gone.

I rubbed my face upwards, felt the scab at the bridge of my nose. It had not yet healed, remained as a reminder of what this place had done to my skin, my hands, my hair which had whitened with the sun, the lemon juice, the lack of green vegetables. The soles of my feet had hardened enough for me to run from the stables to the bus depot. Kyno ran in front, turning to glance back, tongue lolling out of her mouth, thinking it was a game.

I got on the bus, passed to the back and watched Kyno out the dusty window. She waited patiently at the door for the bus, even after it swung shut and the engine cranked into gear. Stood when the bus pulled from the depot, then ran behind for a quarter mile until slowing to a trot, a walk, until we could no longer see each other.

At Pyrgos three boys rode their bikes around the main square then stopped when a grandmother came out from a store with ice cream bars. Behind them, the monastery rose from the benign earth in the distance. The vine baskets, the grape nests whizzed past as the bus picked up speed again. I rested my head against the window, brain numbed by the vibrations of the shaking bus.

Two thousand years passed after the destruction of the Stronghyle, two thousand layers of pumice and tephra covered civilization, hid the pots, the walls, the abandoned city. Until the Suez Canal, until the discovery of the ashy soil on Santorini in 1866, soil which was used to create a seawater-resistant cement, soil which pulled nations together.

The quarry operators unearthed a stone wall, picks and hammers dug hard into still rooms. On lunch breaks, they wiped ash from sweaty foreheads, turned towards the volcano to marvel at the clouds brewing. The

inactive had become active once again. French archaeologists and Greek scientists arrived with clipboards and furrowed brows, observed the volcano, noticed the exposed wall. Thus Akrotiri came into existence for the second time.

The myths and theories: the blast was responsible for the destruction of the Minoan civilization centered on Crete; a battle between Zeus and Typhon caused the sea, earth, and firmament to boil, unleashing destruction on the headlands; Akrotiri is the lost city of Atlantis, sunk by Zeus to punish the city for its greed; the explosion of the volcano caused the tidal wave which accounts for Moses' parting of the Red Sea.

One fresco holds one truth -- swallows depicted from a time when swallows nested in cypress trees. And though swallows can be found on any of the neighbouring islands, they never returned to Santorini after the explosion. They shunned the destruction, reprogrammed their migratory patterns to steer wide from that which could not hold firm.

One hundred years later, Spyridon Marinatos arrived on the island with financial backing and a rucksack filled with picks, brushes, humous and bread. Unsure of where to begin the excavation, Marinatos drank wine with the elders, plied them for their childhood memories of playground findings: pots or mortars used to play house.

He began where the earth sunk down on the southwest end of the island, a cove protected from the meltemi, where the land was bordered off by black sand. Slowly, Marinatos exposed each layer of pumice, brushed and blew ash from surfaces until the silent city was brought back to the face of the island - silent in its stillness, silent in its lack of written texts. This was a world without discernable language, except for the frescoes that adorned the

walls: blue monkeys dangling from vines, a fisherman displaying the day's catch.

There were roadways, toilets with plumbing, drinking cups made from halved ostrich eggs. There were snail shells and bathtubs and pithoi pots and tools of the Telchines, but there were no skeletons, and there was no script.

Marinatos died from yelling at his crew, fell from a wall upon which he stood, shouting instructions even on the way down. An artery had burst in his head. He was buried where he fell, beneath layers of tephra, the material used to make cement for tombstones.

On the plaque outside the excavation site was an artist's rendition of the Telchines: nine dog-headed, flipper-handed Children of the Sea who had taught humans the useful arts. A group of Dutch tourists pushed through the tarpaulin doorway, cameras at the ready. I spotted Didier and Leone right away, could see them on the far side of the site from where I stood upon the dais of the doorway, walked the plank down to the excavation floor. It was a cordoned-off maze, a winding of roads past exposed living spaces until I came within earshot.

So how did the whale get lost?

They stood in front of the tall filing shelves, shards and remnants tagged on each level, waiting for their reconstruction.

It is a baby, um, it lost its group...is that correct, group?

School?

Yes, skool, ah Kate, you come with us. Good. That is good.

I was at the factory, with the dog.

Didier continued up the path, paused to study the lines of a column.

I was just sussing out Didier's line of work. Pretty interesting. Hey, did Thom find you this morning?

At the factory. He told me you and Didier were here.

You know I never said anything...

A pale sunlight lit the entire room, filtered through the thick fibreglass roof. It was beginning to give me a headache, the falsity of brightness, the squinting to tone down the glare. We mounted the staircase out into the real light. Across the road, past the ice cream vendor and idling buses, was the path to the beach.

We found a spot on the rock face, cooler than the sand on the feet. Away from the topless women baked golden, away from the beshoveled children. I half-dashed to reach the water; even through the thickness of my soles I felt the heat.

I waded out into the sea, Didier one arm's-length away, Leone still back on the rocks. The water was so thick with salt that it held my body afloat, small chunks of pumice bobbed up to the surface, grazed my thigh. It was like mercury, only in a blue that matched Didier's eyes. Like the robin's eggs I had collected with Flyk, her in tow as we slid into the house through the glass door. I hid them in my closet, hoping for them to hatch and for tiny birds to circle the circumference of my bedroom, continuously flitting in and out of light, and nesting behind the dresser mirror. Mother found me out, discovered my eggs and had to throw them in the trash with the breakfast shells of a more common type. She scolded me about birds and eggs, explained that once touched by human hands, the eggs would be abandoned in the nest. The mother would never return to warm her young to the point of breaking free, and the eggs would be left for raccoons or rats, pushing hairy paws through soft calcium.

The weight of the sea pressed down on my belly like a firm hand. Inhale, exhale, and the cloudless sky was free of insects. The pockets of my shorts like small balloons in the thick water. Remembering that once, weeks before, I had been afraid of the water, had never learned as a child to swim, had inherited a fear of anything other than the bath from my mother, who was not allowed to swim, to wade for fear of drowning through the uncloseable "O", who would not wear a bathing suit because she no longer felt pretty enough.

I could feel Didier slide beneath me, heel of his foot glance the small of my back. A flatbed boat ferried a flock of sheep around the cliff side of the beach to a grazing spot further down the coast. The breeze carried their bleating, their ruminant aroma. I caught myself salivating.

Didier ran a wet finger down my nose. You maybe get too much sun.

He was right; I could feel my lips blazing. By the time I returned to our spot on the rocks, I was starting to dry in the heat, the saltwater pulling my skin tight, as if I had bathed in egg whites rather than the open sea. Leone dug into her sack, extracted 35 spf lotion, which she squirted onto my ruddy shoulders. She worked it into my skin in a circular motion, smelled sweet from coconut butter.

It's damn odd that they don't just jump in.

We watched the flatbed boat continue its course. The shepherd drove the boat from the back, one hand on the throttle, one on the rudder.

I fell in a pool once, I was wearing a wool jumper. Bugged me right down. I imagine they'd sink, then, all that weight on their backs.

Maybe they know better than to fall in.

Sheep? Sheep's dumber than posts. My gramp raised sheep.

Didier was walking back up the beach, retrieved his shirt, his shoes from where he had left them on the sand.

Hey, Diddely, did you see any fish?

If I were a whale, if I had the capacity to view by sonar waves, I would have been able to see inside Didier's brain, see the translation take place, words in one language replaced with those from another.

Fish? No, no fish. Sorry.

S'alright. Leone gazed further out. I wonder where they are now, if they've reached Egypt yet.

She passed me her bottle of water.

I had not seen the importance of a bottle of water until I reached this continent, felt the weight of it and understood its impact. Water came only from a tap back home, turned my neighbour's hair green, smelled of the rain on pavement. Came warm from the garden hose in the summer, a conspicuous brown in the fall when leaves clogged the sewers.

I could feel the water's course down my throat. It seemed to spread into my lungs, reaching as far as the farthest bronchiole. The buses had returned; I smelled the diesel heavy in the air.

We each had our own seat on the way home, sat facing the aisle, heads weighty with the sun. It was a luxury to be in a bus half-empty; I could even hear the jingle of the plastic dancing girl which hung on a red string from the rearview mirror, tiny bells along the bottom seam of her skirt. More than once, I mistook the sound of unriveted bolts for rain. A sea of teens on mopeds parted to let the bus speed past on the narrow road. Some gave the finger, others blew kisses.

At the turn-off for Perissa, Didier noticed an arrowed sign: Cinema, 3 miles. He tapped my shoulder, pointed at his receding discovery.

Kyno was digging in the garbage outside the post office, a half pita hanging from her mouth like a white tongue. Didier needed to check for messages from the other islands. Leone went in on a whim, came out with a care package from her mother: three clean pairs of underwear, jar of vegemite, new sandals. She wanted a loaf of bread for the vegemite, couldn't wait to savour the taste of home. Didier was still waiting for his mail; he agreed to meet us at home.

Leone and I walked the steps down to the bakery, a half-flight off the main square, across the corridor from a disco. Dance music blasted through two overhead speakers. She bought an unsliced loaf, three custard pies for later. We passed the OTE on the way back to the villa; Didier was in the phone booth, dialing.

Athimios had come during the day, had repainted the sun-faded blue and pink of the doors, the pots, the edges of the villa which defined this building from any other. The tea rose had become incarnadine; the aquamarine, cerulean. The blues of the door, of the walls seemed to melt right into the horizon where they met the sea.

The mattresses had been put back on the metal frames, the draglines in the dirt the only evidence of the previous night's sleeping arrangement. The villa was empty when the two of us slumped down on patio chairs. Leone left to wash the day off her face. I heard whistling, then Didier peaked through the open door to the villa. He skipped the stairs into the courtyard.

Exhausted by the sun, we all needed to nap. We slept in separate rooms. Thom's covers were pulled tight, tucked in on themselves. My bed was still in a state of disarray, as if I had kicked the covers into a sort of nest. My flannel sheet remained as a cocoon against the itch.

When I awoke, the sun cast a long shadow through the window at the top of the room. It stretched as far back as the bookshelf, past Thom's shirts that hung next to the door, past his knapsack, empty and impotent against the wall.

I snuck past Didier's wooden doors, placed my hand on his throat and gripped ever so slightly. I could feel his pulse beneath my thumb, slowed with sleep, the rhythmic thumpthump of his mortality. He breathed silently. Then his eyes creaked open, and I bent to sniff his belly, to kiss his four nipples.

Quelle heure est-il? He rubbed his face.

Nine o'clock. The sun goes down soon.

Mon dieu. I am sleeping man. Sorry. I dress, then we fst to cinema.

The word "fst" was enunciated by a projection of his hand as if it were a jet plane, cutting through air and time. This was the universal sign of action; it seemed to cross all languages. I found, when dealing with gyros vendors in the main square, that the simple inclusion of a hand soaring accompanied by the sound "fst" implied that my order was to be expedited, my departure rushed.

Didier dressed, pulled his naked self into rumpled clothes, glanced for a moment at my bare feet, and we left the villa, mounted the stairs to the bus depot, slowly. I hoped we would not run into Thom, yet also hoped we would. Perhaps his seeing Didier on my arm would shake him from his dozy state, pull him awake and coherent, instead of the way he was -- having pulled deep inside as if in hibernation. Coward incurable.

But we did not run into Thom, made it to the bus depot without seeing anyone familiar. The outdoor cinema was on the outskirts of Perissa, and so we bounced along in the back seat until we reached the town square, then ran

hand-in-hand down the dust road to the theatre. I stepped once on a sharp pebble and had to limp the rest of the way. Surrounded by a wall of ivy, cornered by palm trees. We entered through a gate demarcated by velvet ropes, one corridor leading in, one leading out, and the cashier pulling long on a Dutch cigarette.

Didier held up two fingers, paid our way. Gripped the back of my arm and led me to a seat near the front row. The yard was all dirt, squat cacti adorning the sides, and cafe tables scattered throughout. Didier pulled a chair down from the top of one table, then another chair and we sat until the bored waitress sauntered over, shoes one size too large, cork-bottomed tray held between arm and bosom.

Drink?

Didier looked at me.

Wine. Red.

Two red wine.

And the wine came, and Didier's hand fell upon my thigh, gripped there as if he was about to ascend from this makeshift cinema and needed my thigh to anchor him to earth. To pull him down, to keep him perfectly still on the stiff chair, feet forever on this patch of dusty earth, hair forever pushed up slightly where his head had met with his pillow, forever smelling of Gitane cigarettes and dander, smiling at the solitary chicken that emerged from under a corner shrub.

My lungs were filling with something thick, I could feel it when the sun slid behind the tall white wall, could feel the sludge increase, the gag reflex at the second before activation, all this because I had seen the packed bag at the foot of Didier's bed, had caught a vision of him in the phone kiosk as his colleagues announced the whale's presence two islands away. I knew

this all, had pieced it together as the film began, as he turned to me, pressed a flushed cheek against my own, and said only

desolé.

It was, for him, in reference to the fact that the film was dubbed in Greek rather than subtitled, that we both stood little chance of understanding the words which accompanied images of Kansas under snow. Above, the moon waxing gibbous, the tide high three islands away, the whale pressing its humped spine to the port waterwall. My own spine kyphotic with the dependence on Didier's platelets, green bile, lymph nodes. His hand upon my thigh.

I watched the faces of familiar American actors speaking Greek, the words slipping out of their mouths before they had opened, voices lifting when eyebrows had not. In another city at this same moment, the faces spoke Italian, the faces spoke Czech. Even if I had the entirety of Didier's language in my grasp, the gestures and nods, I would have remained as I did throughout that film: eyes transfixed on the chicken's progress across the courtyard. I wanted a singer's voice, I wanted a choir voice. Night crickets sounded the passing minutes, punctual chirps interrupted now and then by the peeling engine of a passing motorcycle. His jaw was the length of my hand that night, bone stretching the length from tip to butt, then back again as an osteal U, muscles tensing as he pressed incisors to canines.

We caught the tail-lights fading into the darkness -- the last bus back to Thira had come and passed without us. Didier looked up the road, then at the field across from us. We began the long walk back through the dry grass, kicking up dirt and mosquitoes, hoping we weren't walking through beekeeper's fields. We walked in a full silence, rich with the fact that we

didn't need to speak -- Didier could look right inside me to see where I was pained and I sensed his anticipation, his adrenaline.

At the Monastery Profitis Ilias, we peered through the low windows and counted the number of candles burning, the number of souls saved for one more day, red wax held fluid in glass jars. The arms and spleen of the tamatazos lit behind.

I felt bloated, overwhelmed with exhaustion. Cramping with each step. It had been building for days, and I knew I was due to begin the bleeding by morning, within minutes, by the time we reached the villa. We were on the down side of the mount, still had the climb ahead of us, then the sloped resolution into town. Didier picked a handful of grapes from a low basket; they were not yet ripe, exploded in a burst of sourness in my mouth. I spat out the bitter skins, the seeds. Didier dropped them behind us on the dry earth, a trail to lead us back to the monastery in a moment of existential crisis.

We were met at Messaria by the pack of dogs. I heard the crash behind the hotel, the knocking over of the trash cans onto the pavement of the parking lot, then yelling. Dogs came running. Didier stood in the road, watched the dogs running in the direction of Thira, plump man in an apron in tow. He reached the top of the driveway. Stopped. We continued up the road, tracking the dogs in the soft dirt of the road. Half-loaf of bread in the ditch.

There was a heart in my head, thudding rhythms in my left temple. Unaffected by fresh air, by taxi exhaust, as we neared Thira. At the entrance to the cement factory we were met by the dogs again, noses in our hands, our pants. The smell of chicken fat, of potato shavings. Didier spotted a pregnant dog, told me so because her nipples hung down lower than the rest. Her belly was only slightly plump, filled with what he said were eight pups, five weeks

in embryo. Their noses were beginning to form, to push forth from flat faces, distinguishing them from any other fetus. Paws were coming into shape, the bones curled into miniature fists.

By the time we reached the villa, the pack had lessened in numbers. Only three dogs remained, all male, keeping our slow pace, our half-steps on cement along the path that led to the front door. We pushed through the villa doors, kicked a rock under the loose door to keep it open.

I craved a feast of arms, legs, Didier's eyelids, Thom's elbows. The villa was silent at this hour of the night, the restaurant workers in a dormant state. Kyno came out from the shadows of the shower, sat immediately when she saw the three males in the courtyard. Held her tail firm against her hindquarters. The males moved in her direction -- one rubbed against the doorway, another rolled onto his back. The third went right up to her, sniffed at her jowls, her neck. She growled slightly, lifting her upper lip to reveal one perfect, white tooth.

I depart for Paros tomorrow.

I thought he had said Paris, but he had meant the island, three ferry dockings away from where we stood on the cold cement of the villa, the blue trim aglow in moon's light. There was no discrimination between the two, both had the same meaning: Didier was leaving Santorini, following the whale. His face lit by lucida or the luciferased bellies of fireflies as his hand alit on my forearm, grasped there, then pulled. We retired to the exhausted straw mattress; he realigned my vertebrae with a single finger which ran the distance of head to coccyx, my human tail. There was a scratching then, claws upon the wooden door. I stood and let her in, the three males sat in waiting in the courtyard for morning.

The room blazed in a glow of orange, lit the harbour, brought birds to crack beaks against the thin panes.

The physician's miracle was the hole cut, the spiracle in mother's throat. I remember the smell of disinfectant, the sound of rubber-soled shoes against the reflective floors of the hospital. Auntie Astrid three paces ahead of me as we walked down the corridor. Heel toe heel toe, silent in Chinese slippers. Mother couldn't speak at all, had a pad of paper on which she answered our questions:

Okay, but tired.

That's what my food looks like for the next little while.

They figure maybe two weeks.

Yes, it is food.

Talk? Maybe a month. ? Must learn to use a buzzer.

That's right, through the hole in my arm.

They think they got it all. Another biopsy in a month.

You be a good girl.

I had hooked my thumbs into my belt loops, watched the cars pass out the window. Wondered if Flyk was okay in the car, if we had cracked the windows wide enough. Tires had sounded on the wet pavement, the slow movement home of a thousand office workers. Headlights pulling long through the rain. The curtains held a pageantry of odours: ASA, antiseptic, something close to Mr. Clean. Astrid continued with the questions until my mother tired, couldn't hold the pen in her irresolute hands. Her black hair splayed on the pillow like a crab trap, a bramble bush.

I had kept a locket of it in my dictionary between market/marquis -- marquisate/martellato. It happened to be where the dictionary fell open, and so there the hair remained, pressed against a marmoset.

When mother had fallen asleep, Astrid took me by the wrist, walked me past the other rooms, other machines whirring. The smell of sickness coated everything like cellophane; the bodies lining the corridors a museum of convalescence. Astrid's hand was warm, kept my whole body heated as we passed through the automatic doors into the drenched city.

She had let me stay up to see the brightest stars, and we pored over yellowed library books to learn their names. Red Betelgeuse, blue Rigel. Sirius. On raining nights, I had sat before the sliding glass windows, pulled the curtains around me like a prickly blanket, and tried to see up into the sky. I could only see the reflections of the inside: curtain lining and my own face, ruddy with sleeplessness, staring into my own face, against the pane, faded as though in the process of some transformation or transcendence to another place.

When Didier left he took language with him. My morphemes, words, phrases went into his valise, tucked in with sock bundles and grease pencils. We never had the conversations of fellow countrymen, never discussed politics or finances, world events, hockey. Only the most pared-down and necessary communications were required, and when I stood in the corner as he packed his bag, I was speechless. He vacillated between bureau and bed top, folding each article of clothing down. There was a slowness, a preciseness, a methodical manner in his action, as if he had always moved through ports and still savoured the leaving.

We walked to the bus depot, early morning light holding the town in that particular hue, as if everything white had been washed in blue. Alcoves still chilly with night air. My hand on Didier's nape, pulling thumb and forefinger across wooden beads, making prayers. Kyno tailing behind. And when we dirty three arrived at the depot, the engine kicked in on the diesel bus. I wanted a silent departure, I wanted him to leave without fanfare or flourish, maybe a brief and delicate touch – one finger tracing the line of my cheek bone. But he spoke.

Au revoir

he said, and I had never heard two more ugly words in any language. I had no way of replying to this, nothing worked -- my brain, mouth, tongue, all were deadened by the impact. Someone had finally said good-bye, with all the finality and indifference that such cliches hold. He threw his bag on the roof of the bus and climbed aboard. Arms wrapped around Kyno where we sat on the pathway, I could see his face through the grit of the windows, could make out that he was mouthing something, but couldn't discern what it was.

Numb is the adjective that comes closest, but even that isn't close enough.

The key to Thom's room was still tucked beneath pillow cases in the linen cabinet. The lock was as old as the villa itself, merely kept the door shut rather than secured, kept the mosquitoes out. I searched for any signs of change in the room: my unmade bed remained unmade, his shirts still hung uniformly in the makeshift closet. The bar of soap was smaller, though, and the bookmark had progressed thirty or so pages. The loaf of sweaty cheese was gone, replaced by a jar of Nutella.

I pulled down my bed, stripped the mattress bare. There were the stains of the years: nosebleeds and sex. Spilled wine. A mysterium of

markings. In Canada, I had slept in the same bed until I was twenty-one, could walk any visitor through the chronology of sullies: the cut toe, Flyk in heat, where I had thrown up after mother's operation, the handjobs, the coconut milk, the uncapped pen.

Now here was this bed which had witnessed my last days with Thom, and had not felt my body since. The linens stacked in a neat pile at the foot. The metal frame rusted in places.

I collected my belongings, my trinkets, dictionary, sandals. Anything which hadn't already been dragged two doors down into the now-vacant room. The move east had the clarity of an epileptic, a sleight of hand. Only thirty-one paces separated one past from another, two beds. I went from man to man to dog, desired just to curl up and rest for a moment before facing any new and exhilarating day. Didier's boat was pulling away, disengaged from the port wall, the maw of the vehicle ramp closing firmly. In a moment before falling off, Kyno's paw pressed solid against my cheek, I heard Leone scrubbing clothing against the bucket side, the slap of wet towels over the drying line. Opposite to where I lay, my green runners remained nailed to the wall, like two pears rotting on the tree.

Kyno and I started awake when Leone began yelling. I could see through the shutter slats to the upper patio where Athimios stood, fist in the air, and Leone between him and the cliff side of the villa. Pushed open the door; Leone saw me emerge into the courtyard.

He's got a kitten, he was just going to toss it.

Athimios had a wicked smile, brandished the calico against the blue sky.

That's no way to deal with strays. NO. Don't you dare. I can't believe this, can you believe this?

Kyno joined me in the courtyard, our eyes on the kitten, on its anticipated arc through the air and collision with the rockface below. I half-way wanted him to hurl it over Leone's head, wanted to watch its descent and destruction. Kyno began to pant.

Say something to him.

Everything smelled of panic: the shirts on the clothesline, the plastic purple lawnchair. There was no wind, no slight breeze. All was drenched in Leone's shrill tones. Then Athimios turned, tossed the kitten over the low wall that marked the villa off from the pathway behind. I could hear the kitten scurry away to some dark corner of safety.

You are a bad man, she scolded him. Bad man.

If one were to believe in concepts like physiognomy, then perhaps Athimios was bad. At first glance, he appeared the same as any other aged Greek man -- white hair and leather vest, with that same dustiness on his skin as if he had been rolled in flour. There were, however, two markings which pointed to a deeper problem: the pair of melanomas. The first adorned the back of his left hand like a third eye, open and wet and as disturbing. The second grew like a baby corn from his left ear. Mother's cancer was inside, hidden away beneath layers of skin, muscle. It was an entity that grew without my being aware, that expanded until it became the size of me inside her.

(I had begun to menstruate that morning, had mourned the loss of silt and thought -- I would never carry either man's child. The possibility of being grounded through motherhood no longer existed.)

And if one were to take literally the meaning of malignant, then Athimios was malicious, ill born. But this was a Latin term to describe a Greek man, and thus did not fit. I had seen him on that first morning, saw him spin his granddaughter into the sky and laugh. She was like a cloud he kept trying to put back into place.

Leone came down into the courtyard, disgusted with what she had witnessed. I should move out, she said, how can I live in his villa. Cruel, bad man. She pulled her shirts from the clothesline, left the pegs hanging benignly on the wire. Her shirt shoulders were perpetually peaked from the drying, as if invisible fingers pinched at the fabric and pulled up a little. She was always able to wash the town out of her clothes -- they remained a perfect white while mine had dulled to grey.

My isolation had become a *paraleipsis*; it was not enough to miss Didier, I had to be missed. Had to cover my eyes with my flat palms, view what I could through the space where my hands did not meet my nose, between my fingers. It wasn't so much like watching a horror film, more like limiting myself to the snatches of arbitrary sight. He had been my eyes, had alleviated that sense so that others could recrudescence; I had been able to feel his first taste long before his tongue had neared my skin.

The villa felt vacant without Didier, without his books fluttering open on the courtyard table. I heard voices on the path; Thom and Bess came through the door. She passed without saying hello, as did he. It wasn't

jealousy that ate at me but want of them to treat me as anyone else. That was an impossibility, though -- I was separated from both through my history with one. I still wasn't sure, not completely, of whether anything physical had transpired between them, hadn't noticed the progression of their relationship when I was with Didier. I had bit my thumb to rid myself of a headache.

A few days before I had stood at the depot, watched his bus pull away from its designated spot, from any designations we may have put on each other. And what had he done, really, but converted me to a jingoist of straw mattresses, a jobber dealing in clipped sentences and piecework. I had been his putamen, the shell at the centre of his peach, the stone in his boot. His noble recruit, the splintered ferule with which he beat himself. And he had allowed me to hide in the tall grasses of his making.

The sun was overhead. My stomach was empty. Didier was gone. Kyno and I walked, ended up at an entirely new restaurant, just around the corner from Prokyon's, but one which held no memories of Thom, no memories of Didier. It wasn't so much a restaurant as a few tables scattered on the earth behind a low, stone wall. Dishes of yoghurt and oranges decayed in the glass display case. This felt more like Tijuana with its outdoor cantinas and cholera and sweet breath from the packs of gum sold by sad-eyed children. I had avoided this place for no reason, and now Kyno and I shared a plate of goat's cheese. I folded a blank sheet of paper into five even strips, coursed my nail over the edges until it was easy to tear. On the first strip I wrote:

All exactness is lost in approximation, a proximity.

Bess startled me by pulling out a chair, sitting at our table. Is it okay? I nodded. She scanned the fresh sheet for something to eat. I feel as if I haven't talked to you since walking to Oia.

We haven't, not really. Not just the two of us. There was no reason to mince words with Bess, to fill sentences with the extraneous. No need, and I lacked the energy to do so anyway.

I slid the five strips into my pocket for later, intrigued by Bess' presence at my meager table.

What's it like back home? she asked, then took her knife and traced a spiral of cheese onto the blade. What does it look like?

Nothing like this. Big, green.

And the smells?

I wish I could have sensed things there as well as I can here. Different senses are working here -- smell, hearing. My peripheral vision is better. My intuition comes and goes.

Bess reached forward and put her hands on mine.

And my hands?

I brought her left hand to my face and breathed in deeply. At first there was too much goat's cheese, then a spice, something from the kitchen, something I used to smell on Thom when I first arrived. Then a hint of soap. And a trace of smoke, of Thom's pipe. I lied and told her I smelled nothing.

Kyno stood then, stretched her length backwards, front paws sprawled out in front, then stretched forwards, yawned and made an arp noise. She looked hazily at the two of us holding hands over white, looked at me, and closed her eyes for a brief moment. She pawed at something scuttling by in the dirt, gave up when she found she couldn't catch it.

Did he leave?

To Paros.

Did they find the whale there?

I think so. Kyno's warm tongue was against my calf. I wondered if she could taste the salt there, the dolor in my skin, passing through pores to her. Kyno: the inheritor of my sweat. I released Bess' hands to brush Kyno away, and the dog sent up a scowl in response. Bess' hands remained still where they were, where I had held them moments before. I could have retained that position, or not, and found that I didn't know what to do with my hands, wishing instead for missing digits, for the improbability of grasp. It was the opposable thumb which complicated all, opened doors which would otherwise remain safely closed.

A fly landed on our plate, rotated its head from left to right and left again, ejected its prickly tongue into cheese water, stroked its dome eyes with a black leg.

Do you know that flies eat by vomiting and sucking it back up again? she asked, moved from her position to shoo the fly from the plate. I used to not mind them before I learned that.

Dogs do the same, sometimes. When they eat grass. Kyno walked towards the entrance, crunching paw pads on loose gravel. She turned to look back at me once more, the slanting sun causing her to squint. I saw her erect ears and tail bobbing past above the short wall which separated the restaurant from the common path. It was siesta time, the few tourists in town hidden behind air-conditioned walls, shops closed while the keepers napped.

She forked a square of cheese, inspected it as if looking for the footprints of the scattered fly. I've never owned a dog before, she said, never

had any pets. My brother's allergic to everything. I always wanted something, even a damn hamster. Maybe when I get back to Tazzie...

The horn of a cruise ship sounded from the harbour. Three children ran the path past us towards the main square, black hair beneath woven caps. A firecracker went off somewhere not far from where we sat. And another. Not the shallow pop of a firecracker but something deeper, more destructive. It was too far away to smell the sulfur, to taste the explosion in the air.

We did not swim on that afternoon at Oia, a moment which felt as though it had passed years ago. I could still remember the slow arc of the windmill arms on the hill above us, and Bess' feet hidden beneath sand. She asked if I had been to the basement of the White Palace. I hadn't.

Flyk and I moved east to Auntie Astrid's, had the nail hole in the wall of my bedroom to prove it was a permanent move. That was the signifier for me, when items were hung on the wall; more so than any unpacking of clothing, filling of drawers with socks and underwear. It wasn't until Astrid hung my one painting that it became my room: a faded Picasso replica of a girl's face, sectioned into unaligned quarters.

Had it not been for Flyk, I would have pulled in completely, fallen into a perfect disphasia. Garry oaks were replaced with peeling birch, two seasons of sun and rain had become four, and for the first time Flyk grew a thicker coat. I envied her ability to moult, shed away half her self when the blossoms appeared. I don't think she even noticed mother's absence, noticed only the change in landscape -- rolling hills instead of rock faces, and the abundance of gophers.

Her peripheral vision had grown when mine shrunk, when all I could see was the sidewalk at my feet, the patch of caulking in the ceiling over my bed. She had become acutely aware of her surroundings: the moths against the screen door, the squirrels in the attic.

Auntie Astrid's house was on a quiet street by the fair grounds. It was only during the fair that cars passed our block in a slow rotation in search of parking for the day. Some neighbours rented their garages -- sat in lawn chairs with cardboard signs which read, "This way \$5". Astrid's yard was filled with her garden, her garage turned into a greenhouse which brought forth lemons with pored leather rinds, the colour and taste closer to oranges.

These things were made mostly of water -- lettuce, melons, the human body. Formlessness giving rise to form.

It was Bess' idea to bathe, though I came along for the cleanliness again. She claimed to have thirty pounds of dead flesh around her ankles and the remnants of Cairo still nestled behind her ears. The prospect of floating amidst her skin was enticing, inviting, and cheap. Only about a dollar for an afternoon in her bath water.

The room was tiled like a harem in red and blue, the roof was vaulted, a small stage and three degrees separated two baths and we entered, dressed only in white sheets with the word "Palace" embroidered in orange-red thread along the stitched border. The dislocated heads of two nymphs on facing walls produced a constant roar of warmth, causing islands of foam at the point where new water met old. And I believed we were openly Western then, we couldn't hide behind accents or inherited phrases, our sheets

wrapped around our bodies. We were each young, and away, and had bellies full of feta.

Bess dropped her sheet shyly, made as if to step into one bath, and a woman in a rubber cap called out and pointed a dripping finger to the showers. Bess followed to where the nail directed, twisted on the water and stood under the fall, pushing her spiraling curls out of her eyes, turning her back to me where I stood in the middle of the stage, my eyes transfixed on the small of her back, the three heart tattoos painted there like roadkills. She turned again, looked at me and grinned, cool water pouring over her, into her mouth and eyes. It was true, too, that I hadn't bathed properly since arriving here, living from cold shower to sponge bath -- being subjected to the stand-up stall rather than splayed-out porcelain.

At one time, my bathtub had birthed Thom's glistening body, smelling of strawberry balm and smiling from scrub-downs. Our exfoliated souls had huddled beneath terry cloths in such a steamed room, and still a memory of us tucked in water, with enough room for a foot in an armpit, a knee-crooked just so. A dripping fixture kept its own time: the rhythm of moving limbs.

I stepped under the shower next to Bess, quickly rinsed my self down. A wooden door next to me opened; I could smell chamomile in the steam, and a sagging woman emerged from the dark room. Her cesarian section scar like a sideways smirk on her belly. Bess had already chosen a bath, the warmer of the two, and so I joined her there, found a seat on the submerged ledge which wrapped itself along the sides of the bath.

Bess' neck glistened. She sank down into the depths, curls floating on the surface for a moment, then also losing their weight beneath. In the corner of my eye, I saw her resurface next to me.

I think I've been waiting for this since Egypt, she said, stroking her feet beneath the water. Both of us had stopped shaving our legs months ago: four legs covered in fur like children's legs, with the same number of children's blue bruises, but perhaps more scars.

I said nothing, but she offered: I fell in love there, I think.

One hundred degrees defined the shift from steam to something of substance, the movement from heat to ice: the life span of love.

But I'm from Taz, he was Egyptian. Egyptian, what a great word...you always think of pharaohs, you never realize there are living Egyptians, only the ones that died thousands of years ago and were buried in secret rooms beneath the sand. It isn't the word so much as the connotation.

This I remembered, saved the phrase for another strip of paper.

We had a deal over water, that's how we met. I went into his store and said I will be here for so many months and I will buy my water exclusively from you if you will give me a fair price. I came directly here afterward, after I left him. I wanted be to someplace where it would rain, but it doesn't seem to rain here. There's only sticky humidity.

I miss the grass. It's been so long since I sat on grass and I miss it. Too long since I've tasted the white part at the end of the stalk. I used to love eating that part when I was a kid, despite the thought that any number of dogs could have peed there.

The opposite nymph paused for a moment, a hiccup in her constant flow of water yell. The resuming stream made a slapping noise when it hit the surface of the bath water.

I'll go back to Egypt soon, very soon. I'm only barely functioning.

And Thom?

Thom.

Again, the scent of chamomile.

Thom is my friend. And you are my friend. And Thom is not Mourad. And Mourad is not here.

She descended beneath water again and reappeared next to the fountaining nymph. And so I followed, to sit on the other side. She cupped the water in her hands, caught it before pulling cupped hands upwards to splash caught water on her face. A drip hung off the tip of her nose, then collapsed back into the larger body. She was talking about something, but I couldn't hear through the fountain noise. I leaned forward toward her, hidden from the other bathers by the convenience of a stream of liquid yell from a nymph head affixed to an ancient mosaic. We both leant in behind the waterfall and our cheeks grazed; the water all around us was the only element between us. And she whispered that she hated feeling formless when she was without him, that her neck ached when he wasn't there to rub it back into shape.

I imagined what our faces would look like through the stream of water: skin tones and hair shades pulling closer, running water distorting the particulars, blurring the edges which separated her face from mine now that we were pressed together, hot tears running down her face, caught in the crevices where our cheeks met. Perhaps she hoped I had thought this was just more water, nothing different than that surrounding our bodies, inside our bodies. She pulled me into an embrace, skin warmer than the degrees of water, said she would be leaving soon, and she wanted me to follow.

Egypt. And it seemed like a suitable resolution: slouching towards Al Qusayer to be born. Falling into another country where I stood even less chance of understanding the language, spoken or otherwise. It wasn't that I wanted to disappear in mystery, as my father had done. No, it was a desire for

aphasia, to pass days unreliant on words. Perhaps all our lives are spent living the phrase "words cannot express..."; we make do.

I could picture a life there: encased in a purdah of my own creation, hidden away from any conceivable alphabet. Words would no longer be such but waving lines pulled in reverse across the page. Or boustrophedon, turning like an oxen plowing from left to right, back right to left. Ripples replacing angled strokes. There were so few places in the world which were untouched by English, and I wanted to search for a space where I would go un-understood. (Again, a word which doesn't exist -- there was no such creation as "derstood", and "misunderstood" implies some aspect of understanding, though in error. The opposite for "understood" then remains a gap -- perhaps an ignorance on our part in not wanting to admit that there may exist some idea which we could not grasp.)

I could already imagine Bess and I sunk under blankets beneath the decks of a passenger boat, hands filled with yoghurt-coated raisins, Dutch cigarettes. Both content in our dis-location -- nearing Mourad, leaving Thom. Each defining her own happiness as we sailed east of the Maghreb.

The abandonment of one excavation site for another, both knowing there were ways of being, lives and the expression of them, which we had not yet unearthed.

When I pulled out from under the waterfall, the 32-degree scald on my scalp, Bess was towelling off, had one foot propped up on a low bench to dry between her toes. I could see a rivulet of unmopped water trailing the length of her inner thigh, past knee bones towards the knuckle of her ankle. I knew that my feet would never come clean as hers had; the weeks of walking barefoot had ensured an insoluble grit like a slipper made of road.

A story which Leone told me a few days before I left:

Before I arrived in Santorini, it had been Leone, Thom, and a Belgian couple who occupied Didier's room. The Belgians spent most of their days on a rented moped, turned in early and slept until sunrise. Leone, Thom and Bess worked together, but Bess had paid for two weeks at the hostel and had to wait for those days to pass before she could move into the villa. Stace would join them the following week.

In preparation for his job, Thom set about to learn Greek. He studied the Greek alphabet, carried a recipe card with Greek written on the red lines, Roman on the blue below. In this way, Thom was able to walk to the main square, reading shop signs: TOAST, OTE, Post, toilet. Thom had confessed to Leone his disappointment -- he had assumed that he could translate Greek words merely by rewriting them in the Roman alphabet. He didn't realize that the end result would be just that, a Greek word in the Roman alphabet, and that the word would remain incomprehensible.

Leone found Thom's translation card in the garbage next to the toilet. She pressed it into her journal on that day's entry: May 2, 19__.

When we left the baths, Bess stayed behind at the news stand. She agreed to meet me at home, would anticipate seeing me with feet up on the patio, a glass of retsina in hand. I decided to walk the main road instead of the winding path, to check for the fishmonger who sold freshness by the public toilets.

I paused at the post office to check for mail. There were two letters: one from the lawyers, telling me that Astrid's house had sold to newlyweds

relocating from Winnipeg; one from Didier, on a page which had been torn from his journal. A cartoon drawing of a whale, complete with dialogue bubble coming from its mouth. Didier's whale spoke English, had just one word to say.

I can recall having heard the rumours earlier in the summer, though I can't remember now who may have told me -- perhaps one of the kitchen workers at Prokyon's, perhaps I just innately knew the moment I had seen the puppies outside the clothing shop where the sign had read "other motives inside". Kyno did not run to join me on the road, as she always did, always pulled out of some shaded corner to tug at my shorts, bite my wrist just a bit too hard.

It was just after three in the afternoon when I saw her, there was the smell of detergent from the laundromat across from the police station, my scab had healed the day before, the horn of an incoming cruise ship sounded, soles were unaffected by the late summer dirt road, raised my hand to my face and could still smell Bess there.

Kyno's body carved a perfect arc through the air when the port police pulled her from the back of the truck, hands grasped her pasterns before the toss, the perfect toss which lit her into the air. Sent her body through the air, fur ruffling with the motion, and then the thud of her limbs against the dead steel of the dumpster. Followed by the flick of an expired cigarette, their laughter, bravado.

I closed my eyes, and when sight resumed, everything had turned grey.

The three cops strode down the hill to the police station, the slow saunter of accomplishment. They were already inside the building when I reached the dumpster, climbed the metal container to see the contents: paperwork, cardboard boxes, rotting kolrabi, three dead dogs. I could just reach

her back paws, pulled her out awkwardly, and we both fell on the dirt road. Could smell the gunpowder at the base of her skull. I had never carried her before, never had the occasion to pick her up; I was surprised by her weight, heavier than expected despite the heaviness of death, the dead weight of her body over my shoulders.

I wore her thru town, the limp stole of Kyno's body, not knowing where I could take her. I wouldn't panic, not like I had when Flyk's peripheral vision had contracted for that brief moment, when she had turned her back to the slow, circling movement of cars during fair season. I wouldn't be paralyzed like I had been then, wouldn't let myself be overcome with shock.

Few people stared, most downcast their eyes as we passed, on a route past them all to the caves at the cement factory. Had there not been wind, the progression of time and erosion of land, Kyno's paw prints would have remained in the soft earth road which led down to the abandoned building. There were the prints of other dogs, some still alive who had seen the bright flash of gunshot, had heard the clap of the trigger before it had even connected with bullet lead. Heard the crunch of skull bone and smelled the heated blood on fur.

She weighed the equivalent of two loads of laundry, a decent winter coat. I placed her in the back where neither bats nor mice lived, sat at the mouth of the cave and watched the inactivity of the old port. Inhale, exhale; the water had deadened to a dull grey, the earth ashen.

All the pebbles were smooth, as if they had been spat from the sea up the height of the cliff. Not as smooth as Didier's worry beads, the skin beneath, more burnished than my language in his mouth, his in mine. His words caught in my throat like thick cream. In a second of selfishness, I set back the thousand years of continental shift, the upward flux of the earth, and cast a

single rock back out to sea. The splash resounded for those who could hear it, caused a tidal wave for those who could see. It created a sub-Atlantic rift, broke down the bones of dead sailors into chicle. Fell into the dolce vita, laid doggo.

What was I losing then, what had I lost already? What more would it take before loss would cease; what more would I need to continue making do with what I had? My cartilage would still break down as I aged, my teeth would yellow to the human eye. My hair would course, would thin in places only fingers could find. Physical being was a tangibility I could grasp then, one of the few truths remaining. One of the few truths I knew for sure: those who were alive and those who were dead.

"Necessity is harsh. Fate has no reprieve."

There was nothing left to trust in.

There was no explanation, only a satiation, a salvation. And there had to be something better than this kind of stifle -- the calamity of speech, the cauchemar of inarticulation. The thousand years of connotations weighing down on my tongue. A rose is a king is a lion, and if I was just a cur or a cynic, then I was a dog.

The end of the season had come and the awnings were cranked back against the walls. The end of the season had come and the flowerpots were wheeled back inside with the indoor planters and litter boxes. The end of the season plugged corks into retsina casks, shook scatter rugs, cawed the silver to tarnish. The end of the season saw the catfish stocks replenished. It meant the loss of one more tourist in a moped accident. It meant that film development would take three more days than usual. It meant the beginning of the open fire policy on any strays, the migration of swallows from one end of town to

the othr. The clearing of the tamatazos shelves, brushing lint from the black robes of the clergy.

I had livd on this island for the season, and had not seen the smashing of a plate, not witnessed a wine glass against the grate. I can still remember the version of the island I had created for myself while I sat at Astrid's bedsyd, the lush ivy hanging from doorways, the strength of my teeth, Thom's fingers cawt up in my hair. The hue of orange we would have created when we eliminatd the distance between our baredness.

But if my nails had been pulled off, ripped from flesh, I would have been exposed to the quick.

I had few articles of clothing, all were amassd in a pyl on the floor, on the woven carpet, covering the tapestry of six monkeys. There was no need for folding, hanging. The armful of objects I had taken from Thom's room remained as I had left them -- sluffed off onto the floor, dumped like new potatoes, a dizzy boxer. I sifted thru to find a cleaner shirt, something without dog's blood drying on the shoulder. It had caked against my skin, crackd when I bent my arm forward to retreev a black cardigan. Collar bones exposed. I loved that on women, less so on men, the perfect line of bone bisecting the body.

Remember, there wer letters in my pocket -- an invitation to jump two islands north, resume the low moans which would shake the port wall, carry thirty miles beneath the water's surface. There was also all that stuffy legal business, the mention of mortgages, morgues, and the substantial sum sunk into my account -- perhaps the only advantage to being the last in a line. The sole survivor of the familial reck. Imagine if I had been included in Thom's plan, the five children, the home on a small island, stack of wood next to the

door, the annual perusal of seed catalogs, the numerous abandoned attempts at knitting, the quilting bee, V6 engine, shovelled driveway, root cellar, another crash waiting to happen. There were letters in my pocket, there were letters and there was lint, and I suppose they amounted to the same.

I knew he was at the door before he knocked, could recognize his pace as he neared the handle. Thom had come a'knocking, and all the birds in my tree had not sung for him in a coon's age. I opened the door, invited him into my lair, my den, my standing tent. He sized up the room; all led like a red carpet to the bed at the back, everything was magnitized to that straw mattress. The aroma of plankton still hung in the air; Didier's handprint against the plaster wall where he had steeled himself to pull off his shoe, hand coated in sea water and fever.

We've been invited for dinner.

The outside world had invited us in when Thom had been shopping for bananas in the main square, caught a glimpse of a face, then another. Recognized them from home.

Paulo wore corduroy pants and played the harmonica. His goatee was pasted on with flour and water, grew in a perfect V from his chin. His haircut was *chez moi*, evidenced by the patches of scalp that showed through in the back. He studied architecture. Desired construction amidst all that deconstruction. I had admired him from afar, calculated the length of his stride, his shoe size. His favorite spot to sit was right up at the bar; straddling his stool, he would nurse a scotch for an entire afternoon while some CNN tragedy played out on the television.

His girlfriend Clarissa was so thin she looked hydrocephalic, an upside-down exclamation, the beginning of any Spanish declaration. Even her hands appeared too big for her body, as if she had tied inflated surgical gloves

at her wrists. She could not drown, not Clarissa, not with that head and those hands to keep her afloat.

They both stood when Thom and I entered the restaurant, and lyk on the first night when I had eaten here, I ordered cabbage rolls and doubld the wine. Clarissa fingered the dolmades, nibbled at the chip of grape leaf in her mouth. It appeard now and again against her white teeth like a cavity. They had come from Italy, had been groped on the packed buses to the Vatican: violated before being blessd. But blessd they wer with theyr dissection of a map, theyr route around all the sites one continent could offer. Rooting around in the basilicas and castles until theyr new shoes wer broken in, until a day's walk no longr produced the blisters and chaffing of lether against flesh.

And what have you been up to here, in Santorini?

It made me laugh, and I was afraid it came off sounding slitley maniacal. Thom sighed, heavy, from his diafram.

I've been working, running the rooftop cafe of a restaurant.

And you, Kate?

Smiled, that's all I could do.

Kate is going to Cairo.

Really, Cairo. We had wanted to go there, but...

I wasn't listening while Paulo trailed off on theyr reasons for stopping short in Jerusalem. It was the syd of Thom's face after he had made that comment, the line of his clenched jaw. He looked at me.

Bess told me, yesterday. And that's, whatever, that's alright.

That's alright?

That she chose you, that's all.

Laughed, scratched at the dead skin on my nose. I'm not going to Cairo. Not going to Cairo. I'm going, though. Day after tomorrow. One more day then fast.

Clarissa topped her glass, caught the drop of wine with her finger before it ran its course down the bowl. Where are you going?

I pulled the letters from my pocket -- the cartoon whale asking me to "follow", the bill of sale. I've got these letters, and when I put them together, they mean something more than the sum of their parts.

No one understood what I'd said, and the cutlery was falling from my hands. I couldn't keep the butter knife in grip, fumbled it into the air before it fell on the cement floor to join my fork, teaspoon.

Thom held my hands down against the table cloth. Perhaps you've had enough.

Yes, I think so. I think I've had enough.

He made apologies, wished them a safe journey, and when we were outside he grabbed my arms, pulled me into a doorway.

What was that all about?

The silver jewelry was packed away for the night, only black risers rested in the windows. A half orange rotted in the drainage, halfway looking like the moon above. I could smell crepes cooking, pushed past Thom until I reached the night baker. I had drachma crumbling from my portfolio, coins spinning from fingertips, and they filled me with chocolate cream. Even Thom had to sit for one, sliced his delicately with knife and fork, ladled sweet sauce on with the blade. The griddle was poured full again, the slow sizzle sounded against the mirrored walls. Between mouths, this is what I told Thom:

This was years ago. This was years ago. Mother awoke one morning and she coughed blood. Or perhaps that requires a longer prologue. Okay. This was years ago and we lived in a small house behind the college. The kitchen linoleum was black and orange; the doorbell played Eidelweiss. The egg and dart molding on the cabinets was mostly egg and mostly moulding. Our mailbox had one of those red flags that the postman always forgot to erect, an insignificant signifier of new bills, flyers. There was always one pickle in the pickle jar, brine to wash canker sores down. Fingernails were trimmed after Sunday night baths, bangs were made by stretching scotch tape across my forehead and then the swikswik of metal, just like every other kid in my class, on my block.

And when every other kid in my class brought their dad for show-and-tell, I brought Flyk. And when every other kid spent the third Sunday of June at brunch, I thumbed jacks on the pavement. Oh, my father had left for Argentina, or Kula Lumpur, or the davenport. They were arbitrary locales for his location, I understand that now; but then, back then, he re-wired a placement and it was on a placemat that I spotted Argentina over Saturday morning pancakes, and it was a word that stuck.

And what was Flyk? Flyk saved old men from standing on train tracks by barking until they had to pick her up. The fur on her front paws always grew too long, so she looked like kids who run with socks half-off. Her teeth were like arrowheads. When I was five, Flyk came to me in a cardboard box and for the first three weeks she slept in my shoe. She came to me in a cardboard box with Auntie Astrid smiling behind the dogwood bushes, the cab driver idling on the street, counting his change.

God, that day. Astrid's carpet bag weighed lyk it was ful of water; even water was liter than her collection of creams, brushes, cotton balls, concealers. That was all for my mother, to keep her feeling beautiful. Yes, she was beautiful. Take any halfway decent feature on my face, and know that it came from her. My eyebrows, my mouth, how my lip cuts off too soon on this syd: those are her. The length of my fingers, but not my fingernails. My bony wrists, tho hers got much bonier than this, so that the skin between the radius and the ulna dipped.

I remember this tho I shouldn't -- I was five, was just grasping depth perception, the difference between flowers and weeds and which ones I could pull from the garden at will. But mother had woken one morning the week before and yawned blood, gargled blood, brushd her teeth with blood. She had never done that before, cofd up something so sanguine, and I suppose it fritend her. Burgundy against the white sink bowl.

I watched, The Price is Right, no, the one with donkies. Let's Make a Deal, watched that in the waiting room while the doctors ran tests. Learned then of the items I should carry in a purse: comb, lipstik, adres book, photo of my husband, apple core, batteri. A crisp one hundred dollar bill could be mine if I had chewing gum, twist tie. When mother was done, we went for donuts -- Boston cream and cruellers, cruel, can't remember what they're called but they left a film in my mouth like a hotdog. She said the doctors fed her popsicle sticks, pilferd her uvula. They caressed her gag reflex as tho the convulsions they induced would shake out the deposits in her intestins, the dirt from under her nayls, the cancer from her throat.

Of course it was cancer. You can't smoke lyk that and not expect it: nicotine coming out of her fingertips, her teeth had become their own filters. She smelld lyk an inferno survivor, infernal nightgown high with the musk

of tailor-mades. Ther was forever something burning in her hands. Made her thin, kept her regular. She was a good smoker, a cool smoker - could blow a chain of paper dolls, could puff out the shapes of the alphabet. And everything was a match. She could pull two hairs from her arm, stryk them together. Just the action of opening the fridge would lyt her up.

But all that dottle cawt up with her. The nightshade had lost its bloom. What had grown in that culture was her demise; we had to admit that the petri dish never lies.

I receeved two gifts: Flyk and a dictionary. Flyk came with Auntie Astrid; the dictionary was full of explanations. Cancer was anything bad that spreads and destroys. Tracheotomy was a breathing hole. Remember, I was five, so these definitions were red to me at nights, rather than bedtym tales of rabbits or truffela fruits. I was tucked in with carcinoma. Later, when I could read, I would marvel at certain truths: cancer was a constellation which festered between Gemini and Leo, was a crab scuttling about in mother's throat.

My first night with Flyk was spent beneath my bed. Pushed asyd the shoe boxes filled with dried plants, ded snayls. It was the end of June, and the firecrackers had been on sale in secret backrooms for weeks. That night ther wer Roman candles, screaming banshees, basket of cherries, crackling fire, titanium whistlebomb, bursting chrysanthemum, shower of stars. The grove of Garry Oaks lit up in green gunpowder. Between fuses, I could hear the conversation in the next room -- mother and Auntie Astrid -- the difrences between their voices. Astrid's voyce was made of crepe paper. Mother's was Hollywood deep.

The next day she went into the hospital to have that voyc cut out.

Astrid and I went to the beach instead, had soft serve ice cream gritty with sugar. There was a cricket match up the hill, the pitch of white lined voycs carried all the way down to the sand. But ther was a man who kood coerce a skwirl onto my hed with a peenut. Auntie Astrid gave him a dollar. She had a purse filled with Milk Bones for Flyk, saltwater taffy for us. When I asked her what was rong with mother, she said mum had a sickness in her throat that had to be cut away, and that sickness lykd it best in her voyc box because it was safe and velveteen in that box and the stereo always played big band. Was it lyk a genie in a bottle and yes, it was lyk that, only the genie was sick, was bleeding, and no amount of stroking mum's throat would have made him appear in a cloud out of her mouth.

Had I known she was about to lose her voyc, I would have had her record hi-fi confabulations, stereofonic chitchat, supersonic gab. Anything to just hang on to her deliveri. She kood have said anything, it didn't matter what. Meatloaf recipe. X-rated memori. Whatever. Something I kood have slipd into my tayp recorder and playd over until it demagnitized.

The first tym I heard the voyc buzzer, I ran. Flyk ran with me. That sound was made of tin, was the heaviest element in the household. We ran to the red-osier bushes behind the college, studied the summer students thru the low windows of the biologi labs. Ther wer the styrofoam balls of chemical compounds, looking like small solar systems on the counter tops. Weights and measures. Flyk found a kerchief in the low bushes, tore it into shreds. Along the top of the bookshelf at the back wer the jars: half lung, cow fetus, frog. I was sure that's wher mum's voyc had gone because it certanli wasn't in her throat anymore.

I started school that September and Astrid flew back to the prairies. Mum resumed smoking, held the cigarette to the hole and inhald same as she

had before. Slowly, over years, her cancer worked itself into her lymph nodes and her immunity gave. She spoke only when rekwired to, at parent-teacher interviews when she was told of the lengths of my imagination. ("She says her father lives in the davenport, that you had a sick genie in your voice box.") They rewarded me with the leeds in all the school plays. But that wasn't my imagination, those wer my truths, the explanashuns that didn't exist in my dicshunary.

It wasn't that I had eaten too much, just that I had eaten chocolate, and the toxin was strong in my stomak. I almost kicked over the bench in my efforts to reach the door, a doorway darkend and off the main path. And all those crepes spilld out onto the pathway while Thom stood behind me, held my hair out of my face. I think he was spinning circles around me; he held the planets in his palms and juggld them with a bowling ball. It was a bee, drowsi with night and looking for a warm sleev, a comb of cotton, a comb of wool. My mouth was sickli sweet, contained all the cocoa on this continent, the brown foam of the sea. The bee gave up the struggle, found solis in a low-hanging planter, and Thom scoopd up my hand as he would a bag of groceries. My throat stung from all that bile.

Walking home, I cawt a glimpse of the "Brothers", the dance floor, the women with pearls that spild down their backs like water, the tawny skin, the hips, the makers. This was a night of cigarellas for othrs, bed for me. It was all Eurodisco anyway.

Thom walkd me home the same way he had months ago, on the first day I had arrivd. Led me down the path in all my manginess, exausted from the journi. We separatd in the courtyard -- he pasd thru to the riketi bed, the

foot of the "L", while I splayd out on the straw. A light flickd on over the sinks: he was flossing, as he did everi nite, cleaning teeth made for cookd meat and puddings.

I still had three slips of paper to be filld. I knew one wood be "Soilent green is people" just for a joke, a laff. Cosmic releef amidst all that gloom and doom. Another was:

It is like a wave upon the water.

It is like a wave upon the water. Waves are not cawsd by planetary pull or the stars, as is the tyd, but by wind, the changing pressur of ayr. On my back where Didier had breathd silent and warm; in Thom's room when he sighd his reasons for wanting separashun. The waves that had ripld from Bess's arms when she shook in the baths, grasping my hand underwatr and whispering hiroglifics into my ear. There was never such a breaker as an expird cigaret tossd to the grownd, foam against the rocks, and the flies alre dy buzzing in the dumpster.

I awok in the morning to find my spine had shiftd. I was on my way from upryt to obleek, but I kood only complayn to Leone of perhaps sleeping rong. It was the mattres, the thin fether pillows. But certanli the ceeling was high enough, the door was mayd of the rite wood. The coin-operated sunrrys came lyk it always did, slid onto the turntabel and playd misty.

Yesterday she was still alyv, sleeping on her back, legs turnd open. Her dander had been alleeviated with oliv oyl kompresses. I was going to arrange passaj for her, going to enshure that she wood joyn Bess and I as we pasd over

to water deels, camel spit. She wood have nipd at the flute venders in any market, bit at the hems of gold-coin dansers. Barkd at rocks on the path and chewd at the earth that surrownded them, saym as she had for all the days before. But any such plans now were a lie.

Sins my first morning, I had herd owls in the trees, the pirpetual hoothoot of something overhed. This was, of cors, an illushun conceald by leavs, foliage. There were no owls, only pijuns, and the noys was mere cooings. But for weeks I serchd for the backward heds of owls surprysd to be awayk during the day, without even notising the pijuns all arownd.

Leone was in the courtyard, talking abowt how she wood want her wax figure to look if she was ever faymos, the eyelash calipers that must be used so that everi last detayl kood be cloned in paraffin. She was talking thru the doorway as I dressd, but I kood still see her pose on the deck chayr, one hand extended to the east. What is east for an Australian, those who liv at the sunrys? Nothing was west of wher I was born; maybe sixteen bloks of tree-lynd streets, ten feet of beach before the water began. This iland was the half-way poynt from here to ther, the pockt of ayr between claspd hands. She had bot herself onyx with tip money, the perfect cirkel of black that adornd her index finger, cigar band in silver.

Nothing was as charrd as the black earth at the center of the caldera: the small patches of destrucshun in the bay, the epicenters of the aynchent blast. Those two ilands — Nea Kameni, Palaea Kameni — remaynd as testament to change itself. Change begins in such small ways, then is upon everithing, and it was only 100 drachma to stand on its burnt face.

Even from the top of the 587 stayrs we kood see the gysers of steam, smell the sulfur. Leone steppd both feet down on each stayr, said it hurt her hip bones to take each in stride. She had filld her bag in preparashun for the

heat of the crater; sunscreen and hats were plentiful. Bottled water with lemon pulp. She had even dug my old sandals from home out of the pile of clothes, stuffed them into her carriage. And was it so wrong of me to deny those shoes, even when we boarded the motorized tour boat. The captain let me dangle my hands into the water; they became the tiny rudders with which we steered across to the Old Burnt, the current filing my nails down.

Believe this: the water warmed as we neared the blackened island; the temperature rose higher than the bath water at the Palace, the barrels next to Athimios' hut which glowed in the late afternoon. The stench of sulfur grew until the air was yellow. All cigarettes were extinguished. The few flies in the air fell to their deaths. It was a match head, the dark yolk of a Chinese egg.

I could see back to the mainland, could hold it all in view with one turn of my head from shoulder to shoulder: Oia straight through to the port where the boats from Piraeus docked. One eye full contained the restaurant, the villa, the caves, abandoned cement factory. Perhaps the pack had discovered Kyno's body last night, had pawed at her still muzzle, licked her cold stop. But they would have known what the port police knew too — a dog in heat at season's end is a detriment, a spot. I never thought to keep her inside my room, old underwear with the hole cut for her tail, door scratched on both sides. She roamed free that day as she always had, and met her death on the path out of town.

The earth at Nea Kameni bubbled like burnt flesh, swirled in places where the pyroclastic surge and flow sucked the land beneath the water and pushed it back up centuries later. This was the temperamental island, the shy one who sunk and rose like a child learning to tread water. The island that had rubbed the belly of the sea for good luck then floated back up for air, lungs exhausted from the rise, bad case of the bends in its bloodstream. It oozed

ocean at every pore, snorted it out in a spray of steam when our boat landed at the makeshift port.

Even my feet, thick as my soles had grown, felt the heat of magma below. Leone had picked up some fungus in the showers at the villa; she had a foot made of cauliflower and complained that the heat of Nea Kameni caused it to itch. She had a pencil in her sac'oplenti, and she slid the lead end into her shoe, pushed it past canvas and scratched some ink into the sole of her foot.

The tour guide told us what we had already learned at Akrotiri: no skeletons have been found in archaeological digs at the silent site. Leone was on her way back to the boat — she'd had enough of the cauliflower foot and wanted to sit portside, dip her inflamed foot in the warm sea. But from where I stood, I could hear a low moan rising from the earth. It was met with a steam spray from one crevice, then another. The tour guide rushed us back to the boat as the island became a waterworks, a collection of childhood sprinklers fanning out sulfuric steam, a school of whales breathing through the basalt. It was then that I confessed to Leone: I would leave the next morning to join Didier at Paros. The lie got easier with each telling. She sighed louder than the island sulfur.

It's about time, she said.

Time I left?

Time you left the past, Thom.

I haven't been hanging on that strong. I know that's over.

She pulled her foot from the water, inspected the infection. Then she said, I thought you were going to Egypt.

No, I have to talk to Bess yet.

Perhaps I'll go that way. Would be hard to find work there, being blonde, being female. Easy to find a man, hard to find a life. And your dog, will she stay?

The stayrs were gaining resolushun as we neard the port. Yes, she's already gone.

The bay began to fill with boats of all sorts: trollers and oar-driven fishing vessels, wooden skiffs and bayld-owt dingies. Black nets wer hoystd back onbord and the fish cawt within them came out poachd. The water burnd with a feever no one had known before, mercuri burst thru each insertd thermomeeter. In the middel, the Kamenes gaspd and belchd a dun heat. One spat a geode at the town; it toppld the newspaper stand and scatterd glistening shards on the bordwalk. The sky held both the sun and moon. The donkey herders began their slow assent back up the stayrs and the jingle of bells was still awdibel thru-owt town. Those ilands sputterd lyk a wynd-up voyc box or a chyld's toy wich, when turnd upsyd-down and then playcd upryt, moans the lowest moan, vibrates as it matchs the natural freekwenci of the metal casing.

Leone invitd anyone she saw on the way back home: the prep chefs and silver venders along the path. She wantd a proper goyng-away, the one she had been denyd when Stace and Henry slipd away without any warning. Leone wantd to fill the patio with bodies in preparashun for the vacani that wood folow.

The shower room had once held ovr three bodies: Kyno shaking off, the spray of water agaynst Didier and I. His mowth on my jaw bone and my eyes on his chest. That was a conversashun. Without them, the space was vast, the water ekkoed where it hit the whyt-washd floor. Once I was cleen, I reechd up, graspd the fawset and twistd it off. I waytd until the pyp was empti, till the last drop fell agaynst my skin, then I saw Thom and Bess pass outsyd thru the small window wich overlookd the port.

I wood miss salal becaws I had grown up with it in my hayr, or clutterd into cloakroom corners at skool, and becaws it was nowher to be fownd in my dicshunari, lackd definishun and therefore seemd pure.

Leone brayded my hayr, payntd my nayls black. Bess onli knew that we were celebrayting, didn't know the reasons and didn't seem to cayr. She was tying her work clothes into a ball wich she tossd at the foot of her bed. Stayns of tamatasalada showing thru on her whyt shirt. By the tym we were dressd, the patio was filling with grotto workers, hostel inhabitants, dishpigs, drink slingers, the great unwashd, AmEx casheers, tram operators. A thousand langwijis spoken at once upstays; Leone had created her own tower of babel, compleet with malinoma boniface emerging from his shack. Someone was smoking a clove cigaret, but it hardli coverd the smell of sulfur rising from the bay.

Thom was still in his work clothes -- whyt shirt and long pants -- had a full can of Amstel and a shot of Ouzo, black hayr slickd back with the toyl of the day. And in the distans behynd him, the Kamenes sent shock waves that appeerd as a transparent sfeer in the bay, mayd all my fillings tayst like tin foyl, lyk I was chewing on tin foyl or licking a D-cell batteri. Leone thot a moth had flown in her eer; the waves were lyk that.

Everione was indifferent to the chanjis that wer tayking playc, wer too cawt up in their conversashuns to notis the fog that was rolling in. It was late and still the town was brite; all that whyt workd lyk a blanket of snow, kept faycs lit and small animals in hiding. But ther was Bess' hand on my rist, ahed of me on the path as she draggd me to some dyv off the bordwalk, the rows of backs agaynst the bar, tand to perfecshun, swizzlestiks and spykd cherries floating in pink alkohol, lafter by the lemon wedges. The panik, the vomit, the home-brew, the proselyts. Django Reinhardt. I expectd that Greek bars wood play bouzouki, lutes and tamboreens, but they didn't. It was all Spanish gypsy music, it was all French.

She chose a tabel under the swinging fan blayds, breez lifting the hayrs on my forearms. We had sweet shots of Ouzo and something that taystd of coffee. Aniseed coatd my mouth lyk laker, the sticky sheen of laker. We got gididi. We got half-seas over.

Tomorrow is my day off and I just felt like dancing.

And so we dansd and I lickd at her fingers whyl the steel musik pord forth, the Selmer Maccaferri breathing lowd over the speekers, the buzzer, the stoma hanging from the ceeling. No, the stoma hung in mums throat, fumed lyk the Kamenes, smoke and gas arose from that vent. A rose is a king is a lyon, and the roses in Astrids garden grew behind one small cross mayd from popsickl sticks and twyn. That was the last tym I went digging in the erth; ther wer no plastik decoder rings in that grayv. Keeping up with the musik: onetwoonetwoonetwo. Of corse it was rong to be on a dans floor without shoes, to not be abel to tayk part in the shuffelshuffel of a lether sole agaynst well polishd wood. I jumpd in cirkels arownd Bess, bayrd teeth and tryed to snap my fingers. Middle finger agaynst thumb and the quick pull back into playc but my thum had shrunk a falanj, had begun the slow

migrashun to its proper locashun above the rist. The disco ball flashd skwares of silver on the faycs arownd, jaw bone sliced by the arc of lyt, the arc of the body when she flew, she grew wings of fur, hole in the occiput, hole in the throat onli slitley coverd by the gauz, the gaping "O" thru wich she spoke and the unnecessari "o" at the back of a dogs hed. Smyls all arownd. Bess had a handful of peenuts from the bar, crackd shells onto the floor with no regard for cleening ladies, for othr dansers, and the wood fell to wood and glasses fell on the carpet or wer smashd agaynst the grayt. Her dress hung loos on her hips, hardli brushd agaynst her skin when she moved, wet on her colar bone and tips of curld hair; this was a jackknife dans, this was a juggernawt dans with everione throwing themselves under the weel. No.

Wait. It was a loneli, tyrd dans that Flyk did on the payvment after the car had rold over her spyn, the shimmying off of lyf itself to the candyflos kords of fayr musik, the organ grynding wyl I nelt on the payvment, hot Alberta eevning and the moskitos wer thick. She strugld on the street and all I kood say was "breathe, breathe, breathe". And those were useless words, becaws she didnt breeth, her windpyp had been crushd and so how kood she breeth. She stopd lyk mum had stopd, lyk Astrid had stopd, lyk Kyno had stopd, and no words kood stop the stopping. Even when the woman emergd from her car, hayr hidden beneath ten gallon hat, and apologizd over and over until I scoopd up the body, intact and not sullyd with blood. I walkd away. Bess fel into me, held tyt and did the buck and wing, the saraband, the Hyland fling. She held tyt to my belt loop. She held tyt to my scruff. She held tyt and when she stopd holding tyt she breethd heat onto my neck, smelld of peenut buttr and furfural. Eyelashes agaynst my skin and the stench of stayl beer in the carpeting. Her tongue taystd of growndnut, of ankor ice and all my cells turnd skwamus. No.

Wait. I have to tell you something.

She took the lie lyk a three-ring champyon, just sed: Well, I suppose we're doing the same thing. I'm going to Egypt to begin my life again; you're staying in Greece to begin yours.

Stand-up bays cawsd my bones to vibrayt. This was an Irish wayk, a muffld drum for everithing that had come before and for one ill-formd dog, fayc almost unrekognizabel from the bullet wich had enterd her hed and blown her muzzel clean off.

Owtsyd, the town was lost in the whyt smoke; Nea Kameni slipd slowli beneeth the water tabel. The stars caym out from behynd the curtayn of cloud, and as happens in Awgust, one star outshynd the rest. Bess and I sat on the stayrcase down to the chapel of the three bells, watching the bubbels wher the iland had ben, the small wirlpools that funnelld down to the sinking mass of land.

Considr the fynal words mum spoke to me before her fynal fit, her sylent moans. The mantra of all modern mothers to theyr gurls. You can be anything. You can grow up to be anything.

I slept kurld agaynst her belly, the warmth there. Bess strokd the bridge of my nose until I awok, sunlyt streeming thru the gauz curtayns and the glistening hayz of dust motes in the ayr. I had never awokn to this vyew before, tho it had ben the saym for centurees -- the plasterd walls, the thin playt glass, the clopclop of hoovs on the ruf. Ther was no longr a need for wooln blankets, for starchd sheets; this morning saw the end of flannel

cukoons and pillo cayses. It saw the end of toothbrushs and sandelwood sope, toylet payper, my Russian novel.

My beutiful dicshunari, embosd with my naym on the covr, fownd a new home atop the wardrobe, slid up ther with spyder caysings and Minoan soot.

Thom nockd softli on the woodn fraym, opend the door as I packd my belongings back into my napsack.

I brought you something from the restaurant. Just a set of cutlery. I didn't think you had any. So, take care. He turnd, stood in the doorway. And Kate, about your mother. Remember your weaknesses, accept the loss as best you can. Nothing you do or say can change the facts. Um, under the circumstances and all, the best thing, I mean the logical course, is resignation.

It was all blahblahblah to me at that poynt, idel noys wich mayd no diffrens, mayd no sens. The fifth slip of payper had ben compleetd last nyt wyl I kood still wryt: sometym, a syn is just a syn. I kolectd up the slips, slipt into Thoms room and hid them amongst his things: 1 in the soapbox, 1 in a shirt pockt, 1 in his journal, 1 under the Nutella, 1 in his shayving cays. Fiyv remynders of the fax I had resynd.

Leone and Bess walkd me slow to the bus deepo - OTE, Post Offis, fast food playc cald TOAST. Athimios was alredy at the deepo, "For Rent" syn in his hands, his fayling hands. Leone reechd owt, tuchd my sholdr.

Take care.

Bess tuckd a note in my brest pockt. She held the corner as if she ment to tayr at the seems.

This is the address in Egypt, in case you decide to come.

We three tuchd forheds, pressd togethr in the deesil exhaust, arms across backs and my thums losing importans. The deepo was hevi with bodees, dust

kickd up wher feet wer liftd from the grownd in fayrwel embrayces. The deparchure of end-of-summer affayrs; the breech of my expectashuns.

Bess and Leone pasd my bags to the boy on the ruf of the bus wyl I klymd insyd, fownd a window seet by the back door. They wer owt ther, thru the dirti playt glas window, wayving, stan ding on the path to the Whyt Palas. Then, for 1 tym, I sed goodby to them and to my own fayc, ruddy with sleeplesnes, stayring into my own fayc, agaynst the payn.

12 howrs sins that tym and the sun is in fast retreat, glinting now off Thoms cutleri gift, nife blayd working as a beekon of ending lyt, harbinjer of coming nyt.

Varyos dogs have come & gone during the day, snifd at my auld klothes, pawd at the erth wher I lay. Peed agaynst the saym patch of rockfayc. Lookd dismay at Kyno, buljing eyes and flatend eers. Unkurld tayls and hung them low between theyr legs.

Memori shood be gin at the moment of greyttest joy, & so myn be gins now, hed on the soft erth, tung of alfa mayl agaynst my stop. Rguj nwaba birgubf ai qyur kiijubf

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Quotes on pages 62, 123, and 2 & 142 are from Hecuba by Euripedes (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1958, p. 45, 68, and 18 respectively.)

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