

Of Bicycles and Boardwalks and Oceans and Ships prework

by Matthew Temple

In the rain I stand with my hands in my pockets. In the rain I stand on the beach. In the rain my slacks are drenched, heavy, dark. I've left my shoes behind me, rotting in the sand. Left my shoes behind me, soaked, heavy, half-submerged in the sand. Before them, depressions left by shoes; after them, depressions left by bare feet. Miniature puddles quickly filling with water, shapes of shoes and feet quickly mis-shaping, soon distorted, then gone. Left my shoes behind, left my shoes behind me. Left my shoes behind, walking in the sand.

Setting out the dishes, setting plates for two. This is how we used to eat, with the windows open no matter what the weather, our plates set on wicker place mats on adjacent sides of the footrest, whether cold or whether wet or whether hot or whether dry, sometimes steak, sometimes mac-n-cheese, sometimes conversation, sometimes quiet, sometimes we'd make love after, sometimes we'd watch T.V. But always we'd keep the windows open, and if it was rain we'd let it fall through to the carpet, soak the edges of the room.

When the neighbor girl comes back home from school, she opens the door herself. No feet come to greet her, but I imagine the mother must be inside. I can't see their garage, which exits into the street, only their front door, in our alley. Our alley is closed to cars; it has concrete posts blocking us at either end from the other streets. And I guess our alley is a street, too. Some of the houses face inward, some of the shops face the other way. On the other side of Marcel's shop is the beginning of the boardwalk. It's a smaller boardwalk, smaller than the main one, not elevated, just boards on the sand.

If you go one way, you go toward the sunset, an endless stretch of residential placed as close to the water as possible, fewer and fewer shops that way, more and more homes, condominiums, hotels, summer places. Doormats that look like they've been stepped on only a few weeks of the year, carports that open, rarely, to reveal Porsche's and Audi's and vintage cars.

If you go the other way, there's less and less residential, more and more shops. There's an arcade. There are many many t-shirt shops and trinket shops, places to buy things to remind you that you were here. Eventually there's the restaurant on the shore, and then the rollercoaster, and then the boardwalk, the main one, where the action is.

When it rains here it's the docks, it's the roofs of the boats, it's the geese gone undercover, it's the flag at the boathouse drooping, soggy, no wave in it, no pride.

I keep my window open. I like the smell to come in, the smell of the rain. I like the almost-musty feeling. I like how it makes the space seem smaller, and it makes me cozy-in. Sun and rain: I can settle into either, it's the transition that disorients me. Sun on shiny puddles, asphalt drying, closing the windows, putting away the umbrella, getting it out. I wish if it would rain it would rain forever, be gray forever—or either never rain. I can live in either, make my home in either, never want to leave. And once it goes from sun to rain, or once it goes from rain to sun, I love it. The transition catches me between, disturbs a little. I'm sad to see whatever weather go.

The same is true for me and places. Love them all and never want to leave. But once I get to where I'm going, I love it all again.

Were you never here? Did I never know you? I think maybe I just made you up inside my mind and all this time have been conversing with someone I imagined, some perfect counterpart of

myself that I call "you". Maybe I have given you that name, but maybe you're really part of me.

Saturdays I can't tell what time it is anymore. The produce truck's not there. She used to yell the specials in some local accent and I could tell that is was time to go.

Did I forget to call you? Who am I thinking of? I didn't forget to call you. You're not there.

Who was I imagining? It was some mixture of women that I've known. It was no one, it was just a longing.

Curling into myself, crumpled sheets, feel my belly, pull the pillow over my head. I used to sleep without one.

I still have this pillow here. Why? It reminds me of—who? No one. It just reminds me that someone else could be here. Some potential, some theoretical you. Some you from memory, mixtures of it, pinches, cups, sprinkles, powders, splashes, fathoms. And fathoms. Fathoms of hair, fathoms of Saturday morning shopping trips, fathoms of getting in the car and fathoms of standing in line together and fathoms, fathoms, fathoms of you.

We used to love to cook together. We used to love to draw on paper tablecloths at restaurants, with crayons, while they make the food.

I've grown so used to waking up alone in this apartment that it's hard for me to see it any other way. I can imagine a girlfriend here, of course, I can and do. But this has always been my place, just my place. Rented it alone, have always lived in it alone. I like it that way. I took the bathroom door off the hinges, so the space is more open. My futon is in a closet, what was supposed to be a walk-in closet, between the bedroom and the bath. So I can step directly from the bathroom into my bedroom, the converted closet, whose entire floor is my futon.

The corner room is free. It has windows on two sides. I like to watch the storms from there. I have a wicker loveseat, French, that I bought from an antique dealer here, and my green recliner. It's pea green, muppet green, Kermit green, fabric all pea'd up and a boxy shape, but I like it. The back is firm and the sides perfect for putting your feet up while you read.

Pale green curtains border the windows. They're sheer, almost a wisp; if the fabric was laid on your skin while you had your eyes closed, you wouldn't notice it. This fabric sways on July days, even with the windows closed in winter it sways just from the movement in the room. When you sit in the wicker loveseat, the curtains exhale with you. When you open the door to guests, even though the door is forty feet from those windows, the curtains breathe the guests inside the apartment. Welcome to our inside, they say, breathe in with me this way.

I remember there was someone who used to bring her laundry to my door. She used to ring my bell and when I would open it she would be there with a basket full of laundry and her cat, in the basket, even though I'm allergic to cats. I'd let her in. She would set her laundry basket on my washer. The cat would jump out, rub her face on the laundry closet door. And the one who brought the laundry would pull me in to her, would wrap me in the last clean sweater that smelled of her, wrap me in some kind of fleece that had kept her warm outside but was too much for my apartment, wrap us both in it and my arms would go through the sleeves and our arms would be there together, and I couldn't tell what was hair and what was wool and what was fleece and what was you and what was me. What was me, inside us wrapped together? What was me? I don't know if I'm kissing your neck or kissing my own, somehow biting my own skin with my own teeth, somehow taken apart and made distinct, two pieces, so I can kiss myself. If we stop walking at the same time and we start walking at the same time, if we go to the corner shop together, if I put your groceries in the bag

with mine, if when you drop your wallet I pick it up and hand it back, then why do you have your name and I have mine? Why, if I say your name more often than I say my name, are you you and me me? If I say your name more than I say my own, then aren't I more you, in terms of what I know? In terms of what I do, aren't I really more you and you more me? I don't spend hours thinking of my own name, or the way my hair falls, or my voice, or of when I'll see myself again. I don't wonder if I'll call. I don't wonder if I'll bring my laundry, or my cat. All of that is saved for you, and is my meditation, and is everything that is not myself.

What I hear outside are bicycle chains, the clicking of the gears when the rider stops pedaling, or pedals backward. The sound of some tiny clicking in the bicycle gears, the feeling of freedom that comes to the rider in that moment, not pedaling, without exertion, lightness, ease. A touch of wind in the hair of the rider, or on her face. The pace of riding at some moderate speed, so that you can turn your head sideways and look at the gulls picking at an ice-cream wrapper, two of them pecking for its control. And then tighten your hands on the grips and turn facing forward and pedal again, and speed, speed, speed along the way.

The trash pickup comes between five-thirty and six a.m. Which is after the time that I'm up and showered, by then I'm leaning out the corner windows squinting at the colors of sunrise over the ocean, pastel tints on the sides of the shops and houses. Sometimes I'm sitting in my chair with a cup of chai, reading news of the world on ancient paper, tissue-thin leaves translucent beige, and I only hear the pistons of the truck, the intermittent yells from driver to back man, telling themselves when to stop and when to go. Usually the paper is forgotten, or never opened, and I'm leaning out my corner windows with my cup of chai, my knees buried in the seat of my recliner, my spirit panting at the beauty like a dog. It'll be the cold of the morning, and my feet will be cold, and I'll be wearing my fleece, but I'll remember days of wearing wool in winter and know that now in hours my back will feel the crisp of the sun through my

shirt, and when it touches my back I'll think of my tattoo and then I'll think of all the tattoos I've ever loved, and all the people I've loved who've worn them, and then it will be almost noon and the cold will be forgotten. Reading news is second to me, to watching Marcel open his grafitti'd gate and sweep the walk and set out the chairs, to watching nothing move on the boardwalk and timid waves approach the shore. And the trash men come, and the driver is busy checking his mirror to see if the back man is still with him but the back man checks up to see if I am there today and I give him the wave and nod that men give each other that says, yes, this is our life and things go on and things go back and things are not exactly as they should be, but things are being taken care of, by us, in our allotted ways. You are doing your job and I am doing mine, and in this way of not-talking, among men, we can have our sameness be a thing we carry beside us, but do not try to share. I look over and see you with your sameness and you look over to see me with mine. And we don't intertwine them, but we wave and nod and we know that they are there, our similar ways of knowing the world, our similar ways of understanding it. There's a simplicity in that not-trying-to explain that we like, as men, that drives some women crazy, that some women understand. To the other kind it seems like a type of limitation, a lack of emotion, but it's not. It's a quiet peace, a not-needing, a lack of lack that goes well with the role of man. In every species you need the male and the female, in every system you need the part and its counterpart, the pretty peacock and the plain one, the brilliant bluejay and the blunt one, the colorful on one hand and the calm on the other, the striking, the subtle, the supreme, the subdued. When these two men wave at each other at five a.m., it's as though every detail around them is more sharply audible because of their hush. They hear the creak of the truck's hydraulics; they know that. They see the waking up of the alley. They know what it looks like with sleep in its eyes, when it first stretches its muscles on the day.

I read the paper slowly. When I was younger and drove to work each day I heard the news on the radio, mostly in the afternoon. In

the morning I would play music, in the afternoon I would listen to the news. Back then I went through phases, some where the news interested me and I felt it benefited me, and some where I felt it didn't, and I turned it off, and forgot about the world. Disasters and tides and scandals and wars do not always benefit a man. There are months and years when it's best to turn it off and look within. Read the news of your surroundings. Maybe it's your family. Maybe it's your work. Maybe it's your neighborhood. Maybe it's a stranger, but a stranger close-by, rather than a stranger separated from you by ocean and language, by lines drawn in sand and walls built of that same. When I read the news I do it slowly. Between sentences I sip my chai. I like to read stories of the world, but I need to remind myself of exactly what they are. Stories of disaster, stories of a turning tide, stories of another's scandal, stories of another's war. I read a sentence of another's story. Then I sip my chai. If I don't do it that way then I'm living in a world of ghosts and dreams. Ghosts might seem an ancient topic, from the days of religion and before. Science, and this age of news that follows, have brought more ghosts than ever came with god. When I read the news I watch the letters; that is part of why I read the news on paper still. If I can think about the letters, it helps me not forget what I'm actually doing, reading letters on a page. And yes, reality is passed between us, and yes, you share my pain. But without some hold on literal behavior we drown in this sea of ghosts, instead of captaining a ship with them.

Marcel puts out the chairs at six. People show up around seven. Between six and seven it's just Marcel sweeping and the girl with the Ernie bookbag coming down the steps and going up the incline toward the road, away from the boardwalk, I assume to catch a bus. I see inside her house when the door opens to let her out. Someone else opens the door, a woman. From the angle where I view them I can only see her legs, but by the shoes and by the cut of the jeans it is a woman. I can see their umbrella bucket, I can see that their entryway is tiled, not real tiles but linoleum, a light tan color, looking very new. The woman lets the girl out, the girl doesn't look

back, she goes down the steps and swings her arms widely as she walks. It's exaggerated, like she's of the age where you realize that people swing their arms when they walk, so she wants to make sure that when she walks she swings hers too. Marcel sees her. He stops sweeping. He rests his hands on the top of his broom and I can see him remembering her like she was his own daughter, and I wonder where Marcel's daughter is. She is probably in Paris, she's probably a smoker, she probably reads the paper over bagels in a cafe where she meets her girlfriend to start the day. And does Marcel have a son? I don't think so, I don't know why, but I don't think he does. I think he has two daughters, and I think his wife is dead. I think he lost her in an accident, because Marcel doesn't look like he has spent years with an illness. He looks more like someone who's wife died suddenly, and was shocked, and who suffered then. With an illness you suffer some beforehand; with an accident all the suffering comes later. Marcel stops his sweeping for a moment and watches the girl with the Ernie bookbag go down the steps and go up the incline and go to catch her bus. She's in his eyes, as she goes, or maybe it's his own daughter who's there. Then she goes around a corner, Marcel smiles, he goes back to sweeping, and I don't know if there's anything I could ever learn about Marcel that tells me more about him than I know from this.

I watch the storms in there. Over the bay, past the boat masts, on the street below. Shopkeepers unroll graffiti'd gates, chairs go inside, and drops pummel anyone who stays outside.

Sometimes I walk home in the rain, or push my bike beside me. Sometimes I ride in the rain but when it rains I like to get off my bike and push it beside me, walk it home, let my sandals sink into the deepest puddles, my feet fully wet, gray water marking my ankles. Past the portrait shops and the travelers selling beer can sculptures. They make propeller airplanes out of aluminum cans, assemble panels with push-pins, propellers that really turn when you blow on them or fly them through the air. They're hard to pack and send as gifts, they're so delicate, but worth the trip if you can

make it. There's a man there who makes puppets out of palm leaves. Finger puppets, with barely-human figure, abstract people with loop heads, like ankhs. I've never kept the ankh puppets, but I buy them and set them on the newsstand three shops down. The guy who makes them has no shirt, the legs on his jeans come only to the middle of his calves. His cheeks bear the red of the sun. His hair is white, bleached, the ends braided but between the ends and his scalp is frizz and twine, matted, filthy. He sells his puppet/ankh people for fifty cents. I buy one every day. We all do. You have to. And we know he spends the money on drugs, but he spends it on food too. We love him, our whole street, our whole little alley, he's part of us, even though he stinks and even though you wish he would get his act together, it's too late, in his case, it really is probably too late for him to make a major change. Our alley is his institution, and we love him here. We love him in a sad way, but we love him nonetheless. If other homeless guys were here all the time, we'd probably kick them out, someone would. But he's our homeless guy. We protect him, just him, not anyone else, and he stays in our alley, on our little part of the boardwalk, nowhere else. I don't know where he sleeps. I see him in the morning, walking to his spot, gathering palm leaves, sitting in the shade of this one specific tree. But I don't know where he comes from in the morning, or where he goes at night. It's somewhere close by. I hope it's somewhere safe.

When I walk in the rain I think of times in high school when we rode the bus home and got off several stops early to do the same. I would show up at home weighing twenty pounds heavier at least due to the weight of the water in my jeans. I didn't ever take umbrellas. We would have to wash and dry my shoes. The nylon of my bookbag kept its contents mostly dry. My mother would scotch-gard everything I owned because she knew my style. Which, essentially, was walking in the rain. When I got home I would need a bath and all new clothes, and I would leave my hair wet and sit in the Florida room and watch it rain again.

Since then, somewhere in my travels, in Arizona probably, I learned not to wear socks. I only live in climates where socks are unnecessary. All I wear is sandals, because everything I want to do can be done in sandals, and if I can't do an activity in sandals then the activity is not for me. A guy from Louisiana once told me that he never wore sandals "because you can't kick in 'em, and you can't run in 'em." Fight or flight. I (and I'm from Texas, but, I) never need to kick, and I never need to run. At least not anywhere but in the sand. Thoreau said to beware any enterprise that requires a change of clothes, and Mark Twain said it was better to keep a tidy soul than to dress that way. I agree with those guys. If I can't wear sandals to do it, then I don't do it. I used to drive in Ohio with no shoes, which is illegal for some strange reason, but I just don't see driving with shoes on. When your bare feet touch the pedals, you're more connected with the car. I gave up driving long ago, though. Some people see driving as a privilege. As in: what a shame to have to have to take the bus. Those are people who've never lived in New York. They don't know about the world where driving is a shame.

"I think somewhere I've seen you."

"Where?"

"I don't know. I'm still figuring that part out."

...

"It's ridiculous."

"You have the strangest adjectives I've heard all month."

...

"You have this lightness."

"So do you."

"It's rare."

"I know."

"I only find it—I've only found it twice before."

"Then you're rich. You're rich. If you've found it that many times you've lived forever, you're a sage, you're ancient wise and you have—"

"What do I have?"

"The world in your hand."

You put my hand in your hand. You close your fingers about my fingers. You squeeze.

...

"I read they're making eternal life. Scientifically. Clinically."

"They are."

"Tell me about it."

"You assume I know!!"

"But don't you."

"Of course."

"I don't want you to be shy with me. Tell me about eternal life."

"It's all to do with the cell casings, or this casing about the DNA. It

wears out. When it wears out, you get old. If you get old enough, you die."

"And they fixed that?"

"Yes, they did."

"And?"

"And what?"

"Are we going to die?"

"Yes. We are. From getting hit by a bus, or some random accident."

"How long will we live?"

"As old as people did in the bible. Maybe 900 years."

"I think that's just a mistake in translation. I think they didn't even live as long as us. But I hope they do fix that problem with the casings, I hope they do fix the DNA. I want us to live as long as possible, and be silly, and be old. I want us to be ridiculous."

...

"Live fast and die young."

"That's probably really good advice."

"It's probably good advice because of the terror?"

"Yes. Because you're always dying, because you're always young."

"But not in a car crash."

She leans in to touch the flower, not to smell it, not to breathe him in, but to touch it, to touch him with her face, rose cheek on pale petal, rose cheek looking up at your face and just as soft, peach fuzz magnified on your skin by this light, magnified and burning.

Because you actually have to be paying attention, you actually have to be breathing this in, you actually have to know what's on around you, to be hurt, to feel hunger, to know the joy of pain. You actually have to use your senses, you actually have to let it in. This world, this miracle, this glistening sphere, this emerald grove, this crystal fountain. This brilliant star above us, this burning flush within.

[in line for the rollercoaster]

"And people should look at proportion. They should look at sides. We should look at how big this is compared to how big that is, and we should think about what it means. Because that means shape. And shape is everywhere. And it matters. Proportion matters. Contrast matters. Relative volume matters. What is visual and what is verbal matters, as does the distinction between them. And holding on matters. And so does letting go."

"You matter."

"Only because you care."

...

"That's because I've been smelling the flowers."

"When? Today?"

"No. All my life."

[on the rollercoaster]

[she tells him the story of killing her sister / friend in a car accident where she was driving, because he says he sees in her the brightness, the presence, the moment]

[she comes back but doesn't give me her phone number, her email, she came back to do that, I can tell, but she doesn't, she goes, promising to email me when she gets back from her trip]

"We'll have rows of yellow roses."

"We'll have rows of blue. Do they have blue roses?"

"I think so. We'll make them, we'll make them if they don't."

"You said yellow."

"Yes, and blue, and red, and orange, and pink, and purple, and white."

"Mmmm. I'll walk you through the roses blindfolded, so all you can do is smell them, and the same with when you have no eyes and your ears take up more of the job of sensing, the smell will fill you, that's all you'll know."

"That's all I'll know."

"Yes."

"Yes. And how will I see to walk?"

"I'll push you in a wheelchair."

"When I'm old."

"I hope we're old together. I hope we look back and know that we

were young one day and that we used to want to be old."

"We will."

"Will we?"

"Yes."

...

Place my bag above the washer. Outside it's going to rain. Dark this time of night, the inside brighter, dim green and dim televisions, half-wet floor that she's still mopping. Mother's children running, dark hair, dark eyes. This mother with five loads of laundry; me with one. She can see her kids are safe around me. We make enough eye contact that she knows I'm gentle and while I won't buy them sticky candy from the machines, I can put a coin in a game and let them play for free. She won't mind that, we are family enough to do that. But when her children take too much of a liking to me, I will pretend I'm too busy to care, that I need to go stand in the rain, that I need to think on the day, that there's urgent talk that needs to unfold between me and the c-store operator next door.

But those children will remember that, they will recall the guy at the laundromat, who used to buy them games and go stand in the rain. Mainly they'll remember the games, because they never played them before. But they'll remember the guy, too, just like I remember the magician at the table next to ours at some restaurant when I was a child. I remember the face of the man who made me a hat by twisting balloons, not just the hat, but the face of the man who made it. The strangers, in every snapshot, the people caught accidentally in our frames. The people next to us on the beach the day we had that perfect day. We had that perfect day because of the sun, because of the ocean, because we looked into each other's eyes. But just over your shoulder, in the background, others shared

that day.

...

[you found my clothes and you slept on them]
[the feminine instinct to sit on things]

...

I took video once of a man juggling chainsaws. But it's the girl in the top hat laughing, that always makes you smile.

...

There's something in that mother's eye, something more. It's something in me too. It is that on a deeper level, beside our civil law, that we would love each other. That she would love me like her husband, that I would love her like my wife. And we don't make plans to do this, we don't encourage sickness, we do not lust. Quietly we would, we love with a conditional, if her husband died or if our lives were different, then we would love each other. In a nonexistent world, we love each other. In theory we would love. But the theory is correct. Our world does not support it, but the theory is correct. And that's not a need, it's not a wish in any way that the world was different. It is just the knowledge that if I needed you and it was right, that you would be there. If you needed me, and it was right, I would be there.

If Marcel did not come out this morning, I would do the chairs. If he was sick or had to run an errand, I would set them out in threes with the front side open, the side of the table facing the alley, so customers could see the faces of people who were sitting, see them take their spoon and pour the sugar, see them stir the two together, see them sip their tea. And when Marcel got to work I would share with him the morning's business, total up the drawer. And everything would be the same as if he'd done it.

...

I think I'd do the same about your laundry. If you brought your basket to my door and when you came inside you slumped into my chair and looked out the window, and cried at the bay, if you looked at ship masts through the blur of tears for some unknown sorrow, and if you held your head in your hands and said nothing, I would put your clothes in the washer for you, and use the amount of soap that you use, and set it for the amount of time that you set it for, and I would wash it on cold.

...

When you left you would take your laundry with you, and it would be just as if you had done it, right down to the folding, and the stacking, and right down to the kitten I would scoop up from my carpet floor and place in a cradle of warm feathers. And she would purr, and she would peek at you, and she would wait for you to take her in the basket, down the stairs, and home.

...

When you unfolded things to wear them you would know that my hands were the hands that folded them, that my fingers touched their edges, pressed against their insides lightly, made them smooth. And my hands would be with you when you wore them, in the arms of your sweater, in the bowl of your hat, between your toes and with a pinch on your ankle when my fingertips wanted to play.

...

[seeing the homeless guy, seeing where he sleeps for the first time...bringing him back down a blanket...and I don't have a blanket now but it's ok]

And my tea, when you're in it, it's not really that you're there, but that I make my tea with milk and, to me, milk smells like bananas, bananas with milk, milk in cereal as a child and we used to slice bananas to go on it, bananas coming in through the window from the produce truck downstairs.

What it is, when you meet someone like this, when you meet someone who can see the world as a bright place, those are the people who know deep, deep tragedy. It is only people who know how dark the world can get who have an real reason to make it bright. It is only those who've lived through something truly horrible who have the gumption to make the momentary efforts required to make the world bright, to make a moment bright, to make a day bright, to speak pleasantly with strangers as though everyone could be instant friends. It's the perspective of tragedy that reminds us we are all in this together, for most people that is the only way to know that a moment can be bright, by contrast with utter darkness, utter night.

And we're going to have a rose garden, we're going to have a rose garden, my dear. We're going to take her, or him, to the rose garden in the morning, and we're going to help him smell the roses, we're going to create that habit in him and create it in ourselves. It's going to be an acre or two, it's going to be huge. We're going to need the help of all our neighbors to prune it, to clip it, to cut the dead away. It's going to be a field of joy and pricked fingers and drops of blood and butterflies.

Waking in the morning at six a.m. And the sunlight coming in. And the fishers outside my window. I can hear them unloading their boat. I can hear the wooden runners on the trailer squeaking and the panels of the boat's sides groaning. They let the boat down. They wear leather boots, him and his partner, and the leather is worn so it's smooth and shiny; it's shiny everywhere it's been touched and it's been touched everywhere.

"What were you saying earlier? About proportion? What do you say?"

"That people should notice it."

"What else?"

"That it matters. What's making you think of that?"

"I think of it always."

"You do."

"I think of it every night. I have this little meditation."

"What else is in it?"

"Color. Shape. Senses. You."

...

"For you it's a meditation. For me it's a bedtime story. I sleep with a poet, you sleep with—"

"A child?"

"As long as I love bedtime stories I will be a child."

...

"Do you really think we should live fast and die young?"

"No. I think we should make each day last forever and that every day we should die. Live forever every day, and every day we die."

...

"I want to move back. To where to ocean is."

"We have an ocean here."

"I miss you."

"I'm right here. What makes you want to move?"

You move my hand to your belly. "This?"

"I want it to be a neighborhood that's good to grow up in."

And you're silent for a moment. You're silent for a while.

I don't know what you're thinking, but I think it's that you agree. I know you think I'm sentimental. But we can move back here later, when he or she is older, maybe when he's ready for school, or maybe when she decides she wants to start a business. "You think I'm old-fashioned," I say.

"No," you say, "I think you're right." This place is great for us now that we've made it, but it's no place for starting off. For starting off you need a place that's easy, you need softness, a lie. For those who start this life with the truth are doomed to limitation, they are doomed to hold a narrow and particular view. Where those who start with a wonderful lie, with easy interaction and idyll, are the only ones—the only ones—who can know beauty. And there's nothing right about that, there's nothing fair in that, there's nothing democratic in that idea. It's terrible, and it's awful, and it's true.

We want her to grow up with the notion that true connection is possible. We want her to believe that people are whole, and capable of love. We want her to believe that the world is lovely. We want her to think that everyone spends their time playing in sand and

going to libraries and sitting under skylights. We want her to think that everyone rides bikes and skates on blades and eats sandwiches in boats. Then when she grows up and discovers that the world is mostly less-than-perfect, that the world is mostly pain, she will be one of the enchanted, she will be one of the illusions, she will be one who is awake. Instead of being happily asleep, bolstered by endless company of her like, she will be one who wanders, one who knows light in a land of darkness, one who knows when she's awake and when she dreams.

For it is like the coyotes that came into the bay where I once met you, who slink into our alley at night and slink back into their valley by the creek at sunrise. They are among us, we are among them, but the two do not cross over, the two are like a fish and a printing press, like our cat who hears us talking, and looks at us when we talk to her, but knows not what we say. We're right there, but disconnected, we're so close, but never touching. We love our cat, and our cat loves us; we live among the coyotes, and they live among us; but one will never be the other, one will never know the other's mind, one will never see how it looks to the other, one will never know what it means to the other. We will never know what we see when we look into each other's eyes.

The best policy in life is to forget, to forget the past, to have amnesia. The happiest people you'll ever meet are those who forgot the past. Because the past tries to make us do things, the past tries to maintain its relevance long past when its relevance fades.

The past is afraid to be forgotten, because if we forget the past, then maybe it didn't really matter. Why did we live it in the first place? I prefer to think it mattered then, but its relevance does fade. The time to care about the past is when you're still creating it. I have now, and yes, some years from now, pieces of now I've carried all that way will nag me, nag me to worry or nag me to smile, but even a memory is part of my present. A memory is not the past, but

copies of pieces of it taken with me, like a rock brought home from the shore. That rock isn't back on the ocean. It's sitting in my dresser drawer. And my memories of you are the same. My thoughts of you, of our parting moments, of you in your blue jumper waving back at me from the crowd, those aren't moments from the past, they're moments I'm living now, as I paint your jumper blue and whisk the wind in your hair and orchestrate our parting again and again in my mind.

Was your jumper really blue and was your hair tied with that yellow ribbon? Or was the ribbon tied around your wrist? I can't remember. But I know your ribbon was there? You might have given it to me already, as a bookmark that I curled around my finger on the pier. I might have wondered if that ribbon was all I would ever know of you from that day on, if when you never came back I would place your yellow ribbon on my desk by the window, and if I'd forget about you looking over the harbor in a storm, forget the boat that took you away, and later, when I turned off the lamp, I'd see your yellow ribbon on my desk and loop it around my finger once more. Then maybe I'd take your yellow ribbon to bed with me and smell you on it while I fell asleep, smell as much of you as I could find in that tiny cloth, know that every time I smelled you your scent was growing thin, that with every use, your ribbon would grow dim until there was no more of you in it, and it was frayed, and stale, and plain. Or maybe I would leave it on the desk and write stories of you, of what I remember. Maybe I'd forget your name. Not easily, not for years, but maybe someday after you'd left me I would go an hour without a single thought of you, before I caught myself and was shocked at what else could have entertained my mind enough to lose sight of our wonderful afternoon even for a single hour.

Could I ever lose you? Would you ever go away? From here that seems impossible, but time is so disheveled, surely there will be some year that comes when I've forgotten that I loved you. Surely there will be a day when I don't miss you. Surely this wasn't that

one afternoon in a hundred-thousand that I will always look back on. Will this be that one day I always miss? Will the need you hollowed out in me today be the deepest ...

And as I wake, from this dream of bicycles and boardwalks and oceans and ships, I know that from this point on, in my waking life, everything's going to be ok.

I can smell bananas. Bananas are always the first. Later we can smell apples, and always I can smell your hair. I smell it when I first wake up, and there's the smell of it when it's wet from the bathtub, but there's the smell of it when I first wake up, the smell of it dry after a night of sleep and the pillow and your freckles and the birds outside our window—somehow the smell of the bananas is filtered there for me.