

Islands on the water. Islands said everything was ready. Another handful of dry plaster. The plaster sifted through his fingers over the bucket. On the worktable lay some scraps of waste mold and a rasp. He clapped his hands together. He picked out the largest hunk of waste mold. With the rasp he grazed plaster dust into the bucket.

Daylight through the open door. Leaves in drifts and piles in the gravel and in the goldenrod. The poplars black and bare. There was no wind and no birds, just the scrape scrape of the rasp. And sky was nothing.

Behind him the plywood box and its bed of plaster. The sheet wrapped tight around her so only her head showed. Her head nested in the towel he used to dry her body. Her body dim shapes under the sheet, insect dreaming within its skin. He tossed the rasp back onto the worktable. He walked from the outbuilding. His breath gray feathers in the air. He did not feel cold.

From here he could see through the plastic sheet of the bungalow. Blankets tossed from the bed. The mattress exposed and white. The way she was after he'd pulled her from the tub, after he'd peeled her wet clothes. He had slipped an arm under her head. Had slipped his other arm under her knees. Pulled her up her head fell back limbs gone loose and gangly he dropped her on the edge of the tub fingers tapped his foot her leg slapped into the water. He gathered her knees. He slid his free arm beneath her back he pushed his hand through her opposite armpit. Even with a better grip she caught her arm on his leg she floundered from his grasp. He fell upon her wet fish thumped and spraddled on the floor.

He looked away from the bungalow. Poplars lead candelabras under the sky. No sound save the stutter of his breath the click of branches. He turned and slipped back into the outbuilding. Her clothing wet upon the worktable. He picked the green hornrims from the leather jacket. He slipped on the glasses. His reflection in the mirror. He batted his eyes and pouted his lips. He tried to smile the way she smiled. He turned toward the box. Her face had rolled away her throat exposed. Water had trickled from her mouth. Cantabricus, Caracas, Chanterelle. Fallen daffodil. He unwrapped her body. He pushed her left. He pulled her right. He worked the sheet from under her limp flesh. His knees wavered his back flared he rose and rubbed and shook the burn from his arms. She lay still in the box. Feet splayed, arms at her sides. The slack breasts and flattened nipples and hair between her thighs. Hers was the body marked by his use, and Time's. He balled the sheet and tossed the sheet onto the work table. Him as dumb hunter gazed on the body on the threshing floor. He leaned over the box he put the hornrims on her face.

He rose up and removed his workshirt. He kneeled his knees on either side of the bucket of plaster mix. He took hold of the lip in one hand he thrust a bare arm in the warm water. With

his arm he stirred the plaster.

He traded arms when his arms burned. Plaster dripped from his elbows. Plaster thickened to cream. He rose to his feet knees burned back ached arms coated past the elbows in divinity. He dragged the bucket to the box. He looked down on her pale throat bared flesh splayed feet he'd have to prop up her feet and her head and he'd. Shit. Her hair. He glanced around the studio.

On a shelf over the vatted sink among the rags and cotton swabs and a doll's head was a jar of vaseline. He picked up an old tee shirt and wiped his hands of plaster. He reached for the jar and pried off the rusty lid. Scooped out a translucent plum he kneeled beside the box. He reached inside to lift her head.

This will feel kind of weird, he said.

Her head bobbed as he rubbed the jelly into her hair. Her eyes closed mouth hung stunned pleasure. His fingers pale in her greasy black locks. Like when we washed each other's hair, he said. Do you remember? he said. Her head nodded beneath his caress.

He gazed down the length of her body. Hip bones thrust up beneath the skin. Round belly. Belly button. The hair black and curled between her thighs.

On his knees he stumped around the box. He hooked his armpits on the edge of the box. With one hand he rubbed the vaseline into her pussy. The flesh plump and rough with hair. She was moist there. With the other hand he rubbed her belly. The skin rippled under his hand skin want to cling to his hand skin cling to his skin. He rubbed the hair to slick. The hair curled about his glazed fingers. His fingers strayed inside the thick mute lips sparks darkness. She was warm there, inside her pussy there. Stars drifted in the obsidian his head. Still point of the turning world.

He pushed himself to his feet. He kicked off his hightops. Pulled open his levis. He kicked his feet, pushed the levis from his legs. Arms coated in plaster and vaseline he grabbed either side of the box the tub when they bathed together he stepped in, knees between her thighs. He lowered himself upon her. She gasped and her head rolled to the side. Her skin cool to the touch, warm beneath the skin. Her pussy slick and wiry a muddy nest beneath his cock. He took her head in his hands, turned her face to his. Silky lids draped over her eyes. Her hair glistened in the light. The full lips parted, tongue pale between her teeth. A smile at the corners of her mouth. He could find no seam where petal joined petal.

You're so beautiful, he breathed. He raised her head he kissed her. Reedstalks reeled among the stars. Monarchs clung to golden rod. Time past and time present what might have been and what has been. He reached between his legs he took hold of his cock. He rubbed he

cock against she pussy, just he head, just she pussy, Just once more, he said.

He pushed his cock inside her. All the way deep inside her. And the way her brow creased, and her eyes frowned. Undone by dreams. He pushed his cock inside her and he kissed her. Breath burst in he mouth, she body moved against he body, the wild thyme unseen and the wild strawberry, laughter from the fen. He rocked back and forth upon her, pushed his feet against the rough insides of the box, pushed deep inside her and her elbows knocked against the box her mouth trembled under his mouth her teeth against his teeth he tasted her tongue and the way her breath stank of flowers, he ground his hips against her, pulled on her shoulders, her face against his neck. Breath cool upon his neck. Goosebumps on the backs of his arms. Proserpina, Persephassa, Core He said, Tell me who I am, he said, You were supposed to tell me who I am, he said, Am I more or less than a man? Am I something in between? Do you know how you undid me, left me to scrape my heels muddy at the bottom of the fen, you left me in the fen, an animal dying to have you, animal need and want you, don't you know you did these things to me?

He wrapped an arm caked with plaster caked with divinity hugged beneath her waist, he pulled her up against him, her head fell back her ears red with passion she was dim mannikin and he said Core he said, My wife by theft, he said, I have stolen you and I won't give you back, though soil goes unturned, though seeds become spoilt and grasses die in the blade, he said, You should have been mine, he said, and her throat her collarbone her breasts shuddered Beneath the mud she was his wife she mistress to his empire of dirt, and he pulled her hard against his cock the way her face stiffened with desire Oh no he said, and What have I done? he said, and Nothing astounds the stars he said and her head bumped and rolled upon the bed and he collapsed upon her, in tears he lay upon her, into her cold damp ear he cried.