

*

(Grace was the name of the dog who ran through your yard that summer. Like a ghost, you said. Your eyes didn't look like medallions. Your eyes didn't even look like eyes. Parts of your dad's truck poked up out of the water, ogled at by gangs of children during low tide. I couldn't stand to think about anything that didn't concern metaphysics. Stacks of books on the radiator, even more books fanned out in the bed. Whether it was all a dream or not isn't something I spend too much time worrying about anymore. I mostly make paintings these days, and work fifteen hours a week at a smoothie bar.)

*

(Horses scattered as the enemy's tanks poured over the hill. Planes flashed silver and violet above the tree-silhouetted horizon. Boys on their bicycles made a break for the river, where they'd heard a fight might be happening that night. A song was playing, one that everybody recognized, but that nobody could remember the words to. A teenager in a car was waiting for it all to be over. Satellites diminished the aesthetic potential of the sky. I couldn't stop thinking about a book I'd read on the train. The book was *Giovanni's Room* by James Baldwin. It was the first book I'd read in fifty-nine years.)

*

(I stare out the window at the snow-carpeted landscape. You tell me that it's fake snow, put there by the government in order to distract us from their deliberate obliteration of any original thought and culture. The snow looks blue, so blue that if I were somehow capable enough, if I were only serious enough in both inclination and character, I could stick my hand into that snow and extract from it something that would solve everything for us, for our families, for our friends, for everybody, for the entire world. "But you're on the wrong side of the window," you offer perceptively.)

*

(Talking is no longer allowed. The universe turns gradually to stone. The President tries to appreciate his nation's avant-garde literature, but for some reason he can't. It wouldn't make sense for him to understand it, maybe. Or maybe his brain's just getting soft. A loud bang issues from somewhere outside. A triangle of blue light bobs on the wall. Music plays. Everywhere in the palace shadows begin to stretch, merge with each other, climb up the walls like bruise-coloured ivy. For a fleeting instant the President feels the same way he did as a child on Christmas morning, except in some way or other inverted. Seventy kilometres away, on the edge of a vast desert, a pile of metal accelerates down a runway and starts to fly.)

*

(Everybody faints when they see the law's true face. Everybody goes back to work. Everybody stands still as the floor starts to shake. Everybody puts their passport into the envelope being passed around the room. Everybody exits the vehicle and jogs unobserved into the surrounding trees. Everybody takes a deep breath through their masks. Everybody pauses momentarily to stare at the moon floating low and orange above the smog-warped hills. Everybody knows what everybody else is pretty much thinking. Everybody has had the same dream about the fire and the beach. Everybody steps into the clearing at the same time. Everybody speaks the same five words. Everybody disappears. Everybody reappears. Everybody goes home. Everybody is here.)

*

When she noticed the sun pressing warm against her neck she put down the journal she'd been writing in and reached into her knapsack and withdrew a wide-brimmed hat and placed it on her head. Glancing at her phone she saw that it was almost three p.m. The way the sun was positioned in the sky made the lake before her look like a porcelain plate wiped clean. She felt like if she wanted to, she could reach out and grab the entire universe up in her arms. Fifteen minutes later she took a ham sandwich out of her knapsack and bit into it. Maybe she should apply to film school, she thought only half jokingly. Above her head birds sang to each other without even knowing what they were doing was called "singing". The horizon in the distance looked like a seam, a seam joining sky and water, but also past and future, life and death, truth and untruth. She stared at it all, taking intermittent bites from her ham sandwich. Maybe she should move to Tokyo, she thought.