

After work, by the time we have taken off our suits,

the moon has risen. You bring binoculars and we sit – Matthew between us in shorts and tee shirt – at the wooden table in the yard. You adjust the lenses for him patiently but it's hard at three, he doesn't see what we see. Just the new black of sky without that hole to let the light in. Where is it, Mommy. Mommy, I want to be an astronaut.

In 1972, in Cambridge, when we first knew each other, you had a map of Vietnam in your room, tacked to the ceiling where it sloped under the gabled roof. It was a low ceiling, a big map, we could almost touch it from the bed. Once when you were gone I imagined walking my fingers across it, touching rice field, mountain, camellia, burning hut. Imagined you before we met, sleeping under this map in New York in a series of student apartments, while the war hung overhead like a thick, choking canopy of smoke and you breathed it in, juggling papers, exams, leaflets, meetings, marches, sit-ins. While I was in Ohio, working too in my own way but more sporadically, never let the horror soak me through, a dirty rain. That you let it. That for years you lived with a clutch in your throat of rage, helplessness, sometimes exhilaration, flashes of self-righteousness, manic humor, an abiding sorrow – and hung the banner of all that over the bed where we would one day lie. It was perhaps for that, and around that time, I began to love you.

Only let's face it, nostalgia is a heavy coat, it's our lives now I unbutton. In the closet, the pressed suits we shoulder early each morning, having to do not with some change of heart or mind – no, we see too clearly for that, even the worst nights our eyes are the last to blur – but with necessity or what we imagine as taking the form of this child, his shorts, the soft haze of his knees at evening, the long tuneless songs he is already inventing. That we would do anything, even this, to shelter those songs.

Even this. To shelter. *Mother I would an astronaut be/Astride the shining moon.* O not that, the bulky suit swathing the sleek, probing body, the tick and flash of instruments, the newscaster decked in questions, a sexual smile that lures us to the surface, the flag planted, the burning hut. No I will sing the moon. Cold crust, old pock-marked face. Which hangs overhead, which vanishes, which hangs overhead, lighting even now our bodies, their cool, stubborn fire.

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