The Picture Not Taken

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On the other side of a weedy, empty lot, not quite at the center of which a single For Sale sign leans at a precarious angle, sixteen houses of uniform, and extremely modest, height and width line up, separated by spaces about an eighth of the width of each. From the backs of these houses identically sized garages extend, with equally sized, but differently colored, garage doors. In front of most of the doors, an object or two—a tipped-over garbage pail, an extra garbage pail, an abandoned pink tricycle, a gaping white plastic grocery bag—announces that this house is different from the ones on either side of it. Not only the stark view of the houses across the empty lot, however, but the flatness of the landscape around them—meandering clusters of low industrial buildings of various colors (a telephone line repair company, a welding firm, a lumberyard), past which, under arrays of traffic lights, cars rush back and forth along two intersecting avenues—makes the sixteen houses seem exposed and forlorn. The hazy afternoon sun pours down on them without shadow and gives the view a feeling of largeness and sadness, as if the industrial surroundings might stretch on away from this small

zone of ordered domesticity forever.

Twice in my life have I seen these houses, and twice in my life have I failed to photograph them. The first time, passing through with my son Nicky on our way back to Evanston, I saw through the windshield that, with all of the cars rushing through on these major avenues, there would be no place to park. I had only an iPhone, and I could tell from the lineup of the houses that I would need a larger camera, probably with a perspective-control lens, to get the shot. The second time, a year or so later, I went back to that neighborhood in the Stockyards District on the South Side of Chicago specifically to photograph that scene. Unfortunately, I didn't remember its exact location (thinking of it only as a place that had about it the feeling that a good picture could be taken there), became delayed while looking for it, followed up on other views and situations that presented themselves first and that seemed to require immediate attention, and kept putting off my hunt for the spot until, quite suddenly, it was time to leave. Only then, as I was leaving (I had an appointment, again with Nicky, at the Driehaus Museum on the North Side), did I happen, by chance, to drive through the correct intersection from the year before and see the same sixteen houses lined up on the other side of the same weedy lot, the For Sale sign not quite in the middle of it, still stuck up at the same angle. The sun was not as hazy as the first time, and lower in the afternoon sky, so the sign cast a long shadow, and the houses shone with darkened edges that seemed to accentuate their fragility. But I was in need of a bathroom, again there was nowhere to park, and cars continued to hurtle in all directions. I knew I could turn back and park where I had a few minutes before and walk to this spot, but I had this appointment with my son, and I didn't want to be late. The light changed and I drove on.

And on and on. How many times have I left behind scenes like that without taking a photograph? And felt, every time, a sense of loss, though the only thing I had to lose—the image of what I hadn't photographed—was not lost, but remained in my mind, an unrealized possibility. But now this possibility was tinged with a kind of pain for not accomplishing something I had imagined, as if I had inadvertently hurt someone, or even failed to say something to someone before they died, though the thing not said is so often trivial. One is always leaving things behind, why dwell on

what hasn't happened when so much else has? It doesn't matter; it still feels hurtful, bad, sinful even, as if I had let somebody down. How could that be?

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Earlier that day, before I saw and failed to photograph the sixteen houses for the second time, I had visited a cousin, Peter Norton, who lives not far away, in the Kenwood District of Hyde Park. Peter and his wife, Lucy, had bought their house and begun fixing it up in the 1980s, and there they had raised their son and daughter, who were now in their twenties. Peter had been a stockbroker in Chicago—quite a successful one, according to my father—but one day had left his firm and, according to the story that had circulated in the family, taken up painting full time. He is a tall, quiet man, just six years older than I, with a smile that starts as a widening at the ends of his straight lips and then, while his lips are still closed, suddenly spreads, until his entire face gives in to the joy he has been trying to suppress. When I said, somewhat tentatively (because we had not seen each other since he was a teenager), that I had heard he was a painter, he corrected me. "I'm a dabbler," he said, and then, when I appeared reluctant to accept the implications, "like your grandmother," he added, and I gave a little nod to show that, yes, I understood what he was talking about. Indeed, I could not remember ever having seen my grandmother pick up a paintbrush or play her piano, yet she had a reputation as being both artistic and musical.

Peter had offered to take me on a drive around the South Side, to visit various family haunts that I had recently felt compelled to learn more about; and in preparation for this tour, and also for my own later wanderings with my camera, he unfolded for me, on his kitchen table, a large and very detailed street map of Chicago. "You can keep this if you want," he said as he spread it out. "I've had it for at least ten years and I haven't looked at it once. I doubt I'll have any reason to look at it again." With a black pen on the glossy surface of the map, he began marking with asterisks, and, where appropriate, the initials of their owners, places he planned to show me, not only so that I would know where we were going and could see the relation of the places to one another, but so that I could find my way back to them when I went out after our tour to photograph. "This general area here," he said, circling his pen over a

section of the map, "is where the stockyards were, and that"—he drew an oval around a waterway that started in the stockyards and jutted north to join the Chicago River—"is Bubbly Creek." Technically the West Fork of the South Branch of the Chicago River, he explained, this waterway had been infamous at the beginning of the twentieth century for the stench arising from its waters. "At the industry's height," I subsequently read in Dominic A. Pacyga's *Slaughterhouse*—a description that matches all too closely the image that formed in my mind from Peter's words—". . . the river became so encrusted that small animals would make their way across it walking on the solidified mass floating on its surface. Residents reported large bubbles resulting from decaying matter in the creek rising to the surface with diameters measured in feet! At times the South Branch would turn red with blood . . ." What I found myself looking at, though, at that moment as I stood over the map with Peter, was the section Peter had not drawn an oval around but only vaguely pointed out with the tip of his pen, the location of the former stockyards. Quite large in comparison, say, to the green space he had shown me earlier as Washington Park—where our mutual ancestor, he remarked, had ridden his horse—the Stockyards District existed on the map as a blank space with a few streets emptying into it. Some of the streets stopped well before they reached the center of this nothingness, and none of them seemed to connect in any way with each other, but ran off in different directions, missing each other entirely. The only comprehensible connecting element seemed to be the train tracks that came in from the west parallel to each other, diverged, spiraled out, and converged again as they headed east, like the blood vessels to and from a heart. The vagueness, the indefiniteness that surrounded these tracks, at the cloudy center of the open space, made me wonder what I would find there; and though I continued to watch my cousin put a final set of initials on the map, and listened as he explained that this was the house where my great-grandmother had grown up, my thoughts were already rushing far ahead to that open area and the time when I would be alone there with my camera.

Luckily my cousin, who had an appointment with a physical therapist later that morning for his knee, was as interested as I was in starting our tour. Calling Nellie, his yellow Labrador, and snapping on

her leash, he led the way out the back door toward the small brick garage at the rear of his yard. As we were about to enter the garage, and with Nellie straining at her leash, Peter lifted up a wrinkled tarp under a canopy in a corner of the garage and the brick wall behind it. Under the tarp was the unfinished hull of a wooden sailboat. Some years ago, Peter explained, ("an embarrassing number," he admitted) he had begun building a 15-foot wooden sailboat in which he had imagined he would someday be able to tack out onto Lake Michigan for afternoon sails. But he had lost his enthusiasm for the project when he realized, out of the blue one day, that the boat into which he had already sunk several years of labor was too large to remove from his yard without knocking down the brick wall at the back. Because of a network of electrical wires I could see zigzagging among some ancient-looking telephone poles above the wall, hoisting the boat over the wall would be impossible without cutting the wires and bringing a general loss of power and internet to the neighborhood. Yet the space between the side of Peter's house and his neighbor's was too narrow to squeeze the boat up through to the front. As he replaced the tarp over the half-finished boat, with its already-painted white boards and its lovely curving stem, my cousin said that now that his children had grown up and moved to places of their own, he and Lucy would like to move into downtown Chicago. But whether he would be able—or would even want—to sell his house with the still-unfinished boat in the yard, or would have to go to the nearly unaffordable expense of knocking down the wall, removing the boat, and rebuilding the wall, were questions, he said, that he hadn't been able to answer. Feeling a rush of sympathy for my cousin, whose problem of the boat seemed weirdly similar to the types of issues that always seem to be confronting me, I climbed into his Audi and watched with admiration as he zipped out of his garage into the narrow alley behind it without scratching any paint on his doors.

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Consider what happens when you take a picture—I mean, what is going on inside you, the photographer, when you take it. And here I am taking a liberty and assuming, for the sake of argument, that you are like me, or at least that we share the possibility of similar perceptions. Because a

photograph, when it is taken, represents a moment of intense and sudden love and insight for something visible in the world—for the world itself, or for life, or for one's own self; a moment of connection that momentarily dissolves the barriers between the photographer and the things around him, outside him. At best the resulting image, seen by others, is never more than a poor approximation of what the photographer saw and felt when releasing the shutter, but even a half-failed representation of that moment of crossing over, of non-self, is a reminder of the huge life of the world that is not him, and he feels the love for the thing photographed, perhaps, that a novelist feels for his characters. Conversely, by not making the photograph, by standing around politely, or driving off while the special conditions that had brought about the photographic possibility pass, the photographer cheats himself of an opportunity to make that complex connection and express, however imperfectly, his better self. That what has robbed him is his own negligence in not bringing his camera along, or his consideration for the patience of his family, or his desire to be polite with strangers, is as frustrating as his own self-consciousness, which also gets in the way. One is so often caught up in thoughts that lead nowhere, worries about what other people might be thinking, fear of offending or the desire to please (or to hide), that you forget to take your camera out, or to bring it along, or even that you have it, and then the picture is there in front of you and you are not able to take it.

Some photographers are more willing to impose their obsessiveness on those around them than others, and more often than not, these kinds of photographers will take a picture of some sort. These are the photographers never to be seen out of multi-pocketed photography vests, their Canon L lenses poking squarely from the middles of their stomachs during press conferences, black-tie dinners, children's ballet performances, and evening walks with their families. And for all of us, as I think Irving Penn said, putting yourself in the right place at the right time does tend to lead to the right shot more often than not. Some photographers, of course, go to great lengths to create the right circumstances artificially, building sets, dressing others or themselves in costumes, combining strobe lights with natural light, and approaching the making of a photograph the way filmmakers approach a movie. But even for these theater-director types, and for those never

to be seen out of combat fatigues with a pair of Nikons dangling from their shoulders, the picture sometimes does not get taken.

How could this not be the case? Consider the thoughts you have in the shower. Warm water starts streaming down your neck and over your shoulders, the imagination opens up, thoughts run freely, and ideas come that just moments before, in the cold world outside the shower, had stayed away. Now the possibilities for what you can do, when you do get out of the shower, seem limitless. The words for the essay you were writing that have been eluding you begin forming themselves in perfect sentences in your brain, the way to organize a group of photographs that has been frustrating you suddenly becomes clear, answers to problems in your marriage pop up one by one, and what you should have said to the person at the party last night, if only you had been able to think more quickly, falls off your lips in a witty whisper. All of these thoughts teem and buzz around in your head in the shower, but as soon as you turn off the water and begin drying yourself off, they recede back into your unconscious like a hermit crab back into its shell. If you are lucky maybe a tiny pincer will remain for you to grab onto and try to pull back into range. So much inspiration in the shower, so much lost when you get out, yet the feeling remains that if only you could get back in, say for a minute or two during the course of a day, true and wise expression would be yours. And just as no writer can escape this knowledge of how much more he could express himself if he could keep himself in that state of mind of the shower, no photographer is free from the knowledge of how much he misses during the normal course of a day. Often he doesn't see what he wants, how blind he is to what is there, but then, when he is away from there, and remembering it, then he sees it—but it is too late.

Some photographers, of course, make a religion of the missed shot. They know that there are always more to be taken, and they choose to celebrate the multifariousness of the possibilities. These are the logical, happy photographers who take one picture of a subject and move on, knowing that there will be another subject waiting for them somewhere else. Other photographers take a more anxious approach. They know that certain situations will never return, recognize that nothing ever stays the same, and, unwilling or unable to accept the inevitability of

loss, they try their best to capture a moment, just as it appears, to the best of their abilities. These are the photographers who take many shots of the same subject, who are constantly circling around looking for the best angle; the ones who never feel that an angle, once found, is necessarily the best, but that there might be a slightly better one just a step or two this way or that; who are even willing to return to the first angle and renegotiate it, so that sometimes it seems as if they are caught in an endless loop. Just as the danger for the happy-go-lucky photographer is too great a detachment from the things that he sees, so the danger for the anxious photographer is an enslavement to the particular, an inability to let go of the things in front of him. The happy-go-lucky photographer sails across the surface, enjoying what he wants to see and ignoring what he doesn't. The anxious photographer dives down deep. He sees less, but what he does see he sees from all sides. Yet he remains in constant danger of drowning.

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I was there on the South Side of Chicago that day, visiting Peter and looking at a section of the city I had visited, briefly, only once before (when I had passed through with Nicky that first time), partly to see if I might be able to take a good picture there, but mainly because of my grandmother's piano. In the last decade of her life my grandmother had made a point of saying, whenever we would visit her in Farmington, that she was thinking of leaving us her piano, because my family was so musical. We would be sitting on the fat striped cushions of the wicker chairs on her veranda, looking down the lawn toward the stone wall with its cement eagle and geraniums in two pots, or on the Adirondack chairs by her tennis court—or, later, on the white couches in her apartment at the senior living facility in Bloomfield. Somewhere nearby—at the end of the living room, if at Farmington, or just a few steps away, across the wall-to-wall carpeting, if in Bloomfield—sat the piano itself, a small, precisely curved Steinway grand, the golden stripes of whose tiger maple cabinet gleamed in the dimness of whatever room it happened to be in. "You know it's in very good condition, I've had it rebuilt," my grandmother would add, almost defensively, as if concerned that we might be thinking of the expense of rebuilding a

piano after she died, and reject her offer. This slightly negative note was our signal to express enthusiasm for her proposal and to ask her about her grandparents, who, she had often told us, had bought the piano around 1893, when they moved into their new house at 4923 South Greenwood Avenue on the South Side of Chicago. Her grandmother, my grandmother said, was born in England and loved music, and it was she who had played the piano. She liked to bring people over or go to their houses for musicals; and that was her very portrait, if we wanted to go look at it, hanging over the piano in there.

Dutifully we (my wife Katherine, the children at various times as they grew up, and I) would go and examine the portrait of the nineteenth-century lady in blue in the gilt frame, whose hair, if you looked closely, was cut short like a young man's, that hung on the wall above the piano, and the formal photograph beside it of the white-bearded gentleman, who was her husband, and then Katherine would sit down at the piano and play a bit, because she was really the musical one, had played the piano all of her life and came from a musical family; and though my children, too, because of her, played instruments, and became, over time, proficient with them, and even began to play them professionally, it was Katherine, whom my grandmother quite liked, who had brought music into the larger family, a family that did not, in fact—except for my grandmother—generally play instruments or even evince much of a capacity for holding a tune. After we had examined the portrait, and Katherine had finished playing—or perhaps while she was still playing, because she had heard the stories before—my grandmother would speak of her grandfather, the white-bearded gentleman in the photograph, whom she had adored, she said, and admired, and whose habit it had been to ride his horse in the park every morning before breakfast. "Just for exercise," she explained, and the way she said it, with an almost enforced lightness, as if to imply that exercise was not something to take seriously, was not meant, we knew, as a criticism of her grandfather, but rather as a comment on contemporary ideas of exercise, so that now men her grandfather's age would allow themselves to be seen, as she liked to point out from the car, jogging along sidewalks with their shirts off and stomachs exposed. Which park? we would ask. How long did he go out riding for? Oh, my grandmother

said, it was just a little ride before breakfast. She didn't recall the name of the park, but she remembered that after leaving the park he would ride up Grand Avenue. Birds clucked and chirped in the white pines overhead as she spoke, there was the thwock of the ball on the tennis court, the pong of the ball off the racket strings. From the sleeve of her blouse my grandmother drew a ball of tissue, wiped her nose, and with a quick dip of her hand tucked the tissue back in to its hiding place at her wrist. Grand Avenue meant nothing to us. We pictured the old gentleman in the photograph on the wall above the piano, in his dark suit, with his straight back and well-trimmed white beard, in an anonymous park in an anonymous city, cantering up an allée of horse chestnuts with dignity and skill.

He had been, I knew, this great-grandfather, for forty years the treasurer of Swift & Company, the Chicago meatpacking firm whose unclean handling of food, dangerous working conditions, and general disregard for its workers in the headlong pursuit of profits had been made infamous in Upton Sinclair's muckraking novel *The Jungle*. Although the disparity between Sinclair's view of the meatpacking companies, which I had learned in school, and the view of my grandmother's grandfather as it had come down to me through the family, had not troubled me overmuch growing up, as I grew older I began to see how it connected to other, more complicated rifts in my life, not the least of which was my own peculiar relationship to the American economy, so out of keeping with that of my contemporaries and friends (and then another event intervened that, in its way, seemed to call everything into question). For my grandmother, however, as she looked back on her grandfather from the perspective of the tennis court in Farmington, the old gentleman must have represented a rather concrete embodiment of the American Dream. A child of Irish immigrants, as the family history had it, who had been shipwrecked off Montauk Point on Long Island in 1852 and moved to Ottawa, Illinois, he had grown up on a farm and remembered being taken by his father as a twelve-year-old to watch one of the Lincoln-Douglas debates in 1858. In 1862, at the age of sixteen (in the middle of the Civil War), he had left his family's farm and moved to Chicago. Little was mentioned about his early life in Chicago beyond the general observation that

during his first years he had "slept on pool tables." What was known was that he had gone into banking and quickly made a name for himself in that field. His reputation was solidified when, in 1871, apparently at least partially due to his own efforts, his firm's assets remained largely unharmed by the Great Chicago Fire, and the firm was able to prosper afterwards helping other businesses refinance. He opened a "commercial paper house" under his own name in 1882 and six years later, in 1894, joined Swift & Company. According to his obituary in the *Chicago Tribune*, he was a "confidant of Gustavus F. Swift." The obituary also mentioned that he "was known as a skilled horseman up to the time of his fatal illness and was often seen riding his favorite mount on the south side [*sic*]." When he died in 1933, at the height of the Great Depression, he left each of his sons $500,000 and my grandmother $20,000. Although it was not until a year or so before my tour with Peter around the South Side that, during an email exchange with my father, I developed a more precise understanding of the cast of mind that might have helped our ancestor maintain a position of such extraordinary power in Chicago, if not in the United States, I had the feeling as early as middle school that having an ancestor who was a director at Swift & Co. was not a piece of information that, in Brooklyn Heights in the 1960s, I would share with friends. On those afternoons in Farmington, glad that my children could spend time with their great-grandmother, I allowed the more mundane and, for me, complicated facts about her grandfather to sit in a hazy cloud at the back of my mind. But my grandmother's constant mentioning of the piano, and how she was thinking of leaving it to us, kept bringing the indistinct feelings closer to the surface, especially as I knew that the "offer" included not just the tiger maple Steinway but the portraits, apparently always meant to hang beside it, of the old man with the carefully trimmed beard and the nineteenth-century lady in blue. And in fact when, not too many years later, after several interim steps, the piano did in fact make its way to my house in Upstate New York and, along with it, the two pictures, I felt as if, in a way, this couple had moved in and begun demanding some kind of acknowledgement. That it took the death of my grandmother for them to come forward in this way was one of those minute shifts in the kaleidoscopic relationships of the dead and

the living that can end up changing one's entire world view. There they hung, and there they hang, and beneath them the piano now sits—a combination that was never there before. But perhaps nothing more would have come of it, even then, if one of my musical sons had not happened to move to Evanston, on the North Side of Chicago, in 2011 to join the cello program in the music school at Northwestern University, and we had not begun to visit and revisit Chicago on a regular basis, forcing me to reconnect, however tangentially and gingerly, with some of the complicated sources of our family's pride.

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You are out somewhere—on a road somewhere—and you look off somewhere and see how the sun comes down through the buildings, or down through the trees, and in that instant you see, even as your eyes are already turning back to the road, how, if you were to turn off and go over there, get up close to or even inside the light, you would certainly take a good picture or even many good ones; but for one reason or another—you are on your way to see somebody who is expecting you at a certain time, or you are not alone in the car and the others in the car need to be somewhere or suddenly want to be somewhere very badly, and you do not feel that you are free to impose this idea of the light on them—you do not turn off toward that glimpsed situation, do not honor your knowledge of something that you know would make a good picture: but even so you are struck, as you drive away in silence from the turning-off point, by a feeling not of remorse but of surprise and even pleasure to be reminded of the independent way the sun works in the world, striking down into trees and houses without you. It is as if for that moment a hole is cut in your egoism and you can peer through at a much larger reality on the other side, a reality that you don't normally notice or acknowledge while picking your way through traffic and talking to your companions in the car, and you are reminded that this much larger reality, which you have seen through to as if through a hole in a curtain or the lens of a camera, in which the sun is always at work whether you are there to see it or not, and where trees bend in the wind, and people go about their business in small towns in Northern California, and butterflies flutter like so much flotsam and jetsam along

roadsides in Arkansas, and loose gutters creak on the sides of houses, and mists come up in changes of temperature, and people die and people are born, and acorns fall from trees and squirrels eat them, and lizards in deserts scuttle over rocks; it is always there not waiting for you, not acknowledging you (it is so much bigger than you) but ready at any time for you to notice and acknowledge it, and even, sometimes, when you least expect it, usually when you are alone and discover that you are free to do so, enter into it for a little while with a camera. But this other reality, you realize, as you continue driving away from it, is not like some platonic ideal that exists apart from you, but rather is the very mess of things of which you are also a part, only a much larger and infinitely more complex—one might even say rich—mess than you normally can apprehend. It is so many things all jammed together—the shadows that lurk in the woods by the roadside, memories evoked by houses and shops, shopping centers, Ford dealerships, off-the-wall vine-covered antiques stores, corn cribs, silos, a disintegrating barn advertising a tuxedo rental business carried on thirty years ago, suddenly familiar things you pass that connect to people who are gone or to places you can no longer call home: and that is one reason, you think, as you drive still further from the picture you did not take, that the relinquishment of the picture is often so painful, because to have taken it, and to have entered that light, would have been to connect to a reality in which what you have lost still exists, and not to have taken it, not to have made the effort to turn off in that direction, is to let go of the possibility of connecting to whatever it is you no longer have and normally don't have access to. There is a danger in that, too, of course—of giving yourself over to the long rays of the no longer living—and that is where, in another way, photography comes to the rescue, because it interposes an illusion of focusing, a requirement of holding still, and a hope of capturing something living and visible for others to see and hold, like a bird one has pulled down from the sky.

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After we had turned from the alley into the street, my cousin said he would take me first to the house of Jonathan and Edith Norton, the house my grandmother had recalled visiting, the house of the piano,

which was just a block away from his own in Kenwood, and which seemed, when we got there a few moments later, almost modest in its long narrowness, as if it had been slipped into the crack between the two wider houses on either side of it. I noted the tall maple in the front yard and a porch that faced the street but remained back from it, shadowed, guarded—a place from which, on a summer's evening, it would be possible to see but not be seen. A paved driveway led back to the brick carriage house where my grandmother's grandfather had kept his horse, later his car and horse. A tile roof, crenellations along the eaves of house and porch, painted patterns on the porch posts, and an enormous copper gutter trough suggested, despite the narrowness of the house, a whimsical but tasteful luxury. Everything looked freshly painted and well cared for; the current owners evidently prided themselves in keeping the house in good condition—and could afford it. Because we did not know those owners and had not contacted them in advance, we did not venture too close to the house or try to penetrate along the driveway. Some years before, Peter said, his uncle, my great-uncle, Robert Norton—my grandmother's brother—had contacted the owners and arranged a tour, and, Peter said, the house had been as well cared for on the inside as it was on the outside. There was a story Uncle Bob had told then, he went on, of how one night the family was at dinner and a burglar had climbed up to the roof of the porch, entered an unlocked upper-story window, rifled around with everything, made a terrible mess, and fled with $1,000, leaving the window open. You can see, Peter said, pointing first at the porch railing, then at the porch roof, and then at the window, how easily he could have climbed up there while the family was having their supper. We smiled at each other over this almost comical idea of the family eating dinner downstairs, unaware that something terribly wrong was going on above. This reminded me, however, of another, not-so-comical story about the Norton family, which my grandmother had told us, and I asked Peter if it wasn't Jonathan's son who had died when the grandstands collapsed. Losing his smile as we turned back to the car, Peter said that it was. Jonathan and Edith Norton, I remembered, climbing in beside Nellie, had had three sons, of whom my great-grandfather, Alfred—my grandmother's father—born in 1884, had been the oldest. Jonathan, the middle child,

the father's namesake, had been born a year later, in 1885, and Frederic, the youngest, in 1888. On Saturday, November 1, 1902, Frederic, then fourteen, had gone with some friends to the Michigan-Wisconsin football game at the University of Chicago's Marshall Field (later renamed Stagg Field). It was an important game on the college circuit and expected to be a big one—upwards of 20,000 tickets had been sold in advance for a stadium whose normal capacity was 8,000—and in preparation for such a crush of people the University of Wisconsin had shipped a circus grandstand to Chicago to accommodate some of the extra viewers. Erection of the grandstand was not complete when Frederic and a couple of friends, Chapin Palmer and Lloyd Canby—avid Michigan fans—climbed a ladder at the back of the stands to reach the topmost seats, which consisted, later testimony revealed, of 2" x 6" planks. Wave after wave of people crowded on to the flimsy stands from below, even after the police and building department officials tried to turn them away. Soon after the game started, the stands collapsed. Frederic was among 40 or so injured, and one of three taken to Chicago Hospital. He received surgery on Sunday for internal injuries but the surgery was unsuccessful. On Monday night he became delirious and on Tuesday morning he died. In recent years, for reasons of my own, the memory of this story, the thought of the loss that the horseman from my grandmother's story had carried with him as he cantered through the South Side, had seemed to bring the elderly industrialist in the black-and-white photo closer to me. I seemed to see a sadness in his eyes, and I thought I understood it.

Further south on South Greenwood, a couple of cement barricades blocked our way, and, as we turned to take a detour around them, Peter pointed out the barely visible facade of another, much grander brick house behind a set of wooden police barriers, "That's Barack and Michelle Obama's house. Not that the Obamas live there any more. You can tell because there's no longer any secret service or even cops around." In fact, not a living soul was to be seen on the street behind the barricades or near the house, which was itself difficult to make out, both from our angle of view as we turned off South Greenwood to pass around it along South Woodlawn, and, owing to the tall trees, from the back when we passed behind it along East Hyde Park Boulevard,

heading towards the park. It made me happy to think of the future president and his wife once living just there, down the street from my ancestor's house, and close by my cousin's. As we entered the park drive, Peter pointed out some of the buildings of the University of Chicago in the distance, and began asking, politely, about my own immediate family, particularly Nicky, the cellist, who had by now graduated from Northwestern and was working for the Chicago Civic Orchestra, whom Peter had met several times at larger family events, and then about my two other children, and what they were doing now. It was certainly not the first time somebody had asked me such a question, and I knew that in his position I might have asked the same thing, but I still felt awful as I told him, or reminded him, I wasn't sure which, that our oldest child, our daughter, had died almost eight years before in a skiing accident in New Zealand. You can see people's minds flashing on this information. I was pretty sure that Peter probably already knew it, had heard it from his mother or sisters or someone else at the time the accident occurred, but by this point, seven, nearly eight years later, with so many more immediate concerns pressing at him, not only his own mortality but that of his mother and the concerns of his wife and children, not to mention the imprisoned sailboat, had forgotten all about it, as people will, as people do. And if only to fill the silence of what I imagined to be his embarrassment at this lapse of memory, which I perfectly understood, I began, as I always do, to fill in a little, explain what had happened. Rachel had spent the spring semester of 2010 in New Zealand as part of a year abroad from Columbia College and, in early June, had made up her mind to go skiing, because you can't do that, ski in the summer, at home. She had gone to Mt. Hutt, near Christchurch, with some friends, had spent the day there, and on the last run had gone off-piste with one of the friends, slipped on some ice, fallen, slid down, and hit her head on a rock; and because she was not wearing a helmet had permanently damaged her brain stem and, five days later, in the intensive care unit at Christchurch Hospital, had died. I probably didn't go into even this much detail with my cousin, just confined it to as bare and cold an outline as I could, because by this point, very often, people who don't know the story have tears running down their cheeks, and people who realize they did know

the story but had let it slip from their minds look at you with a mournful look—"that look"—Katherine calls it—and make an excuse or apologize for their mistake or pretend they hadn't known, and it is uncomfortable for everyone.

My cousin, however, chose perhaps the most dignified and restrained response, a response that I understood, and appreciated, as one that I might have given, which was not to try to respond to what I had told him at all—not to deny hearing what he had heard and, probably, feeling what he had felt, and what he must have known I would know he would feel—especially after our mutual acknowledgment of what had happened to Frederic Norton—but not to try to say something that, for all he knew, might only make matters worse or even require me to divulge more particulars of the case. Reverting to his role as tour guide (we were passing now through Washington Park, where our ancestor had ridden his horse), and pointing across a brown expanse of grass toward a long, narrow body of water with a wooded stretch in the middle, "I used to walk my dog on that island over there," he said. "I saw birds I've never seen anywhere else, birds for the life list. It was wonderful. The trouble is I saw some other things I've also never seen anywhere else, and I had to stop going. I don't walk my dog there anymore." Immediately I began to think about Pelham Bay Park, in the Bronx, and some of the things a friend of mine had described seeing when he went to core some oaks there, but the switch was too much, I was back on my daughter, wanting to say more to this person who was a family member and a stranger at the same time. I had so much more to say, it seemed, and I still felt so awful, and personally responsible, because she was not wearing a helmet; and at the same time I wanted a natural, easy way to smooth out the awkwardness and move back into more comfortable territory without at the same time betraying my daughter. And so, as if not to let go of what we had been talking about a moment before, but to expand upon it, move it in a "positive" direction, "and then our other son, our youngest," I said—and I began, with what I hoped was some modesty, though all the time feeling also that I was not really compensating for inflicting on my cousin a different kind of discomfort, listing the quite extraordinary accomplishments of my younger son, which allowed him

to hold his own against his also equally accomplished older brother. Why was I so dependent on my sons' accomplishments? As if their accomplishments could make up for the loss they had sustained, or, if listed, could convince another that they could. My cousin, however, whose reticence struck me, just then, as the highest form of courtesy, drove and listened without saying much, maybe a comment or two about musical talent and practicing—the sorts of things people say—the sorts of things I say—and expressing some interest when I described a knee injury my son had sustained while wrestling, because Peter was suffering from a knee problem. But mainly he was focused on the places he wanted to show me, and I wanted to focus on them as well, and so we exited the park and he pointed out that the very wide street on which we were now driving north, which had grassy islands with trees in the middle, and was called Martin Luther King Jr. Drive, had originally been Grand Avenue, and it had been up this street, after exiting the park, that Jonathan Norton had ridden his horse. That this route would take the Swift & Co. treasurer in the direction of the Union Stockyards, and hence toward his place of work, was apparently not a detail that my grandmother had retained when she described her grandfather's rides to us. She had never said anything about his life at the office, I realized, and it occurred to me that, despite all of her visits to her grandparents' house on South Greenwood Avenue, she may never have visited the stockyards.

* * *

In Max Frisch's experimental novel *Gantenbein*, originally published as *A Wilderness of Mirrors* in 1964, a narrator—one of several personalities in the book—remembers, in later life, a murder he did not commit. "I know it's ridiculous," he says. "Not to be able to forget an act one never performed is ridiculous." But it stays with him, will not let him go. Many years before, as a soldier in the Swiss army at the beginning of World War II, he had found himself alone at the top of a mountain with a German climber. After much of the sort of conversation two lone hikers have with each other on top of a mountain, the German, about to climb down again, remarks, as if casually, that all the land surrounding them will one day belong to the

German Reich. This causes the narrator, at first, in an odd way, to notice everything around him and describe it: "what I saw: rock, blackish, in places also reddish, snow in the midday light and scree, slopes covered in gray scree, then meadows, treeless, stony, streams glittering in the sun, pastures, cattle that looked in the distance like tiny grubs, a valley with a wood and cloud shadows; close by, the black choughs. It was only after a while," the narrator continues, "after he [the German] had put away his Leica and finally disappeared round a rock with a cordial wave and wishing me a good time in the army, that I felt angry at not having told him to shut his trap . . . The more I forbade myself to get indignant about what he had said, the more wildly indignant I now became." He falls asleep in the shelter of a rock and wakes up believing that he has pushed the German over the rocks into the valley below. He hasn't done so of course—the German is long gone—but the imagined act, and all of the details and consequences that never occurred, haunts the narrator for the rest of the afternoon as he hikes down and tries to locate where the German might have fallen and considers how he, the narrator, could, later that evening, have slipped back into his regiment without anyone ever knowing that he had committed a murder. And—for some reason, perhaps because of a sense that he had been a coward, and not performing it was not to have done the decisive thing—he remembers the non-murder for the rest of his life; it comes to define, in a way, who he is; not having killed a man becomes as serious for him, almost, as if he had, and part of him becomes frozen in that moment, seeing over and over what he should have done or said long after the circumstances for doing or saying it are finished.

* * *

For many years I liked being alone. The sense of wholeness, focus, freedom to follow an idea to its conclusion, calmness, and at the same time mental intensity, were greater for me when I was not trying to be something for someone else, and I was always seeking out situations (getting up earlier than everyone else in the family, going off to the library or to a rented office—or, if in the country, to an empty outbuilding; staying at home when my family went away, or going off by myself while my family stayed home; driving off to writers' retreats or

empty country houses, or on photographic road trips) when I could be alone to work. It was a lonely impulse and full of ordinary sadness, unproductive daydreaming, sexual fantasizing, and guilt over the hurt feelings of loved ones who, no matter how clear one might be that solitude was simply an annoying condition of the way one worked, felt—or I felt they felt—rejected. But it was in fact a condition of the way I worked, and for the distractions that sometimes beset me there was nobody to blame but myself; if they sometimes took their toll on my productivity—occasionally to a shameful extreme—the cost was my responsibility alone. But when my daughter had her accident, something changed. I remember saying to my friend Matthew in the taxi to Newark Airport (he came with me "so that I would not be alone" before the first leg of my flight to New Zealand, as I was going ahead of my wife and sons) that I didn't think I would ever be able to go off by myself to work in the same way again, because before I had always felt confident that my family would be okay in my absence, but now I could no longer trust that assumption, and would always worry about them, and underneath everything would be, I could already feel, this sense of weakness that I would not be there if they needed me.

Matthew responded with his usual understanding, reminding me, from his knowledge of his own father, who had been a novelist, that such a feeling of weakness was not unusual in artists, who so often must trade a sense of security for time to work, but what I did not know in the cab that rainy June afternoon, as water beaded and slurred on the side windows as we passed the Vince Lombardi Service Area and the oil tanks and groaning marshlands of Bayonne, was that in the future I would always worry, sometimes to a debilitating degree, about my wife and sons when I was away from them—as I did then, picturing them back in our apartment packing for this terrible trip to New Zealand—but I would also, with equal intensity, find myself thinking of my daughter and of things we had done and not done together when she was alive, and how, if only I had been with her that afternoon on Mt. Hutt, I would have made sure that she wore a helmet, and would have figured a way to swoop down, interrupt her slide, and prevent her from hitting the rocks. It is as if you keep a part of your children with you always; as if to your own experience inevitably accrues those of your

children, so that you are with them in some way even when you are alone. I remember thinking, that same evening, as the plane crossed over an enormous brown emptiness of red buttes and canyons, and the brown and green intricacies of mountains thrust up beneath the plane like sandcastles, that a part of my own landscape had been cut away. I had brought with me, as one of the only things I thought could be adequate, a blank Moleskin notebook and some pencils, and in this notebook I tried to describe, as the plane droned on, "this huge continent in my brain suddenly gone dark. A land mass," I wrote, "that slides into and defines every other land mass and what lies between. And everyone around me feels the same way. You would think that we could bond over these similar emotions, and on a level we do, but each is still always left with the land mass gone dark in his own brain." Another friend, Chris, who lost his first child, Martha, barely a week after her birth because of complications that could not be addressed by a rural hospital in Turkey where his wife, Claire, had delivered the baby prematurely, told me, after we got back from New Zealand and he took me out for a beer, that, although twenty years had passed since they had lost Martha, she, and the circumstances of her death, still came back to him at moments when he was alone, especially, for some reason, when he was in the shower, and the stab of grief in those moments was as intense as it was unexpected, as if a bomb had suddenly gone off outside his window in the middle of an otherwise peaceful afternoon.

* * *

Then there is Robert Frost. As if anything in Frost, when looked at closely, can be considered clear. With his simple diction and rhyme he sows confusion. It sounds so logical: one traveler, two roads, can't travel both, chooses one, and that has made the difference. Then you begin thinking. What difference? Is he happier? Richer? More fulfilled? Then why is he looking so longingly back down that other road? At first he had perceived it as a more popular road, because more people had worn down its grass, and who wants to take the popular, conventional route? But then he looks more closely into the matter, with the benefit of hindsight, and sees that "as for that the passing there/ had worn them really about the same." I don't know if high school seniors, and even

middle school students, still quote such lines on their yearbook pages, but it strikes me that all those of my generation and earlier who swallowed the pill of the road less traveled must now be, as Mr. Grimwig says in *Oliver Twist*, eating their heads. This is a poem about regret, about a man who, even as, like the ancient mariner outside the wedding feast, he endlessly repeats his irritating homily about the road less traveled, is actually thinking about the road, perhaps more traveled, that he didn't take. It is after that road that he names his poem. Here is the truth: way really has led to way, he can't go back, and now, as he tells us with a self-pitying sigh, it is too late.

* * *

Altogether I was out with my cousin for about an hour and a half, after which we returned to his house where, after using the bathroom and saying goodbye, I reluctantly left him, sitting on the arm of a sofa with Nellie on the floor beside him. It seemed that there was so much more we could have discussed—the story of a family from a different member's point of view being, in most cases, an entirely different story—and in those last few moments, as he brought me up to speed on his mother's health, the confessional urge that had come over me earlier in the day came back. But reticence is a norm whose strictures always seem like a blessing in the moment they are called into play, even if later they feel like a curse, and we managed the formalities of leave-taking with efficiency and mutual respect. Contributing to the efficiency, on my part, was an excitement that soon I would be free to take pictures. As promised, Peter had given me his detailed street map, and as I set out to retrace our steps, but taking pictures this time, the route I followed, although almost identical to the one we had taken before, seemed different, both because I was seeing everything for the second time—now as a potential picture—and also because my destination was no longer my cousin's house, but that blank area that had once been the stockyards. And although I was already ruing somewhat the many questions I had not thought to ask my older cousin, such as how long his tenure had been in the neighborhood, and why and when he had moved there, increasingly the rhythms of photography—stopping the car, picking up the camera from the floor, getting out, pressing the

button on the car key to lock the doors with a reassuring honk, walking away, walking this way and that, looking, thinking, looking some more, so that anybody watching me would be uncertain as to what the person was up to, now making some decisive moves, now going back to the tentative and provisional—brought me into that state of mental and visual stimulation that only photography can create, and the idea of the places beyond where my cousin had taken me drew me with increasing force. I lingered for a while, though, in Washington Park, looking out through some mulberries, across an open expanse of grass where packs of geese wandered, toward the fiery buildings of the University of Chicago, and visited some oaks and more mulberries in a tree-filled section that I later found out was called the Arboretum, trying to picture Jonathan Norton cantering through on his morning routine.

In this way I came, before reaching the stockyards, to the red-brick house on South Michigan Avenue where Robert and Mary Badgley Dodd, my grandmother's other grandparents, had lived, and where their daughter, Mildred, my great-grandmother, had grown up. I was struck, as I looked for a second time at the red-brick Victorian towering almost by itself on the west side of the broad and empty street, by its air of expressing, in what I could only think of as its shabbiness, the passage of time more authentically than had the Nortons' house two miles south, whose pristine condition—so well-maintained by its current owners—seemed to nullify temporal distinctions. As I walked around the front of this one, I noticed how the house took on different appearances from different angles, at one moment seeming to be the huge dilapidated South Side townhouse my cousin had showed me little more than an hour before, then a well-kept Victorian mansion that could have been built on the Main Street of any small American town. (The Norman Rockwell picture of a lady seated in a skirt and straw hat on a sidewalk, weeding a bed of flowers in front of a fence not unlike the one I was looking at now, came to mind.) The large red house stood in solitude, one of only two such mansions surviving along the block. A vacant lot on the north side had become a parking lot. Hanging from a small flagpole attached to the front gate were the red, black, and green stripes of the Pan-African flag. The front door was reinforced steel with three locks and a wire grill over the window. A sign atop a pair of wooden

posts named it the:

Radcliffe W.
Hunter House
of
St. Thomas
Episcopal Church

Earlier, Peter had told me that he had visited this house, too, with Uncle Bob, and that, aside from acting as the parish house for a nearby church, it was also a community center, with a dance studio, an art gallery, an after-school program, and an artist residency program. This part of the South Side, Peter explained, was known as Bronzeville, and had been a center of African-American life, not only in Chicago, but in the United States, for more than a hundred years. St. Thomas's Episcopal Church, he said, had been founded in 1878 as an African-American church, and still called itself, according to its web site, "the Mother Church of African-American Episcopalians in the diocese of Chicago." The parish had built a church just a block west of here, on South Wabash Avenue, in 1910. That same year, I found out later, is thought by some to be the beginning of what came to be called the Great Migration, a spontaneous movement, undertaken without publicity and even in secrecy, that drew hundreds of thousands of African Americans over several generations from the rural south to cities in the north. In Chicago, blacks settled largely on the South and West Sides, and State Street, two blocks west of the red Victorian, and one block west of the church, was a central thoroughfare of what became known to some as the "Black Belt." When Robert Dodd died in 1913, Mary, his wife, I learned, moved to a hotel on the North Side to be near her son Bradford, and lived there until her own death in 1922, thus becoming part of a separate, but connected, local migration of whites away from the South Side. The Kenwood District, further to the south, where my other great-great-grandparents lived, enacted restrictive real estate covenants early on, and integration was much slower there. Nevertheless the route my grandmother had described her grandfather as taking every morning on his horse, through Washington Park and up Grand Avenue, would, by the early 1930s, have taken him through what

was already known as "Bronzeville," a term thought by many to be less offensive than "Black Belt." As I climbed back into the car and continued on towards the Stockyards District, having taken a few pictures of the red house, I found myself thinking that in those changing neighborhoods of the late 1920s and early 1930s, an old white man riding through on his horse under the trees of Washington Park and up leafy Grand Avenue must have seemed an anachronism—and not a positive one.

* * *

On the plane to New Zealand—watching the snow-capped peaks of my own country slide beneath me (I was heading to meet my mother and change to a new airline and plane in Los Angeles)—I vowed that I would go to Mount Hutt and ski to the place where, according to the companion who had been with her, my daughter had stood before pushing off to join him on the other side of the icy slope. While I was thinking these thoughts in the plane, my daughter was still alive, but unconscious, in Christchurch Hospital, but we had been told she had no chance of surviving, and, mulling over this prognosis, all I could think of was to follow her to her last moment of consciousness, see what she had seen, and try to be with her in retrospect even if I had been so many miles away in actuality, too far away to rescue her. I had been there at her first moment of life, had held her in my arms for two hours while her mother slept, and I felt I owed it to my sons to show them that I would follow my children as far as I could in the other direction, that I would investigate their sister's life to the last moment before her accident, to her accident itself. Perhaps the boys, younger than she, would find something reassuring in it. She died four days later. Katherine and I had spent the night in the hospital, the nurse woke us, we held her hands and watched the heart monitor go flat. The next day the manager of Mt. Hutt arranged for a jeep to drive us to the mountain.

* * *

The center of the former stockyards, I discovered when I drove in, was not so blank as my cousin's map had made it appear. The City of Chicago had turned it into an industrial park. Chain-link fences in

varied states of repair (some brand new and gleaming, others torn and leaning at precarious angles) defined both sides of every street, and long, low, windowless buildings bearing names in fancy script such as Luster Products, Superior Nut and Candy, Aramark Uniform Services, and Infinite Herbs rose just above the fences. There was a general dustiness and clamor of trucks downshifting and backing up; streets full of potholes, some still dirt, emptying into gated enclosures of what looked like piles of garbage; a parking lot containing nothing but puddles and a pair of ancient-looking buses; another containing dozens of perfectly aligned bucket trucks. Above a sparkly, multi-terraced white building fronted by a well-kept rectangle of lawn, an enormous white wind turbine hung motionless against the greenish sky. Afternoon sun gilded elevated tracks that curved around to disappear and reappear again among smokestacks, and semi tractor-trailers backed slowly into too-tight spaces while cars lined up oh-so-patiently behind them to wait. I waited, too. It reminded me of Hunt's Point in the Bronx. The vast everything that happens happened, heralded by the beeping of backing trucks. How can you have the patience to wait, always to wait? It is maddening, it is horrible, always having to wait when if only you had been there you could have done something. A building stuck up above the others: large, old, brick, broken—maybe part of the stockyards once?—and I tried to drive around to it but was stopped by a freight train. A long, low, monotonous series of railroad cars, some carrying double-long beige containers reading, in yellow, "J.B. Hunt Intermodal," others traditional, shorter, in red, reading, "www.zim.com," both international shipping concerns, passed by. And kept passing by. I waited at the flashing barricade. What did those containers contain? TVs, towels, apricots, sledgehammers, dishwashers, yo-yos, coffeemakers, computers, batteries, toy marionettes, real marionettes, how-to books, bird books, gun books, the president's latest memoir, the memoir by the person who ran the president's campaign, the memoir by the journalist who covered the election, the memoir by the former CIA director, men's suits, women's suits, ladies' dresses, skis, artist's clay, guns, toothpaste, garden seeds, guns, almonds, rolls of cotton, rolls of film. Film? Guns.

Finally, the freight train rolled off, the barriers rose up, cars started

their engines and bumped across the tracks with their hoods jerking up and down—and I continued to make my way down streets and around corners toward the broken building. Now the building was hidden, now visible, now rearing up above the windshield, now falling behind another structure, until I saw on a narrow street and around a corner an opening in chain link where I could drive in at the base. Shelves of metal studs stood up against the side. Flaking white letters on the facade read, "BO Packing Company." It was now part of the storage area for a lumberyard. But this was not the picture I had in mind. I couldn't even exactly remember the picture I had in mind, only that it would be somewhere around here, but I was not sure any more if any picture I could take here would be what I had in mind. At one time the missing windows of the building had been covered with white-painted plywood, but now holes had been broken in the plywood, or the plywood had broken away, revealing darkness. This was not a photograph, this was but a building, and this was not it, this was not what I had in mind, not it at all—and yet—and then I was back on the slope swooping down as I had not swooped down. All the people who had once worked in that building were dead, or making their way in purple slippers down the never-ending corridors of senior living facilities. The sun that poured in here now no longer poured in for them, and, if it poured in for me, I was surely not taking advantage of it, because I was back on the ski slope or looking around for the picture I retained now only vaguely, the one I had originally come here to take.

* * *

The manager of the mountain helped fit my sons and me with rental skis and took us on some of the runs that he knew from the record of her electronic lift pass that my daughter had taken. Since the day she had visited the mountain it had snowed, then warmed; the actual tracks of her accident had been covered up, and it was foggy. As we came down one run he showed us, from the side, through the fog, the rocks where she had landed and, from the bottom, below the rocks, some of the slope (now hidden in fresh powder) down whose then-icy surface she had slipped. All the time I was thinking, first, should I be letting the boys see these things, to relive so exactly what had happened?

And, second, why is he bringing us on so many other runs before taking us to the spot? It was as if this big, blond, apparently friendly man was assessing our abilities before allowing himself to take us off-piste to where she had gone before her fall. We kept going up the lift and down other slopes, and he kept alternately praising our skiing and giving us pointers on our turns, so that I, at least (I hoped the boys were oblivious) became strangely self-conscious about my skiing, almost incompetent. My knees felt wobbly, I couldn't hold an edge, my ankles felt loose, I kept having to discreetly lean down, while waiting for the lift, to adjust the buckles of my boots. With every comment by the mountain manager, whom I began to think of as a glorified ski instructor, the more uncomfortable I became in the boots, and the more I wondered how the boys were feeling (they looked just fine, if a little rusty and freaked out in the way we all were). I asked the manager, finally, when we would be going to the spot, and he promised the next run. It was foggy and hard to see, but when we got off the lift on the next run, instead of going down, we struck off across a powder-covered snow cat track and began climbing a little.

* * *

On a street called South Packer Avenue I noticed a place called Stockyards Brick. Across from there, between Stockyards Brick and the tall building with the broken windows, stood a low, boarded-up building of indeterminate age called General Offices. It was here that I got out of the car. None of this was marked on the map. It may have been that the makers of the map had determined that the layout of the streets was still too provisional, too subject to change, in this new industrial park, to allow them to depict an idea of permanence. But here it was, Stockyards Brick, and across the street was the boarded-up building with the sign over the door, "General Offices," and behind that was the big building with the broken, dark windows. Something about the configuration of these buildings suggested that I might get a good photograph here, though I couldn't tell why. For what enterprise would the general offices be the general offices? Would they have something to do with the stockyards, or something later? Nothing about the boarded-up windows gave a clue. Nor did the neat stacks of bricks in the brickyard across the

street as to what once-standing building they came from.

Nevertheless, in the brilliant afternoon, I got out of the car. The need for a bathroom, which was growing, and the need for lunch, which maintained itself as a dull ache somewhere in the region of my stomach, receded from my mind as the effects of the light and the problems of photography took over. I took some pictures, a few more, of the general offices, some others of the tall brick building, and a snapshot across the street of Stockyards Brick. Just up the street, behind the windshield of an armored car, two barely distinguishable figures made the motions of eating sandwiches. There was a roar of thousands of vehicles moving unseen at increasing distances, some beeps from a truck backing up, the cry of an alarm of some kind. In Stockyards Brick a forklift hoisted a block of bricks, zoomed to the other side of the yard, lowered it among other blocks arranged there, and zoomed back for another block. It all suddenly seemed too flat, too low, for a picture of the kind I usually take, with elements all throughout, and though I tried a few of the general offices, they were not *it*—and it seemed that although I was *here*, at the center of whatever *it* would be, *it* itself was not here, had vanished, was only those guys eating their sandwiches in the armored truck, or the man zooming about with his forklift at Stockyards Brick.

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It was hot work in the heavy snow, across a slope that fell towards the lodge where my wife and mother waited. We could barely make the lodge out in the mist, and it was uncertain where the rocks where my daughter had fallen lay. I was directly behind the manager, with my sons behind me, and I kept looking back to make sure that the boys were still with us and safe. I don't know how many times I have thought about this moment and realized that at that point I could have changed positions with my sons and gone to the back of the line so that I could see them in front of me as we poled forward. This was how I had always skied with my children, whether across slopes or down them, making sure I went last so I could swoop down and rescue them if anything happened. But none of this occurred to me as we made our way across the slope. I had put myself, and us, in the hands of the manager, and he didn't have these worries; as far as he was concerned we were all three in

his care and he had to lead the way, so that, when he noticed how I kept looking back, and how anxious I seemed, and suddenly said, "We don't really have to go if you don't want to, you won't see much in this fog anyway—should we head down from here?" My "yes" was almost instantaneous, and the manager immediately turned and began to make slow graceful turns down the powdery slope away from the painful track we had been following, and the boys, after looking at me in silence, inscrutable behind their ski goggles, awkwardly followed, me now regaining enough of my sense of order to let them go first and follow behind. At that moment, and in the moment before when I had so quickly acquiesced to the manager's suggestion, all I could think about was my sons and keeping them safe, as if those protective instincts were even stronger than my grief about my daughter, but by the time we reached the bottom and rejoined my wife and mother, and the moment had passed, and we were driving back to Christchurch—and especially that night at dinner when both of my sons expressed what they had not expressed on the slope, and which I had not been able to read through their ski goggles, their surprise and disappointment—anger even—that we had not fulfilled our plan and skied to the spot where their sister had last stood, as I had seemed so anxious to do myself, that I began to wonder at my change of heart, and my inability, at that moment, rationally to rearrange the order and put myself at the back of the line to keep an eye on everybody and keep going towards the goal I had set, which I now understood had also become the goal of my sons, an idea I had come to on the plane even while my daughter was still alive, to stand in the place where she had last stood to see what she had last seen, to be able to imagine ourselves able to look at the world one last time through her eyes, even if the method of getting there was more physically and emotionally complicated than I had expected. But it was too late, I had made my decision, and what had not been done had not been done: but for all these years since, when I wake up in the night and think of what was on her mind when she fell, and of how she had gotten into the situation and of how she couldn't get out, or didn't know she needed to get out, because always when she had fallen before she had landed in soft snow; when I think of how, if I had been standing behind her, I could have tried to swoop down and shunt her away from the

rock, and of how, instead, I was 9,000 miles away and oblivious to what was happening to her out there, I also remember, as of something I could have done, something that had not been outside my power, that, six days after her accident, the day after she died, when we went to the mountain, I could at least have thought to rearrange the order of our group so that her brothers and I could have continued to the spot where she had last stood.

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An apartment had opened up at the senior living facility in Bloomfield, and my father and uncle had convinced my grandmother that, as her income was insufficient to cover the mortgage on her house, and her house itself, with its multiple levels and steps and door saddles and rug edges, its staircase with the continuous banister that curved around three sides of the entrance hall to the balcony above, was becoming too dangerous for a 95-year-old to navigate on her own, she should sell her house and move the nine miles north to a facility where she could be cared for properly and live within her means. She had long resisted this move, as indeed she had resisted every attempt to convince her to downsize. The house had belonged to her second husband, Stanford Jones, whom she had married in 1983, a couple of years after the death of my grandfather, and when Stan Jones died in 2000 my uncles and father had helped arrange for her to buy and move to a smaller house nearby in Farmington. But, although she had apparently seen and approved of the smaller house, when her late husband's children put their father's house on the market she made it known, apparently with the encouragement of one of my uncles, that she would not move, but would buy the house from the children and stay there. This uncle, the one who had encouraged her to keep the house, had himself, after years of struggle, made a fortune in real estate speculations in New York City, and, as he was devoted to his mother, he must have thought that if his mother, who lived on a fixed income from a trust, ended up not being able to cover the hefty mortgage she had to take out to afford to keep the house, he could always make up the difference. I hope so because soon after this transaction was accomplished, and my grandmother was able to stay in her second husband's house, now her

house, retaining Bridey, the cook who had worked there since the time of that husband's first wife, and who continued bringing in my grandmother's morning coffee, bacon, eggs, and toast, my uncle was diagnosed with a glioblastoma brain tumor. He lost all of his powers of speech, and, after numerous attempts at new therapies, died in April 2005. Although I will never know if he would have done something to help his mother stay in her house, I do know that neither of his brothers could, or would have felt themselves in a position to make such an offer. I am uncertain of the exact sequence of events after that, but quite suddenly I learned that my grandmother would be leaving the brick house at 67 Mountain Spring Road, with its bedrooms and back bedrooms and upstairs bedrooms, and its guest bedroom and back hall, still with its 1940s wallpaper, in which another parallel family had grown up and from which its members had gone off to boarding school and college, into which the furniture of my grandparents from Baltimore had been brought out of storage and installed after Stan Jones's death, as of something familiar landed in an alien space, and moving to a truly alien space, an unknown apartment in an unknown institution in which her two remaining sons informed her, and tried to reassure the rest of the family, that she would be "quite happy." And so it must have been in a spirit of saying goodbye to my grandmother's more than two decades in that house, the only house in which my children had known her to live, that we "stopped in" for a night in October 2007 on our way home from my parents' in Vermont—Katherine and Rachel and Willie and I, because Nicky, just in high school then, had to stay in the city for his Saturday music program.

There was the usual conversation about the piano, and as usual Katherine sat down to play something, though not for long, and somewhat tentatively, because she was not in practice. My grandmother, anyway, zeroed in on Rachel, or perhaps Rachel, who had just started as a freshman at Columbia the month before, focused on her great-grandmother, because they shared something that was theirs exclusively, in which none of us could participate, which was that each had lived for a year in France. Perhaps because she had failed in French in her senior year at The Master's School at Dobbs Ferry, and it was thought that a year in France would prepare her more fully for Smith College, my

grandmother had spent the academic year 1929–30, the equivalent of a gap year between high school and college, at Miss Schoff's School in Paris, where, according to research by my father, classes in literature, history, and French grammar and diction were taught in French, and recreation included fencing and drawing. (One of the educational moments during the year was the stock market crash in October, about which my grandmother, then not quite eighteen, pronounced herself bewildered at first until she received a clarifying letter from her father. As quoted by my own father in his account of his mother's life (*Catharine: A Retrospective*, Norwich, VT, Bragg Hill Press, 2011), "I was completely in a fog before I read it," she wrote. "In fact, most of the school read it also; it was so clear an explanation. Some girls seem to have lost an awful lot." Although, as with my grandmother's painting and piano playing, spoken French was not a skill she regularly demonstrated as part of family conversation, she left no doubt about her regard for the language and culture of that country, which existed in her mind almost at the same level as her reverence for those of England; and when Rachel, in the academic year of 2005–2006, which was her junior year in high school, happened to go live with a family in Rennes, Brittany, as part of the School Year Abroad program, my grandmother found a ready listener for her memories of Paris and Miss Schoff's. And perhaps it was partly at Miss Schoff's that my grandmother had perfected the technique of "drawing people out" that was so much a part of her social manner, so that even in a quiet chat by the tennis court, while her mother and brother played tennis and I wandered about with my camera photographing trees, Rachel found herself talking to the listening old lady, whom she loved anyway, happily describing, perhaps, the moment she first felt comfortable with her host family, making jokes with them over supper, or the time her mother visited for Thanksgiving and tried to cook a turkey in a strange French kitchen; and there in one of the yellow slatted pool chairs (replacing the Adirondack chairs that had long ago rotted away), my 95-year-old grandmother fixed her pale blue eyes on my daughter and listened intently, or seemed to listen intently, occasionally taking from her sleeve a tissue, wiping her nose with it, and with a practiced dip of her hand tucking it back in at her wrist. And above them both and in the background, in the whoops of

the cardinals in the white pine boughs, in the rattling looms of the insects, in the vines turning autumn red along the top of the backboard, in the hum of traffic down on Route 4, in the thwack of the tennis ball off the court, in the white folds of my grandmother's blouse, in the late afternoon sun burning like fire in the trees behind the tennis court fence, in the ants speeding across the flagstones, and in the plane droning far overhead, hovered the white-bearded man on his horse.