

daughter. I hadn't seen them in a while, and when I opened the door, I admit I was a little gut kicked. They resembled the people I'd held in my memory, but it was just as though they had been gnawed. Dad was wearing his old suede jacket minus one sleeve, and that left arm of his was hanging naked at his side. The lump wasn't any bigger, but it looked somehow *hardened*—more immediately comparable to a stone than anything that grew.

Mom caught me staring. Caught me hesitating before I passed Nora over to him, her tiny hands groping through the air to yank his salt-white beard.

Later, while he was changing her—a task he seemed delighted to perform—I served mom her cocktail on the porch.

“He was never like that with you kids,” she said, like she knew I'd been wondering.

She assured me the thing on his arm was nothing. Just a mass.

She'd always hidden the worst from us, as if not speaking of a thing could render it inert. She'd once spent a whole week in the hospital and never said a word until I found the bill, and even then she'd tried to brush it off, nimbly changing the subject to the weather, the neighbor's rotting fence, the rising price of eggs.

It didn't matter what she said or didn't say. The lump seemed to speak to me in its own, incontrovertible language. Shouting from his flesh that we were headed for an ending. A rupture of a life we'd managed to stitch together by quick years, few words, and gestures too small and too many to count.



That night I dreamt the lump grew and grew and wouldn't stop. We had to leave our beds and run out into the street and I knew all the neighbors were watching, though I could see no faces in the darkened windows. We watched as the walls of our house bulged and buckled with the size of it. Then, just before it seemed like it would block out the moon, it split like an overripe pomegranate and out poured all these sharp and wet things,