

# This man, Adam



**ELDON GARNET**





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**He lives in the city but smells of the woods**, feet black as asphalt, clothing, body, saturated by the city, a deep urban penetration, yet from the pores of his skin, from the glands of his armpits, he secretes the scent of the woods, of the earth, a woody odour, a counter-point to the urban stench.

**Adam possesses dignity.** He is not one of them, he does not care, how can he care? The way he is treated. Why? Wild eyes, scraggly hair, overly thin body, not his voice, he seldom speaks, it is something more essential, so why would he care, possessing himself, his own pride. Let them keep their distance, he doesn't mind being shunned, considered a wild man, his sun darkened skin is thick, a strength he wears against those who regard him as unwelcome. Adam sees them eyeing, not for his good, but destruction, he has been taught, too many times, hard inflicted evidence, convinced of their malicious intent. Between Adam and the wild street dogs a clear connection. Like them he moves from place to place, sleeping under a bridge one night, in a back lane another, scavenging for food in trash cans, pursuits he shares with the dogs, animals in search of sustenance in the urban underbelly of disorder and brutality, but well aware he is not a feral dog, only suffering like them the kicks and rebuttals, the angry commands of "Get out of here," rocks thrown, beatings with sticks and brooms. Indeed these dogs are his equal but he is not a dog.

**A veil covers the city**, it has not stopped raining in two days, night and daylight covered in a never-ending downpour. Sometimes merely a haze like drizzle, as it is at this moment, at others, a torrential emptying of dark clouds, or, a steady dripping where you can count the drops as they descend to become the stream, the river overcoming the street. At night, in the darkness, staring at the light, he can see a line drawing of rain, parallel lines falling. His skin covered by another skin, a film, a blanket of water caressing his body, covering his head, naked shoulders, chest. Long ago his shirt was washed away in a torrent of water, his pants, tatters of cloth all that stands between Adam and animal nakedness. Sitting on the curb, facing the street, he bends into himself, head locked between knees, hunched over, his back a perfectly curved arch. A river descending his neck, between the shoulders, running over smooth muscle, over the vertebrae rocks, cascading down the two cheeks of his buttocks, passing between the inside of his legs, over his calves to join the river overflowing the street, submerging his feet and lower legs. He can do no more than sit and try to be patient, it is not unusual, it has occurred many times, he has experienced rain lasting for three, even five days and nights. He tries to be absent, to imagine somewhere else, not here, not so much to imagine this other place, but his disappearance, where he is not

compressing his body into a tight, self-contained, protective ball, not some particular place, but somewhere, in another time, to disappear from this world tormenting his body. A Buddhist monk, after a life time of practice, could not perform the task better than Adam. His mind is clear, nothing stands between sense and thinking, he is clearly not, not a question of connection between body and mind, rather a perfect unity in a state of not. More than absence. It is his strength, sitting on the rough concrete sidewalk, without cover, immersed in water from above and below, no other choice, he cannot be here, how else to survive for so many hours, so many days. The solution therefore simply, not to be present. "No, I am not here." It continues to rain and he hardly draws a breath.

**He sees many like himself**, the others, from a distance, but he is not of them, he may look similar, worn to nothing shoes, bare feet, erratic beard, gaunt, barely covered body. Men and women a reflection of himself, but he is a shadow, watching from a distance. The others, part of a tribe, unlike Adam who is alone, like them, but not one of them.

**Adam sits on a city bench** watching a bent, old man beside a thin city tree, alone. This is his tree, together, man and tree, occupying a small territory from sidewalk to tree trunk, compulsively, carefully, gently, laying thin sticks in a regular pattern around the tree, creating spokes of dark wood, precisely bending each stick to form a gentle arc. Entering one end of the wood into the ground, between stones, the other balanced against the tree's lower trunk. For over an hour Adam has been watching this old man, his gaze fixed as one end of each stick is carefully forced between rough paving stones to create a circle surrounding the tree trunk, the other end dug into the remnants of the tree's bark worn smooth by years of street traffic. He watches the old man pick up a thin stick, begin to circle the tree, methodically touching each dark spoke. Adam understands, what he sees is a ritual being performed. Once or twice during each circle the old man claps his hands, rubbing the thin stick between his palms until it spins with enough speed to ignite a small fire. At his bare feet is a small object, but seated at a distance Adam cannot determine much about this object. It is irregular, circular and oblong, larger at one end, brown in the middle, red at the ends. Its irregular shape making it difficult to move, it does not roll. The old man needs to first move one end, carefully, inserting his stick, its tip in the ground below the object, giving it a

quick flick, if successful turning it once in the intended direction, or if unsuccessful, falling back in the opposite direction. Obvious to Adam, judging by the difficulty the old man is having moving the object with his thin stick, it possesses some weight, possibly composed of iron, although it could be a bone, but it is heavier than a bone, not a piece of wood. It could be a rock, or a fragment of concrete, a fallen piece of a nearby building. Adam does not care about the particular identity of the object or the reason it is part of this ritual, not concerned, not intrigued enough to come closer, to leave the comfort of the small public bench in the canopy shade of a tree similar to the one the old man is circling. Adam is entertained by the old man's performance, he does not question why it is being performed, but he is quite curious about the pants the man wears, how they perfectly match the colour of the tree trunk, how the vertical lines, the alternating light and dark of his pant legs are an imitation of the tree, a camouflage, how at night this man's legs would blend seamlessly with the tree, how he would become invisible. As a young man Adam is only learning to hide, to disappear, "Someday, I will blend into the tree." Is this old man Adam's mirror. They are similar, but this old man wears black thongs, the soles of his aged feet protected from the rough ground. Young Adam prefers to be barefoot, only the thick callused skin at



the bottom of his feet separating him from the city's cobblestone and concrete pavement. Is this the future Adam, an old man circling a tree, performing an undefined ritual, waiting to disappear at night into the tree?

**He doesn't know, how could he.** Watching, walking, what does it matter what he sees, he is there, everything passes, not questioning, seeing, not a choice, inside and outside, what is there but his senses and particularly of sight. Strange, she wears clothing with coloured strips, her pants skin tight, cut above the knee, alternating bands of red and white, like Adam no shoes, bent over looking in the garbage piles on the busy streets, beneath trees and wooden posts. She moves like a monkey, quickly, in sudden jerks as she grabs a discarded suitcase or part of a broken lamp, a small stuffed child's toy, holding it for a split second, examining before deciding to keep or discard. She is thin and fine featured. She bends over revealing dark underwear and lithe flesh, arousing Adam, his body tight, but she is not to be approached, she is defensive, her quickness a protective device. As he approaches, entering her space, her body becomes taugt, wound, her thinness becoming spider like. She moves quickly to keep the intruder at a safe distance, locked in her gaze. He keeps away, stepping back to watch from a distance. She sees him watching, but after the second or third time, catching Adam's eyes fixed on her, she no longer pays him any attention. Aware he is being aroused, she has seen it too often, her disregard for Adam an acknowledgement, a recognition this man is not a threat.

**All morning, still, hanging, gray air** demanding release, and now, a steady downpour. He stands under a small covering, a tattered canopy protruding from a building. Fortunately, the angle of falling rain is away from the building, the covering providing adequate protection if he stands tight against the wall. Earlier this morning before it started to rain, he found almost an entire cigarette, lit and quickly abandoned. He has a lighter, he would be truly naked without his lighter. This one is yellow, they come in all colours, found, as this one was, in the park beneath a bench, stuck between the wooden planks, where he also found the cigarette, not by the same bench but closer to the park's metal entrance gate where the police stand guard, strictly forbidding entrance to the park, their guns visible in their holsters, ruthless eyes relentlessly on guard against his, and all like him. But he knows many other ways to enter, the surrounding fences are far from impenetrable, he is after all a thin man and the park's perimeter is extensive. He uses the park for its supply of lighters, achieved at night much easier than during the day, but Adam is young, so foolish and playful, mischievous, so the sojourn during the day, although more dangerous, has become a game between Adam and the often fat guards who are more proficient at shouting than giving chase. They would never unsheathe their guns unless he was

robbing or accosting, which he would never do. Attacked, obviously he would defend himself but Adam would never attack first. The police are brutal and prison infinitely impossible, the cage a horror, a primal fear, its treat his deterrent, but Adam isn't interested in robbery, no use for their jewelry, their cameras and money, although he finds money helpful, not that useful, good for the luxury of a pack of cigarettes but not much more. It is sufficient for Adam to visit the park for whatever he can find under or on the benches. The pens of no interest, the lighters important, the few coins and occasional paper money are always welcome, the cigarette this morning a delight. It is always more fruitful to look under the benches in the morning, he isn't sure why, perhaps it is the business men who use the park as a place to relax on their way to work, sitting for a moment to enjoy the natural environment, perhaps smoking a cigarette before their confinement to a desk and computer for the day. For Adam it is the game of invading the park during the day, the reward, the spoils aquired by cunning, the fence defeated, the guards avoided and it is also the pleasure of the well kept grass and trees. Crouched, hidden behind a hedge, his back resting against the steel fence, he feels a calmness impossible on the street. He has a routine, a series of benches he visits, hiding places to where he can quickly retreat, holes in the fence available if he is

spotted. Dashes are made, rewards are procured, cigarettes are lit, smoke curls around his head before being erased by the rain. A steady stream, it will not last, it will take longer than a single cigarette, but no longer than an hour at most, so he stands, his back leaning against the stucco wall, protected by the overhang, smoking his cigarette. By his posture and activity he could, for a moment, be mistaken, if one ignores his attire, for a proper citizen, perhaps not an executive, at least one of the city's manual labour force, a man hired to drive a car or, in his current attire, a construction worker, a bricklayer. The smoke circling his protected enclosure evidence of a proper man enjoying a cigarette while he waits for the rain to diminish, or end, before returning to his normal activity, whatever he was doing before being interrupted by the rain. A pleasurable retreat for this fictitious man as it is for Adam, taking deep drags on the slow burning cigarette, damp from lips and rain.

**Adam never wonders** what he is going to do, he does it, and later he doesn't think about what has been done. Passing someone in the street he knows, they see each other, lower their heads as they pass, they do not want to make contact, both mutually avoiding, but Adam also feels both the necessity not to make contact, not to interact, and a strong desire to make contact, to interact. Like all animals, he fears the presence of the other and simultaneously the need to socially interact, but he knows, they possess sharp knives, his body vulnerable, so by necessity he keeps his distance. He is sure he frightens them as he is frightened by them, an equilibrium of avoidance, symbiotic, balanced. Everyone can disappear, Adam is content by himself, the tendrils of the other, if he allowed, would strangle, therefore, "Disappear!" demanding to be separate, independent, so "Disappear!" you and you he screams but no one hears. What he hears are the drums in the darkness, over and over again, the same beat, no matter where he is he can hear them. In the night, in the darkness the drums perpetual from sunset to sunrise, the drums do not rest, forever beating. Occasionally, sudden silence, only for a few minutes and then they begin slowly, one drum at first, a few irregular beats and then explosion, the frenetic rhythmic beating in the darkness. Hand against rawhide, ten, twenty hands beating and he feels his heart beat and the night is not empty

but occupied by drums talking to each other, beating, a rhythm, life,  
darkness with presence. He is not alone.

**In a small wooded section** of the city, not a park with fence and guard but an abandoned hill, a rocky place a half hour walk from the central core, here Adam has found a hidden refuge, a place to sleep away from footsteps, from the danger of attack, where once his eyes close, to sleep at peace, removed from the danger of the city. Using three trees, an isosceles triangle, a tree at each corner, the bottom edge of the triangle half the length of the two sides, creating just enough room to lie with his head at the shorter length without any part of his body touching the trunks of the three trees. Adam roughly bending the lower branches of the trees downward, slowly turning each to form the triangle. Trying not to snap the branches, making rough incisions in the branch's bark with a sharp stone, a notch sufficient to prevent the branch from breaking when coaxed to bend to interlock with another. It is a naive construction, rough incisions, breaking branches over his knee, forcing them to interlock, crudely tying the branches together with scraps of rusted wire, blending the dark wire with the branches. Adam hopes to make a home, if not invisible, at a distance, a place not distinguishable as somewhere someone might be living. The lower branches are of particular importance, needing to descend sufficiently to the ground, to blend with the grass and small plants, to create a visual screen. The first night he spent here,



he had no sense this could be the future site of his home. He liked it for its seclusion, on flat dry ground, thinking possibly a large rock resting just below the earth, is helping drain, to keep the earth dry. Here he sleeps, returning each night, walking the road, on the narrow shoulder, avoiding the cars, comfortably undisturbed, for the next two months. Each early morning, working to make improvements, to make it more and more like a nest. Creating a roof with a multilayered knot of branches, scragging out the ground with his hands and a sharp stone, creating a hollow to follow the contour of his body. Collecting small stones throughout the city, placing the stones in a plastic bag, carrying them back to be spilled and spread in the hollow where he sleeps. After the stone bed is completed to his satisfaction, he searches the city to collect thin branches of pliable wood, carefully removing the leaves and bark, weaving the branches together, collecting, cleaning, weaving until he has created a mattress of woven sticks. The final layer of his bed is the most difficult, more difficult than the collecting of stones and thin branches, for this he needs to scavenge the city for discarded pieces of cloth, forgotten clothing, too often covered with lice, larva, fleas. Sometimes thinking he has found a treasure, picking up the flattened cloth from the ground it comes alive in his hands, crawling with insects, impossible to distinguish cloth from maggots.

No choice but to discard the treasure, dropping it quickly, he cannot afford invasion from this island of vermin, their transfer to his clothing and body to be dreaded, he knows lice will come but he does not need to encourage their presence. Finally, after weeks searching the city, Adam has accumulated enough fairly clean cloth to form a third and final level on top of the woven twigs. Perfect, a canopy of tree branches, an almost soft bed on which to spend the nights and the hot afternoons. He enters by the shorter side, feet first, once inside, drawing the branches closed. In the darkness, safely hidden out of sight, he can sit up, bend at the waist but not stand. Adam is adept at stillness, able to sit in place for long periods, waiting patiently for a reason to compel him to move, undisturbed, squatting, never moving, not shifting positions, even slightly, occupied in stillness, his vision occupied by the simplest of things, a common stone, a remnant of tree bark, the tires of parked cars.

**He is a man of detail.** He has been watching, thinking, “An impossible dream,” imagining possessing such a place. Twice for days, afternoon and evening walking past, and as the days advance and his curiosity grows, five, six, seven times a day, watching. Everything is always the same, no one there, the objects do not move, the bed undisturbed, the metal folding chair stationary. Hidden away, an absence between three white brick walls. A corrugated metal roof top of a single-story building, perhaps once a garage or a work shed. A roof top space, half covered by a corrugated metal canopy supported by three wooden posts, the outer two posts attached to opposite brick buildings. To view this hopeful residence, the best place to stand is on the elevated highway, cars dangerously close, almost brushing his pants. From his highway observation point, Adam can see there is no door in the far back wall, only a window, sealed closed with red clay bricks, no trap door in the corrugated steel floor, no access to this roof top dwelling. But there are signs of human occupation. Possibly what Adam is seeing is a space from the past, built and abandoned long ago, not demolished, its access sealed, a place where someone once lived, a place of history. He cannot tell, it’s a mystery, is someone using this space or is it truly forgotten? After Adam has spent many hours each day, each night watching, when he still has no evidence of anyone using this space, at

the beginning of the fourth week he decides to act. From the highway vantage point, it is too far to leap, it is close, but at a distance of more than three long strides, impossible. The site is indented, a slight deviation in the grid, displaced slightly from the seamless horizontal face paralleling the street, an indentation from the expansive grid of wall and window, a mistake breaking the straight edges, a deviation, a single story shed, not a garage as the street is too narrow here for a car, just enough room for a motor bike between the front of this anomaly and the concrete pillars of the raised highway. A heavy-duty corrugated steel door, covered in layers of graffiti, paint and rust occupies the entire front. It opens by sliding up, locked at the ground with two large pad locks. The front and the two sides provide no proper foothold for climbing, too high, twice the height of Adam with his arms raised. Scaling the front impossible, the only points of access are on the sides, in the gaps at the east and west corners, but, he does not know how. Obviously, a tall sturdy ladder would be the most efficient, but Adam has no ladder and it is not something to be found discarded on the streets. Of the numerous items he has witnessed in the trash he has never seen a ladder, metal or wood. He could, but will not, steal a ladder. He is against theft, a basic code he will not break even for this rich reward, so only a rope, again an item he does not process, but at

least an object of possibility to be found. Even if he finds a rope, how to use it, to climb a rope means an attachment of the rope to where, to the roof above? Going back to his vantage point beside the highway, again the necessary walk on the ramp against the flow of traffic, on the narrow curb beside the highway, carefully, dangerously, retaining his balance with each step along the curb, holding, sliding his hand along the waist high metal railing, cars approaching at full speed, some honking, some waving, cursing his presence, warning, if he falls it will be into the path of their speeding machines. Luckily for Adam, here the traffic is slightly slower, being the lane connected to an exit ramp, the ramp Adam uses to access his highway vantage point. Steading his back to the cars, holding the rail firmly in both hands, Adam looks out at the same height as his potential roof top home. Staring, his hair, his loose-fitting trousers catching in the wind of the speeding traffic, scanning the roof, it is "Impossible" but it has to be done, "possible, but how? If I attach a rope from the roof to ground," but how can he reach the roof to attach the rope and this is itself a hypothetical question, he has no rope to attach, but then again, the problem is where to attach the rope, why bother to obtain the rope if it will not be an aid in his ascending to the roof. Precariously standing, staring for too long, aware the police after such an extended period

will discover his presence, questions will be demanded. "Enough," no solution, he needs to descend, standing on the narrow curb, staring at the edge of the roof, "there must be a solution, a way up." There, on the left, attached to the wall, almost at level with the roof, a two headed light, two empty sockets, no bulbs, destroyed long ago by vandals or nature, attached to a metal box attached to a white wire, running along the front of the building before suddenly disappearing inside the wall. This is the only protrusion from the two walls. Laying down on the sidewalk directly under the highway, leaning his back against the concrete support, looking up, calculating the distance he needs to climb to reach his new home, taking a small cigarette butt from his shirt pocket, lighting it, taking three or four drags on the dry butt, leaning back, taking a deep inhale of the slightly musty tobacco. "If it is anywhere, it is to be this light fixture," somehow, he doesn't know how, perhaps the rope can be looped around the metal box, perhaps, if not here, how? Too soon the cigarette completed. "Yes, a rope" must be procured, closing his eyes, dreaming of climbing, in the comfort of his new abode, sleeping.

**A full moon**, drums in the night, Adam can feel his body shake. The drum beats, over and over again, closing his eyes. He is the skin on the drum, the incessantly beating, not painful, in syncopation the heart pumping, possessing a spirit, not of dirt but air. His heart not burning asphalt but a surging sea, feet flying with each step.

**Adam wakes wrapped** inside the branches, hidden from others, the scent of earth, of decay, feeling the weight, the claustrophobia, feeling part of the earth, thoughts of mortality, possessing a feeling without explanation, a feeling of endless emptiness, but it is not something on which he dwells, he merely feels it, the opposite of the feeling in his loins, but as strong. Sliding out through the narrow opening, listening, looking, making certain no one is nearby. The sun still low in the sky, no clouds, "It won't rain today." He has, for now, given up hope of finding a rope, in the last weeks, wandering the city, he has found no suitable rope, the best, a dirty piece of grey nylon, tying it to his waist for the day, in his nest, depositing it, this small length, in a recess where his feet rest. Of course, he is tempted, he has found a rope that would be perfect for his purpose, but too dangerous, there are eyes everywhere, he can feel their presence. A particularly perfect length, he sees it from his place on the curb, on the other side of the street, at the construction site, for hours maintaining his surveillance. No one is at the construction site, people pass, sometimes in small groups, sometimes alone, but no one goes to where the rope is hanging, just above the ground, wrapped around a protruding length of wood, part of a temporary structure to support a brick wall under construction. Who owns the rope? It would be easy enough for Adam to rise from



the curb, walk the short distance across the street, enter the unwallled site, walk to the rope, reach up, remove it from its wood support, throw the prize over his shoulder and calmly walk away. With these simple gestures his life would be completely transformed, but he can't, these are actions beyond his possibility. "They are watching," he knows they are guarding, they know he wants their rope, it is a trap set to capture him, the rope is their bait. Adam can't see them but knows they are there, watching, listening, so close they can hear his heart beating. He is certain, it is what he would do if he wanted to capture an animal, setting the bait in the most conspicuous of locations, positioning himself hidden nearby, waiting for the prey to take the bait, firmly in his grasp before springing the trap. "Yes, they are waiting to take me." He is tempted, who would not be tempted by such a fine rope, but certain, this is a trap set by vengeful, spiteful men, who, if they catch him in an act of thievery, will consider it justified, possessing the right to push him to the ground. If he resists, and he will, as would any trapped animal, fight back, to be kicked, possibly clubbed with wooden sticks or worse, by metal bars. "No, they will show no mercy." Once Adam fought back, kicking one, biting another on the arm, on the neck as they struggled on the ground, wrapped together in a deadly embrace. No, he will not attempt to steal their rope, he is

not such a simple man as to fall for such an easy trap. Grinning, Adam rises from the curb, walks slowly down the street, proudly moving away from their trap. He has no rope but has escaped capture, not beaten and mercilessly thrown into an iron bar cage, for this time at least, he has outwitted his captors.

**No other opportunity** to procure a rope presents itself for the week, into the next, he is falling further and further behind in his dream of a rooftop abode, but he has to proceed. Although there are many diversions and regressions, there remains the rope toward which he is attempting to advance. If anything, Adam has time, there is no choice of another direction, he needs merely to move forward, singularly proceeding in the possibility of finding a rope.

**When he wakes** in the morning, his naked, blackened feet touching the smooth surface of the small fragment of nylon rope, his elbows rubbing the rough cloth of his mattress, he suddenly realizes, “Here is my rope,” realizes he need only use the cloth, the bed on which he has been sleeping, to weave, to knot into his rope.

**Everything is difficult for Adam**, the simplest of tasks needing to be undertaken, he does so without the necessary ability. He is lacking. His ability does not improve or diminish, it is constant, how it was and how it is. Everyday is difficult. It is as though he is always walking up hill on a stony path, has never experienced a level road, it is not that he is the cliché Sisyphus, there is no punishment involved, only endless toil, nothing monumental about it, merely every day, undramatic, how the muscles of his heart beat, involuntarily. It isn't enough for Adam to have been inspired, to have solved the problem of the inaccessibility of rope, to image a new one he will weave, knot from the refuse of the streets, it is the toil of finding cloth. At first it is easy, taking from his storehouse, from his mattress, unwinding the worn, torn cloth to form a short length of rope, as long as his body. A good beginning, but by his calculations, he needs twice or three times the length, or more to reach down from the roof to his waist if he is able to begin the climb reaching up, slightly higher, not sure yet of the details of climbing. The immediate problem rather of constructing the rope, where to find the cloth. It should have been easy but it is not abundant on the streets. His mattress has disappeared into the rope, leaving only sticks on which to lie, but Adam does not find it uncomfortable, at least it is not pavement, or rocky ground, pleasurable being raised from

the damp earth, above the morning dew that has a way of passing through his body. Lying on the twigs, even slightly above the earth is a luxury. He does not mind sacrificing the cloth from his mattress for the possibility of a better life. To obtain more cloth is not impossible, in gutters running beside the curb, often over the covering of drains, mixing with mud and urban refuse, condoms, crushed cans, plastics of every colour and shape, he finds fragments of cloth, most are small, no larger than his hand, tatters of lengths, squares discarded into the gutter. Sometimes Adams's search is fruitful, only this morning, hardly an hour into his wandering, he found an entire length of denim, easily discernable as a trouser leg, just one leg and part of the waist, a strong length, hardly worn. This leg can be cut in two or three equal strips, these he knots together adding to the existing length, now at least half a body length, an excellent find, a good day's work. For the next two long weeks, Adam collects, weaves, knots, until he has a length of rope he hopes is adequate for his intended purpose, a rope of cloth and thin lengths of plastic, a material easily obtained, garbage dumps overflowing with plastic waste, employed to give the precious cloth bulk, he hopes, strength. He has seen many plastic ropes and these he knows are often stronger than hemp or cloth ropes, the plastic giving his construction a glossy sheen that catches the light and makes the

rope sparkle in the sunlight. He is proud as he ties the last piece of cloth into the rope. Laying it out on the ground, "It is long enough," winding it onto his bed, on top of the sticks, for one night returning the cloth to its function as a mattress, passing into sleep, smiling, justifiably proud of his handywork.

**Adam can solve physical problems**, doing as he needs, simple. If there is a tangle to sort, his hands and eyes will untangle, much as a spider weaves a web. Adam is not a simple man, merely one who moves simply, one step at a time, one foot in front of the other on the inclined road, it is how it is, will be, proceeding, not in the right or wrong way, proceeding, how else is a man to act, for Adam there is no other way. Absence of planned direction is how he proceeds, not knowing a destination. If it is simple, it should be easy, but it is not easy, just simple.



**He imagines finding a piece of wood** he can fashion into a hook to attach to his rope, to throw the hook, to catch the base of the light fixture. It will have to be strong, this wooden hook, yet narrow enough to be looped around the tube protruding from inside the wall into the metal box on which the fixture is attached. It is this connecting point he studies, to find the precise catching point, exactly where it emerges from inside to outside the wall. His question: "Will it bear my weight?" He has found a root in the park, an arch in the air, grown a complete circle above ground, before returning into the earth. He need only cut the two ends, to leave slightly more on one end to which he can attach the rope. With his small knife and a wet stone, a flint-like piece of rock to keep the blade sharp, he cuts into the root, chipping at it, shapening the edge, pressing the blade, pressing his palm against the handle, small splinter after small splinter, the wood is hard, thinking, "This is good, it will be strong enough to hold me, it will be worth the effort." Not hours but days before he has made his hook.

**Now it is necessary** to make the perfect toss. From the pavement throwing the hook toward the top of the metal box, “Catch it,” he yells as it falls to the pavement. He tries again, tossing, looping it in the air, flicking it upward toward the wall, “If I can hit the wall just right the hook will fall with enough weight to clamp on,” toss after toss, “how long can the hook last?” hitting the pavement, trying to catch it before it lands, flinging, flinging, sometime catching it in the air before the ground, slipping through his hands. Flinging and finally catching onto the back of the box, “will it hold?”, pulling slowly, wriggling the rope and hook, it moves down, the hook catching the box, with subtle movements manouvering it in place, pulling, lightly, lightly, harder, harder until it seems to be secure. Grabbing with both hands, placing all his weight, leaning back, pulling on the rope, reaching up, hand over hand, climbing the rope, holding, hand over hand, lifting his body off the ground, wrapping his legs around the rough rope, slithering with incredible agility, his thin body blending with the rope, reaching the ledge. The hook is holding, grabbing the edge of the building, hanging by his hands from the ledge, lifting himself, forcefully throwing himself upward, leaping from the edge onto the roof. His effort rewarded. Standing, stepping carefully, his feet judging the strength of the roof, the metal floor bending but taking his weight.

**“I can smell them.** Someone else has lived here.” He has trouble understanding why anyone would leave “Such a perfect place,” this new home, his dream. They have left a rudimentary bed, horizontal slats of wood cut to balance on a sturdy wooden frame. “Why would they leave?” impossible to understand. His most important find, a small cooking stove, a cast iron bucket in which wood can be burned, complete with a rusted metal grill balanced on the bucket’s rough edge. Beyond his dreams. A canopy, roughly constructed of corrugated plastic, overhangs half of his living area, an excellent covering against rain, his bed placed here for a dry night’s sleep. Adam worries they will return, find him here, challenge his presence. If they return there will be a fight, he will protect this perfect place from invasion. If not the scent, the essence of the previous owner everywhere, he isn’t sure, will they return, but for now, unquestionably, this roof abode is Adam’s, he will arrange the furniture as though it is his forever.

**Sitting on a wobbly wooden chair**, the constant sound of traffic from the highway, he claps his hands, missing the circling moth, missing, clapping, crushing its soft body, wings, a brown shadow on the palms of his hands. They are attracted by the small fire where he is slowly roasting, over the low burning coals in his small bucket stove, a pigeon captured this morning, not a feast but meat. The moths began to appear a few days ago. He did not act quickly enough, hunting the first few when they appeared, killing, a quick extermination, he thought they were unimportant, but they laid eggs, hatched larva, producing a prodigious presence. His hands waving at the air, clapping at the small brown moths, enjoying the game of the quick precise clap necessary to obliterate. Flicking the light residue from his palms, a fragment of a wing, the moth's flesh blending into his skin like a lotion, brown dust floating. Clapping, missing, some are much smarter, quicker, moving more evasively than the others who are slow and stupid. It is a perverse entertainment, clapping, scooping with one hand, a quick grab at the air to capture a moth in mid-flight, with a graceful bending and flicking of the fingers simultaneously releasing the moth and crushing it in between fingertips. With another graceful motion, the crushed body flung to the floor, wings often floating in the air above the body. The pigeon has some worms. All urban birds

have worms, but he does not mind, they are only worms, they live in the pigeon, equal to the pigeon. Evening, the moon, a cooling cross breeze, a plump pigeon slowly roasting. Feathers drifting above the roof, "Tonight the moths are gray and white," the embers of the fire orange, red, yellow as bright as the sun. Slowly turning, browning and blackening the pigeon on his improvised spit, fat striking the coals, flames leaping, clapping his hands, crushing a mosquito, turning the spit, content in his roof deck palace. He knows, an animal instinct, the pleasure of each breath, alone in the night with a small fire, a small piece of cooked meat, a roof over his head, a bed, biting into a small leg, a morsel of skin sliding between his teeth, grinding the bird's brittle bones, succulent flesh rolling on his tongue, bursting on his pallet. Ripping off the other leg, the closest part of the bird to the embers are for Adam's taste the best, the smallest part of the pigeon, unlike a chicken's leg, but he does compare the fat thighs, the heavy bones of the chicken, to the pigeon's thin bones, he eats, spiting bones to the floor beside the stove. Slowly turning the spit, toasting the pigeon's breast until it is a light brown, still possessing a taste of blood. In the past, Adam did not hesitate to eat raw, cold, rubbery flesh that stuck between his teeth, but this is a past he no longer lives. Tonight the embers soften the flesh, he sprinkles salt on

the bird, luxury, not the brutality of yesterday. A shooting star, he is almost certain he saw it cross his right shoulder, the quick, intense light, the fat from the pigeon's breast dripping down his chin, licking his fingers, a small piece of earth, dark dirt, coming loose, falling from his finger nail, mixing with the pigeon's flesh, taking another bite, an audible crunch of teeth against bone. Far away he can hear the sound of drums, a flame flashes upward from the fire, he removes the other breast, his fingers black, bringing them to his mouth, a small laugh of pleasure. The drums seem so far away.

**Leaning back in his chair**, lighting the butt of an unfiltered cigarette found earlier on the sidewalk near the market, taking a deep drag, exhaling the smoke into the night air, watching it float toward the highway, disappearing slowly in the still air. He is proud of the arrangement of his home, everything he needs, proud of the small stove he has balanced on a layer of stones to protect the roof from the sparks. He is proud of his bed, the steel chair on which he is sitting, proud of what he has scavenged from the streets, a steel rod he found leaning against a tree, he uses to stir the fire, the broken door, flat and secure, now used as a base for his bed. Enjoying his cigarette, wondering, who would throw away such delicious tobacco, who would take only a few puffs before letting it drop to the sidewalk and walk on. "They must be very rich." Were they wearing a suit, a hat, "Was he clean shaven?" Adam's beard is black, untrimmed, covering his face, sometimes he hacks at longer strands with his knife. It is a unkept nest impregnated with street debris, often small insects unexpectedly crawl from it onto his lips to be casually licked away. He knows this wondering is a problem, it happened before when he was content, in a small clearing in the woods, roasting a rabbit, sitting on a small log, staring at the embers from a fine fire, throwing green leaves and branches on the fire, the flames leaping into the air, streaking upward.

Wondering about his mother and father, his brothers and sisters, he cannot remember their faces. Adam has been alone since he was a young boy sent by his father into the world to find his own way. There was no rite of passage, no initiation, only a stern look from his father, a small smile from his mother, his brothers and sisters understanding said nothing, no one watched his departure, too soon his brothers and sisters would be following his example, without complaint, leaving. Yes, wondering is born of contentment and a pleasant evening breeze. "Should I want more?" Watching the cars pass, watching the embers burning, thinking perhaps this is not paradise, this plastic covered protection from the rain, this insecure rope ladder he climbs to his roof top domain, his bed balanced on stone and scrap metal. "Perhaps there is more." The barefoot girl he has seen on the streets, her eyes running from him, is this what he wants, the comfort of another, he isn't sure. "Do I miss something I have never known?" Wondering if a room with walls, to be enclosed, would not be better than his open roof, staring at the lights and sounds of the highway. Somewhere a stove burns with little smoke, where a window looks out at the sunrise and sunset, where the floor is smooth and clean. He isn't sure, it is again a world he has never known, not a place he misses, somewhere in a dream. Tossing the fragment of his cigarette into the fire, lying



down on his bed, wondering if tomorrow he will be lucky enough to find something to eat beside the limes from the trees on the boulevard where the rich people live. Yes, this thinking, this wondering is not good, it keeps him awake when he should be resting for tomorrow's toil, but he cannot help himself, he knows something needs to grow, but he is unsure of what needs to be planted, unsure of the question needing to be asked. He knows it is important, "But what," muttering to himself as he closes his eyes and tries not to wonder.

**He walks the streets**, constantly examining discarded objects, half rotten oranges rolling in the gutter, broken heads of dolls as black as charcoal, wandering, wondering, with no fixed direction, proceeding where his instincts tell him to proceed. It is impossible to be lost, anywhere is adequate for the moment. He finds a broken handle from a shovel, examines it as potential firewood, picks up a rusted screw, examining its threads and head to determine its usefulness, picking up a small piece of mirror, placing all of them in the cloth bag he carries slung over his shoulder, each making a clicking sound as it hits another fragment before coming to rest at the bottom of the bag. He sits on the curb watching three men building a wall with rough cut bricks, fascinated by their mixing of the cement, turning it over and over again in a steel tub before carrying it in a damp pile, on a flat raised sheet of wood, to the wall, to be troweled onto the top most brick by a heavy-set man, precisely placing the next brick onto the layer of wet cement. Adam watches, peeling, eating a hardly rotten banana he was lucky enough to have found earlier, the wall growing to the height of a man. He wants a cigarette but today the butts are small, trampled, containing more dirt than tobacco. The workmen watch Adam watching but they do not care, to them he of no concern, nothing, no one. He is happy to be of no concern, unimportant to these

men who are building such a straight, solid wall. He thinks, when they go home tonight they can be proud of having built such a fine wall. Later that day, bringing the rope ladder down by pulling on a carefully hidden string, he cannot help but ask, "What wall have I built today?" aware this question is posing a serious problem, not so much that he has not built a solid wall, but the questioning itself, and of course, the answer, he has never built a wall.

**He must go to the sea**, understanding it is necessary, although he prefers the comfortable enclosure of the city, the secure confinement of buildings, the ocean is calling. He can feel the salt winds, he can smell the seaweed shores, the scent drawing him away from the highway, cars racing forever forward, honking, weaving, suddenly stopping and starting, the constant exhaust smell. The wind bringing him the sea, requesting his presence, he has no choice, questioning, "Why is the sea calling?" It is early morning when he sets out, the sun hardly risen, the streets empty except for the few in the market setting up stalls to sell their wares, fruit, knives, pieces of coloured cloth, fish. Picking up a discarded pineapple thrown aside by a vendor, brown on one side, cutting away the rotten half with two quick incisions with his shape knife, sitting under a tree, trimming the rough shell, eating the over ripened fruit, wiping the excess juice from his fingers to his pants. Setting out again, directly, not wandering as is his usual practice, through the city to the sea. When he arrives, the sand is already hot, but not uncomfortable to his hardened feet. Staring at the waves, rough, not understanding why he is here, only that he has been asked, but there is nothing here, the sandy beach stretching in both directions, to the left ending in a steep hill, to the right disappearing around a bend. The salt taste on his tongue, the waves reaching his

knees, wetting the edges of his cut off pants. It isn't that he expected anything to be here, a token, a marker to tell him why. He sits on a log just back from the water's edge, a few bathers carefully enter the rough waves, others on the beach, a few under colourful umbrellas, a few lying on long towels and wooden cots. An old man is casting a fishing line out as far as possible into the water, trying, the wind blowing the hook and bait back onto the shore. Adam has a small cigarette butt found on the way, but the wind is too strong to allow the use of his lighter. A pelican dives and emerges from the water with a fish in its beak, a surfer falls from her board at the edge of the shore as the wind catches her board and throws it over her head. Is this why he is here, to watch, to inhale the salt air, to sink his feet in the sand? He cannot answer. It is not possible to sit here all day, the sun is directly overhead, he has no water. He stands, walks a few steps to the right, turns, walks a few steps to the left, half turning away, his back to the sea, "Yes," he says to the sea, turning to face the waves, "what is it you want from me?" He has no patience. The sea is telling him something, but what? The wind chewing at the water, the waves beating against the sand, yes, it is telling him, "Beware?" Yes. The sand and water slapping his face. "It is coming," this is what it is telling him, it will be here soon, you have time but "it will be soon."

Walking away from the shore, climbing the road, feeling the wind slapping at his legs, pushing at his back, "The sea is warning me, beware, be afraid, it is coming?"

**Climbing the ladder**, the rope shaking, his feet against the knots, swaying with each gust of wind, climbing. The stench of rotting seaweed, the ocean choking his breath. A few drops of rain. "I have no time." Cleaning the back corner, stacking anything with any weight and size in front of the corner, upturning the bed, a door, standing it on its long edge, supported by his chair and table, a fragile wall, the stove pushed to the opposite corner, throwing a sheet of plastic over the edge of his wall. "At least for now I am dry." Huddling inside his thin blanket, the bite of wind and rain, howling, falling in cutting sheets. Lifting his head to stare through the plastic at the highway, cars sliding sideways, in circles, stalled and abandoned, pushed at every angle against the guardrail. Using both hands to hold the plastic sheet, sitting on it, all his strength will not be enough. What could he have done to prepare, what could he have built without tools and materials in such a short time to protect himself from nature's force? The plastic sheet flying from his aching fingers, blown out of sight, the rain piercing his face, no choice but to tuck his lowered head between raised knees, close his eyes. Completely wet, his ragged clothing offering no protection, a stream of water flowing down the wall, flooding over his huddled body, he tries to imagine himself somewhere else. "Perhaps this storm is only a wave breaking on the

beach,” but it is cold, the wind sharp, the rain sustained. His stove blown from its corner, rolling down the roof, falling into the street. The rain too dense to see anything but rain. A car rolls off the highway hitting the ground not far from his ladder. “At least it did not burst into flames. This will not be over soon.” Facing the wall, pushing into the corner, his back to the wind, his bed like a knife flying from the roof, slicing into two cars, tossed again into the air. Crouching deeper into himself, pulling in his legs, arms across his chest, whatever barrier he had hastily created, gone, thrown, disappearing into the whirlwind, flying debris hitting the wall beside him, rolling, carried away.



**Through the night, the hurricane tears** and thrashes his home, the city, only in the morning, as the sun begins to rise, relinquishing its strength. Topsy-Turvey, Adam has heard this word before, it is obvious what it means, he always thought of it as a child's word, but now, lifting his head, relaxing his hands from his knees, it is not childish. He has huddled for ten hours believing, at any moment, he will be caught up, tossed to the sidewalk below, thrown to the highway, carried in the air to the sea, or a metal pole, a spear would be flung into his chest, or one of the cars, carried in the air, landing in flames. Looking away from the wall, hardly able to straighten his body, painfully unwinding the muscles locked into themselves, locked against the deluge. Shivering, wanting the sun, slowly standing, staring at the chaos stretching everywhere. Yes, "Topsy-turvy," the ruins, cars scattered, one leaning against the wall below, trees pointing downward, ripped from the earth, shot like arrows into walls, buildings without roofs, walls crumbling in on themselves. Standing at the edge of what was his home, he sees destruction's nightmare, trying to understand what remains, what is rubble and what is about to collapse, his arms around his chest, the sun slowly rising above the horizon. A living witness of what the storm has consumed, dazed, the ruins, this tearing of the earth, not comprehending what he will do,

only the necessity of survival, the wonder of being alive. Almost naked, tatters of clothing barely covering his loins, he walks, stumbles over stones, under a collapsed wall, one building on top of itself, an arm protruding from the rubble, an open hand with fingers fallen, broken trees, cars on their sides, a young girl digging in a mound that was once an apartment building, frantic, screaming, longing the stones to reveal the smallest breath of life. A man frozen, standing, staring into nothing or where he once lived, silent, still, the whimper of a woman holding a lifeless baby in her arms. He sits, watching, listening to a boy calling his father's name, trying to climb the steep slope of concrete, fragments, rubble, once his home. A shrill, irritating creaking of half walls, holding for the moment, articulating their imminent collapse. The buildings screaming under the twisted tension of collapse, so intense, so loud, he clasps his hands over his ears, pushing against the sound. A wall, unable to hold any longer, falling, first a few bricks, then the wall, the building exploding inward, then silence.

**A scratching, a pounding,** he hears both, leaning into the sound, listening, not a pounding, yes, a pounding, a scratching, a voice. "What is it saying? Where? Is it 'Help'? 'Here'?" Hearing it, clearly, it is his name, "Adam," silent, listening, to the right, "just behind," yes, "Adam," clearly, but from where? Now a pounding, no voice, now silence, then again, his name, without a doubt there "In that pile of stone and wood, Adam." Closing his eyes, listening, walking quietly forward, standing, listening, sliding his feet upward, slowly ascending, broken concrete sharp against his bare feet, sitting on a wooden plank, listening. "Yes, someone is buried here asking me, asking Adam for help. How do they know me? How can they see to call my name? Buried, I can hardly hear, how can I find them?" Carefully climbing a few steps higher in the loose pile of bricks, once a small building. "Why are they calling on me to help. It is only a voice. No one is trapped. A spirit, like the sea, calling me." The clear sound of pounding. "Someone is hitting a rock against a rock." He understands, no longer confused, knows he is being called and cannot deny the demand to help, someone is buried, trapped, without his aid will certainly perish. A steady beating, he hears it, feels it in his legs, a pounding, one stone against another, regular, like a heart beat but louder, no, more like the rhythm of a drummer, slapping a dry

stone, again and again. Pressing his ear against the broken ground, against a flat slab of concrete, not sure, "To the right? to the left?" or just below his ear. Again, his name, over and over again called out from the underground, "Here" he shouts, his throat rough, calling again "here, here, here," followed by silence, listening, the pounding returning, now not a continual beat but broken, one two three, silence, one two three, silence. "Over there," taking two steps to the right, slightly up the slope, picking up a broken metal pipe, hitting it sharply against the broken concrete ground, hitting it again, imitating the rhythm he has been hearing, one two three, answered from below ground by one two three. One two three four to which he answers one two three four, communicating, "At least now they know I am here." He shouts at the ground, "Here." Silence. Hitting his rod twice against the stone. Listening. The answer, two beats. Pressing his ear to the ground, searching for the source of the sound, "From below," he can feel the vibrations of each buried strike, hitting the ground once with his pole to be answered by a single strike from below. Looking to the street, there is no one to help. Two men, bleeding, sitting on the ground holding each other, at their feet a body lying with a small bloody rag covering the face, no one to help. Picking up a grey brick, rolling it down the incline, picking up another, another, throwing them

aside, over and over again, digging carefully so each rock removed does not loosen another, demanding he create not a hole but a wide circle. He is tired, his body aching from last night's vigil against the hurricane, his hands already bleeding, grey dust and blood like gloves, but useless, covering his hands. Sitting, resting, he can hear the faint sound of his name being called as though whoever is trapped below knows Adam is there to save them. Bending, kneeling on the ground, he drinks from a puddle of sandy water, spitting out small grains before drinking again. The sun is directly overhead, midday, but it is not the heat that bothers him, rather his body, the neck, shoulders, bruised and exhausted and he is unsure that digging here will reveal a person hidden below. Pounding the ground with his steel rod, a response, louder, closer, the vibrations in the stones more intense, with this hope he continues, using his rod to pry and roll larger rocks, rolling those he cannot lift, clearing away the smaller bricks with his hands. It isn't until sunset, when he is thinking, "No longer can I go on," when picking up a jagged concrete block he sees a scrap, a corner of bright blue cloth. Digging, clearing away the dirt and rock and mud, supported between two cross beams and a bent metal bar, in a hollow pocket, an unconscious body. Pulling slowly, first an arm, a leg, the other leg, pulling the body out of the hole. Lying it on the

ground. "Alive?" Resting his ear against a bare chest, listening, faintly, a heartbeat, "Alive." Cupping water from a nearby puddle, carefully carrying it to lips covered in fragments of concrete and dust. Carefully cleaning them with wet fingers, bringing a few drops to parted lips. Returning with another handful of water, a cough as the water enters the throat, "Alive," resting his hand behind the head, the cupped hand of water slowly dripping into a welcoming mouth. Eyes looking up at this almost naked man, Adam, kneeling, thinking, "A wonder of nature." Adam looks into questioning eyes, both intense and tired. With Adam's help, they are able to lift their head and raise their back.

Adam is the first to speak, asking, "How do you know my name?" There is no answer, the question is not understood, "You were calling my name, over and over again, I heard you call out Adam, Adam."

Pushing forward, sitting, Adam kneeling, his head slightly turned, the answer, broken, from dry, cracked lips, "I did not...know...your name, until now. Adam. . . Adam. . .thank-you, thank-you for finding me."

"But you called my name. I heard it clearly. It drew me here, to you, to dig."

Again, not understanding, silent, hardly able to sit upright, hands pressing against the ground for support, “Thank-you, thank-you,” eyes closing.

Adam, in silence, staring, for the first time realizing, the person he has rescued is a young girl. “Why was she calling me? Was she calling my name, maybe I misheard, it was not Adam but a cry of pain?” Helping to place her head on his leg, he lies down, diagonally, stretching out on the rough ground, exhausted, falling asleep with her.

**At dawn** Adam wakes to find her standing over him, examining his body from head to toe, toe to head. Rising, standing, facing her, they are so much alike, except for his bearded face, they are mirror images. He of her, she of him. Of equal height, slim, muscular, smooth, hairless skin, each staring into dark eyes, black curly hair, bodies covered in a thin layer of earth, ripped and soiled cloth tied at the waist, mouths dry, cracked, craving water, expressionless.

“What is your name?” Adam asks as he slowly sits on a small rock, looking up at her for an answer.

“Ev, I am called Ev.”

His arm sweeping through a semi-circle, “Is this where you live?”

“No, not here. I was on my way home when the storm suddenly appeared. It was so strong, the wind, I couldn’t walk. I took refuge here and then it fell, the building fell.”



**It is decided**, she will take Adam to where she lives, where there might be desperately needed water and food, hopefully it will still be standing, her parents there to welcome her safely home. Each taking one more mouthful of water from a hollow in the rubble before setting out. Staggering, walking. There is no one on the streets, a few dogs running in and out of fallen buildings.

“Is it far?”

“Yes.”

The road often blocked by cars facing in every direction, trucks turned on their side, upside down, sheets of metal, wooden poles, garbage of everyday life, chairs, tables, dishes, pots and pans. In the city the landscape is of damaged, destroyed builds but the further they walk from the center, in the city a few trees blocked their way, now it is uprooted nature, a forest swept onto the road. The hurricane bringing the mountain, sliding it on mass to cover the asphalt with earth, trees, bush, the forest reclaiming the road. A fallen orange tree providing them with temporary respite. Sitting on the tree’s trunk, reaching out to easily take the fruit, with the yellow birds, sitting, eating, peeling a second orange, Adam smiles.

**The bruises on their bodies** a dark purple, their hands, arms, chest, deeply scratched, the juice stinging their fingers. She gets to her feet, pointing, declaring, "It is over the next hill." It is not easy cutting through the brush with only their hands, each step threatened by dense roots pushed to the surface when the jungle slid to reclaim the road. Adam following, she leads over the crest of a hill, hoping her home still stands. It is dark as they descend toward a small building barely discernable in the distance. Almost at the house she begins to run, excited her home still stands, running to find her people, are they waiting, are they alive, opening the door, tragedy, disaster, lying on the floor, her mother, her father, her brother, their bodies stretched out, their faces barely covered by scraps of cloth, corpses.

**A woman's voice from the shadows** shouting, "Who are you?" suddenly rising to her feet, "What do you want?" Ev silent, staring at the three bodies, holding her hand over her mouth, crying. The woman understands, stepping out of the shadows, "Is this your family?" Ev holding her father's head in her hands, weeping. "We found them outside and carried them here. I am sorry, sorry we could not cover their faces." Adam a silhouette in the open door.

"Yes, we brought them in from the sun," an elderly man steps from the shadows, "You are daughter and the son?"

Adam coughs out a low, "No."

Ev beyond speech, pressing her cheek against her mother's face, lifting her brother's hand to her lips. The room devastated from the flooding and receding water. Adam picking up a water-logged book, straightening a wooden chair, sitting, watching the woman, the man, the bodies, Ev stretching out on the floor, lying with her family as one of the dead.

The old woman to Adam, "Our house is destroyed. We had nowhere to go and when we saw this house was still standing and we saw they are dead, we thought, my father and I, we can stay here, safe."

Adam does not answer, sitting holding the heavy book, Ev hardly present.

“We have some food,” the old man interjects as though to convince Adam, “yes, we have vegetables and a small chicken we found crushed by a tree.”

The old woman, “So, if you would like some of our stewed chicken, you both look like you could use some.”

**Adam eats,** Ev falls asleep, pressing between her mother and father, holding her brother's hand. The woman and the old man lying on the remains of the bed, a frame, no mattress, also fall asleep. Adam thinking, "This is not a home but a place of the dead, of darkness, a cemetery." In the morning two shovels are found in the back shed. Holding a shovel in his hands, Adam, head lowered, looking down the wood handle to the blade, wondering, what is he doing here with this instrument, why, how does he possess this tool. Just a night before it would have been more useful in saving Ev's life, why does he clutch it now. Ev saved by the effort of his bare hands clawing at the rock and concrete, with this tool he is being asked to again dig, this time not to rescue, rather bury the bodies of those who have succumbed to the storm. Standing with bowed head, staring at the ground, at his bare, scarred feet. The others are outside struggling to load the bodies onto a wooden cart, the three of them carrying, first Ev's mother, gently, as though not to hurt what can no longer feel the warmth of Ev's hand supporting her head, lifted, to be placed at the far end of the cart, then her father's body lifted, slid on the rough wood to lie beside the woman with whom he has spent his life, his last desperate breath as the waters rushed into their home, ruthlessly consuming them together, then her brother lifted and placed

on the cart beside his mother. Adam does not help, stands at the door frame, neither inside or outside, watching, the three struggling with the inert bodies. He wants nothing to do with death, his energy has been drained from his body, nothing remaining for these rituals. As the three pull and push the loaded cart along the road, he sits on the steps of the house, holding his shovel, frozen. Ev, leaves the cart, turning back, walks to Adam, without speaking, taking the shovel from his hands, returns to the cart, placing the shovel between her mother and father, continues, pulling the cart forward to the cemetery. Allowing his body to slide to the ground, Adam closes his eyes and drifts. Not until it is dark does he wake to find Ev sitting beside him. Neither uttering a word, sitting on the steps beside each other, taking her hand in his hand, together through the night. In the morning, finding clear water, he fills a cup, brings it to Ev, gently holding it to her mouth while she drinks. They spend the day arranging, cleaning, carrying broken fragments of furniture to a pit, emptying the house, discarding the damaged furniture, relics of a family who once lived their lives here. Death is not a topic they need discuss, it is for them a presence inevitably felt.

**Resembling those who perished** by the ruthless will of nature, their bodies coated with the rubble of collapse, Adam takes Ev's hand, leads her down the hill behind the house to a river. Removing the remaining remnants of their tattered clothing, washing the fragments of the fallen city from their bodies, lying on their backs, naked, beside the river, looking up through the branches of tall trees, speaking for the first time since Ev buried her family. In a low barely audible voice, "I miss my mother, my father, most I miss my brother. My father was old, my mother took care of him. She too was worn out. Moving slowly, sometimes shaking, to bring my father food as he lay in bed. Each step an effort. But my brother, he was alive, always smiling, always helping as much as he could, helping my mother make the soup, cleaning the soiled clothing of my father. I miss my brother. My heart hurts."

Without answering, Adam rises, walks a few paces, reaches up and removes two apples from a tree, handing one to Ev, sitting down beside her, eating together.

"You should return to your home, it is where you belong."

"And where do you belong?" Ev asks staring into the darkness of Adam's eyes.

“With you,” again taking her hand, helping her to her feet, naked they walk back up the hill.

“It will not be easy,” she says, “to live here without my brother, my father and mother.”

Adam lowers his head.



**In a metal trunk that survived the storm**, they find clothing, although damp, once dried outside in the sun, suitable. Dressed, together they walk down the hill toward the city in search of food, to witness the hand of the storm. It is what they expected, some houses are still standing, some have fallen, trees, branches resting on collapsed roofs, men, women in ripped clothing searching in the rubble. It is eerily silent, no one is talking. They too do not speak, walking, looking, dazed by the extent of the destruction, it will be work to survive. In the central square a few men and women in yellow vests are handing out bottles of water and packages of food to anyone who approaches. They receive a bottle of water and a package of food. Sitting on the floor of their kitchen, they eat and drink. The future is here, the past has disappeared with the storm. Together, taking pieces of torn clothing, they make a bed in a protected corner of the room, lay down beside each other, their bodies touching but not embracing, passing into sleep. In the morning rising together they eat what little food remains of their packages, leave together in search of more food, water and whatever they can hope to find to make their lives possible. Adam searches in a ravine where most of the trees have been ripped from the ground, the roots of one tree tangled in the branches of another. On some, fruit still clings. Walking the splintered trunks,

retrieving a lemon, a few oranges, a green pineapple, not much but enough to supplement what Ev is given in town by the yellow vested aid workers. The river water is muddy, cluttered with the bodies of dead animals, emitting an odour of death, Adam although tempted, knows it cannot be taken. He finds a thin chicken wandering aimlessly, easily caught, bringing it home. Ev convinces him to wait before he kills it, "Possibly it will produce eggs." Again they clean the debris from inside the house and the area in the rear where Adam builds a small enclosure for the chicken. From a secret hiding place in the wall, Ev removes a few bills, drying them like laundry on a thin wire line constructed above their bed. Tomorrow she will take the money and try to buy goods and food in one or two of the shops that have reopened. For the moment they will live on what little they have scavenged, hoping tomorrow will be more rewarding. Sitting on the floor eating, talking as though life is normal, a young couple curious about each other's past and possible future. Ev hears Adam has little memory of his parents and what is called a childhood. He learned from his father, life is a toil to be endured without complaint, from his mother he learned, pleasure is possible but not a state to be expected. Adam hears that Ev was a member of a tight family who lived an easy life, educated, attending classes at the university, studied music, knows

how to play several musical instruments including the piano, clarinet and violin. She points out the piano pushed against the wall opposite their bed. Adam tries to image her playing the piano. She tells him she will play for him when it dries out, he can almost see her playing but isn't sure what sound the piano will make. They go to sleep at dark holding each other, sleep until the sun wakes Adam, lying as still as possible, breathing with shallow breaths, staring at Ev, thinking, "She is beautiful, the most beautiful," in silence until she too wakes. Her eyes opening to the smile on his face, she embraces him tightly, he embraces her.

He tells her, "I have never been with a woman before."

"I have never been with a man."

Slowly, their lips touching, gently, bodies moving together, a graceful dance of love, he enters her. Their day is spent together as they find what they need in the city to survive for another day, neither of them speaking, both knowing where they need to go, what they need to accomplish together. It is no longer a struggle but mutual pleasure, both understand this is the beginning.

**Adam's development was unusually quick** and easy, Ev teaching him to read, write, later the subtleties of playing the flute, which he took to so quickly, she suspected he had played before, able almost instantly to play a simple melody, within weeks complex compositions. With much effort, after searching through the ruined city for tools, Adam is able to rebuild the house, including kitchen and a separate room as a bedroom. It turned out, Ev's father had anticipated his own demise, setting out funds at a downtown bank which they are able to draw upon, not a great amount of money, enough for their needs and more than Adam has ever dreamt of, for not just himself, but within a year his family, Ev and a baby boy. As efficiently as he learned to play the flute, read, as he managed to find what he needed in the city, he quickly demonstrates a skill at managing money, finding himself unexpectedly good in the world of trade. He ventures out into remote villages, for pennies, acquired wooden sculptures carved to represent local animals and totem figures. Personally, he likes works of birds rendered to represent members of local clans and their local deities, these he buys and sells to local merchants, who in turn, sell them to tourists. It is not long before his objects are noticed by a friendly merchant, who knows another merchant who sells objects of art. Adam does not understand why these small wooden carvings are

being called art, he tries, and it is Ev who explains, “As much as these wooden carving are for the local makers, personal expressions of their clans and their personal deities, for the outside world, these qualities are of little importance. What sets them aside is the quality of their rendering, not merely their accurate representation of local animals, but how they are uniquely carved, how sometimes the less accurately represented the more they are artistic.” Adam intuitively finds himself acquiring the figures which Ev calls abstract.

“Adam you are attracted to the carvings closer to the gods than to the human world.”

“Is this why, yesterday, the merchant who bought ten large carvings, called them art?”

Ev smiling, “Yes, like the pieces I play on the piano are works of art.”

With this lesson in mind, Adam returns from his next buying expedition with many large and small abstract carvings, taking them directly to a private art gallery, selling them for what he considers a fortune, calling them not trinkets for tourists, rather, objects of art. It isn't long, possibly, four or five more trips, to further removed towns and villages, before Adam earns enough money to build a house for his

family in the center of the city. He buys thick and colourful books on art, in the evening, while the baby sleeps, he and Ev read and discuss what they see reproduced. He finds himself particularly attracted to what is referred to as prehistoric art and to modern art, understanding intuitively the influences of what is called naïve art on modern artistic production. Now, when he goes on buying expeditions, he carefully selects works that made reference to both ancient, so-called primitive notions, and the current moment of the world in which he and the carver live. The works he acquires expands from fine wood carvings, to unrefined sculptures, often fabricated from wood fragments, the wooden ruins of the hurricanes that have ravished the area over the years. He has no interest in handicraft products, such as simple decorated bowls and other domestic utilities, he finds these attempts contrived, created as decorations to supply tourists, woven work, baskets, blankets, of little interest. The sculptures he now acquires, often, after intensive negotiations with the local artist, grow larger in scale and more complex in construction than those he purchased earlier. With little effort he is able to sell these sculptures for larger sums, not just to art dealers, who often give less than their value, who he has learned through experience, after many transactions, not to trust, but directly to collectors, who have heard of this man who is able

to find these unusual sculptures, of this man, Adam. A frequent buyer is a tall thin man from France who has taken a liking to Adam. They met often for lunch in a fancy restaurant, over food exotic to Adam's simple taste, negotiating for inordinate sums for particularly large, unusual sculptures. Adam has become adept at negotiating, never settling on the original, or the second, or even the third sum offered, amiable battling, often far into the afternoon, for an amount, only a year before, he could not imagine.

**Within a few years** he and Ev are wealthy, they have a second child, this time a girl, their home is larger and decorated with many sculptures, the best sculptures Adam has kept for himself. He now dresses in expensive suits, has taken up the habit of importing cigarettes from around the globe, Ev dresses in fine silk and linen, the children are taken care of by a nanny who sings to them in three languages, the food they eat is imported, for Adam it is no longer exotic. Under the guidance of the French collector, Adam purchases a large industrial building he transforms into a gallery dedicated to the selling of sculpture. He no longer barter with the local artists from whom he has bought, rather feeling they too should share equally in the profits of their efforts, he often pays double and triple what he paid them in the past. His generosity becomes well known to artists locally and far afield, resulting in many artists saving for him their best sculptures. Known as a welcoming benefactor to be sought out, often an artist will travel a great distance to bring Adam a particular work for which he will gladly pay handsomely. It is an economy of mutual support, both buyer and seller rewarded in mutual trust and respect, the capital exploitative equation of work and surplus value broken, replaced by a capital equation of equal reward. His reputation and wealth grow, as does the artists. One of Adam's favourite artists is a



woman who often visits the gallery bringing work he greatly admires. She is elderly and has about her a confident worldliness, although, she has never travelled more than 100 kilometers from where she was born. She is thin with large hands, strong arms, the result, he thinks, from working hours against the hard wood with knife, chisel, and recently, small electric hand tools. Her voice is deep and she speaks slowly and surely.

Adam who, without reserve, prefers abstraction over representation, rhetorically asks, why her work sometimes presents the natural world in a manner which is both abstract and realistic, "Why does your carving of a bird not look like a bird but an angel with wings?"

"It is not an angel and neither is it a bird. I begin with the idea of a spirit," looking Adam directly in the eyes, "and I try to let it fly as spirits fly. What it ends up being, I am not sure. This is what I like and what I consider my calling, to give life to what has never existed."

"If you were to carve a bird that looks like a bird, very real, would this not be enough?"

She laughs at his question, answering, "If I were to make a bird out of my wood it would not be a living, but a dead bird, a work without

life, merely my pathetic attempt to play god, to give life to what is only dead wood.”

“But if I see the bird in your carved bird, would I not be reminded of the living bird, would it not appear more alive the closer you are to carving a shape that reminds me of a real bird?”

“It would be false life, a dead animal sitting lifeless in your hands.”

“So, by carving not a bird but the spirit of the bird you are making sculpture that is more than the bird, is somehow closer to being alive?”

“I think you are beginning to understand. Nature is often too beautiful and wonderful, how can I ever hope to capture it by my hands. By necessity, I try to capture not the sight one sees when they witness this magnificent bird, but as I said, its essence, the spirit of the bird. Can you imagine if arrogantly I tried with my knife to carve a single feather of the bird, I could spend days carving intricately each fiber of the feather, maybe even spending weeks with magnifying glass and precise tools trying to carve a single feather. In the end, if I am successful, I will have made a delicate, intricate wooden feather, beautiful to see and touch, but it will not be a bird’s feather, rather my idea of nature’s feather, a feather made by an old woman who has

the arrogance to image she can make something as wonderful as a single bird feather.”

“So, you know from the beginning that any effort, great or small, you make to carve a true rendering of anything, a snake, a horse, a man, a woman, is doomed to failure?”

“Yes, I am merely an artist not a maker of nature. I, in all humility, possess only the remote possibility of giving you the spirit of nature. Beginning with the knowledge of this impossibility, I carve freely, outside the possibility of creating anything as beautiful or ugly as is contained in nature. By not trying to do the impossible, I am free to give you something, not a failed imitation, I am not sure what, but something other.”

“I have read in many books the word, abstracting.”

“I have also heard that word, abstract, but I am not concerned with terms from books, they too are arrogant, trying to describe what I have created, trying in words to represent what is real, much like the failure of trying to represent nature in my carving, feeble, destined to failure.”

“So, when I speak about your carving, what am I to say?”

“Nothing. Hold it in your eyes, in your hands, see it, feel it, but do not insult the carving by turning it into words.” Adam is silent, he has no response. She smiles at this silence and says, “Again, you are beginning to understand.”

The next day he sells one of her works for a great deal of money, when the man who buys the sculpture asks Adam if it has a title, Adam answers in the negative, slowly shaking his head. When the old woman returns the next month to Adam’s gallery, he asks why she does not title her work?

“They are wood not words.”

“But of course, they are wood.”

“What more do we need to know other than my eyes and heart are speaking.”

“I need to know you carved the wood. That it is your heart that brought life from nothing.”

“It is wood. I try and make the wood mine, to speak for me. When the wood possesses me, I do not matter, no longer of any important.”

“But it is you who makes the wood speak, only you, therefore you are

not just important, you are the sculpture. If someone else carved the same piece of wood, it would be a different sculpture, I would see and feel differently. Only you can make the sculpture you brought to me today.”

Laughing, “For someone else’s work you would not have paid so handsomely”

“It is your voice I want to hear, not someone else’s.”

“No, if from the beginning I had sent my nephew and he told you he had made this piece, you would not know me, or care about me. You would venerate my nephew as the creator?”

“I am not sure, maybe you are right, the work first. The creator a mere shadow of the sculpture.”

“The carving speaking, its voice clear without the dotting mother.”

“When I read the art books, I feel so innocent, there are so many names. Ev says it will take time. Each picture has the name of the artist written below and the year it was created. I notice in some of the older works, under the picture of the sculpture, there is a date but no artist’s name. Many of these works speak more deeply to me than

those they refer to as masterpieces. Sometimes I see a small figure, usually of metal, or stone, the book refers to its creation as before the marking of time, and usually little more is said. I stare at it on the printed page, I want to hold it in my hands, turn it every way to see it clearly.”

“It is the stone speaking to you. After all the years it is still alive even in a photograph. What the maker was saying long ago still speaks and is heard.”

As she is leaving, Adam asks if he will see her soon, she turns, nods her head, “Yes, you are learning and have much more to learn. I will think of you when I am carving my next sculpture.”

**Adam is an excellent trader**, financially successful, but trade is of less importance than Ev and the children, family, the centre of his life. It is something he never imagined, a family, he hardly had one, by thirteen escaping the fighting of his father and brothers, off to the streets of the city with the clothing on his body, a small sharp knife, it could not be worse than the battle at home. Putting his daughter to bed, Adam is not sure what story to tell to lure her to sleep. He could tell her how he rescued her mother, or tell how hard it is to hunt small animals in the city for food, or he could tell about the first time he heard Ev play the piano, how complex, how sweet. He does not want to read nursery rhymes that mean nothing, rather wants to teach, to tell her stories about life, too soon the enfant will be a young girl who will need to see the world as it is, no dreams of fancy. He still has his knife, in just a few years he imagines passing it to his son, explaining the knife is his history, a tool he used to build, a weapon to defend oneself. Tonight, Adam has promised he will play the flute while Ev plays the piano composition she has just completed. Sitting in his living room, reading about ancient worlds, he images himself in the thick forest where leopards stalk and monkeys chase each other in low hanging branches. He sees himself in an ancient Egyptian city walking the sandy pathways, imagines he is

a craftsman carving with hammer and chisel in stone, remembering the words of the old woman, telling him she is not important, what she carves is of importance. Looking at the images of these ancient carvings, imagining he is one of the men who worked for the Pharaoh to immortalize his rule. Taking a magnifying glass from a drawer in his desk, he carefully examines the illustration of a statue, of a sharp line carved to represent a leg, a few strokes to make a mark that will last in time. He examines a small totem carved in wood by a people who lived in a jungle, taking his thoughts to the old woman, seeing her spirit in the figure, feeling in the totem the place from which he came. In another sculpture, it could be his grandfather he sees running, the fragment of a weapon, a simple wooden club in his raised hand. It is his mother bending at the waist, looking down, possibly over a simple fire, a figure from Polynesia, a realistic Renaissance stone depiction of a Greek goddess. The sculptures he finds haunting, ever present, are those telling universal stories, containing ideas of a narrative not just about himself, but all those who have lived, live and will live. They tell his story. He understands from these sculptures, he is one of many. Before he met Ev, he survived by his wits like a lone animal, now he sees himself as part of, one in so many, in a time beyond measurement. He is a boy walking the streets of ancient Greece, up a



hill, passing by a temple, a crowd in the square trading goods, a boy sitting, watching a group of men and women debate about what he thinks is an argument about nothing. It was Ev who taught him to see himself as another person in history, not alone, tucking his son into bed, or kissing his daughter lightly on the forehead. Another man, no different than the billions of men and women who lived before, now live with him, will live when he is gone. He now understands, when he freed Ev from the ruins, he was bringing himself into history, when he turns the pages of art history books he is of importance, but not, merely one more, one more.

**When the old woman visits**, he is again ready to question. Her appearance in a bright yellow dress is sunshine in his grey world of confusion. He is now her pupil, she knows he is learning, she is his teacher. At first, it was Ev's books that brought him to questioning, but the true questioning began in the enigma of the old woman's sculptures, in the understanding of her own disappearance, in her self-engagement in the paradox of selflessness. The more he understands her disappearance the more he understands her presence.

"Why, when I see your work, am I struck? A feeling, when I look, I feel my heart. What I see is beautiful."

"It is not that my works are beautiful, often they are ragged, not right, but at the same time they are beautiful. I chip at the wood, playing with the shape and find what I am making as I make it. Sometimes I make what I want but sometimes it falls apart and I discard it to the fire. Failed carvings make excellent kindling. But sometimes, I know it works. I can't tell you why but I know. Part of the work is in knowing when the heart and eye are working together to give life to the wood. When I know a work is done, it fills my heart." She stands silently staring at Adam, an upturned half smile, her eyes alive, a playfulness in her continued silence. Slowly unwrapping her new work.

Adam wondering, "Does she makes each piece a size she can carry herself?" The sculpture reaches from the floor to her waist, wrapped to protect its contents, each piece of string and cloth removed slowly by her nimble fingers. Her latest sculpture possesses the quality about which they have spoken. Adam is moved, it is as she said, a work about Adam, not a literal representation but a subtle sculpture containing an essential presence of the person.

"Do you see yourself?" she asks gesturing between Adam and the work, as though each time she waves her hand, from one to the other, she is tying them together.

He sees himself instantly. "And it is more than me."

"Yes, of course, no man is alone but one in a large clan."

"Yes, yes, if I could ask you one question, I would be that answer."

"I see you as myself."

"So, this sculpture is also you? But you have told me many times you are of no importance."

"No, it is not me, and is not you, but us and many more."

“And will the next work you bring me, will it also be about me, or is one enough?”

“You will have to wait. I cannot be certain of what might be, and it is bad luck to speak what might be.”

The sculpture is not a representation of Adam, there is no head of the man in the sculpture, it is a portrait without a face. Ev laughs when he tells her it is his portrait. “Yes,” she jokes, “a complex man of the earth.”

He knows he cannot sell this work, it would be like selling part of himself, wondering, “How can she sell a part of herself?” Placing it in his living quarters, away from the gallery, in his study on a small plinth, set against a full-length mirror, where he can study the back and front simultaneously in a reflection of himself.

**Growing older**, her back starting to bend, legs wobbly, the old woman visits less often, bringing less knowledge, fewer works. On her last visit, she asked Adam if he can help in her studio, her nephew, who has been a great help, has moved with his family to another city. "If you have the time, spend some days, or even mornings, with me working the wood?" Adam tells her he will gladly hire an artisan skilled in woodworking to help but she refuses, "No one but you Adam. I know you have no skill with wood, but this is an advantage, I will teach you to be my hands, it will be as though I am still the maker."

The first day at her studio Adam feels lost, out of place, standing to one side or seated in a soft chair watching her work. "Can I help?"

"No, I will tell you when you are ready to help."

He watches as she strokes a piece of wood, lovingly, as though it is a child, moving her knife into a small crevice to remove the smallest chip. He watches as she rests, studying what she has done until she suddenly moves, swiftly, makes a small change. He watches as she lifts pieces of wood too heavy for old hands and arms, trembling under the weight, but still, she refuses to allow Adam to help.

**He arrives early**, is offered coffee and fruit, eating together, they do not talk, her eyes far away. “Is she thinking, imaging how her sculptures might appear, is she preparing, or just an old lady tired from a restless night of small pains? When ready she will begin another day. I will study, the more I watch, for not hours, sometimes days, her working over a detail I can barely see. The more I learn, the more I will learn.”

After the first month, she produces only one work. Adam growing impatient with her pondering, her painful slowness, declaring one morning, “I can’t sit any longer watching you struggle, your hands and arms are fragile, I can see the pain on your face as you cut even the smallest piece of wood. Let me help!”

“You are right but I have a rule, whoever is to help me must watch as I make three, or even four sculptures.

“But it’s a rule made when you were younger, when you could make three or four in the time I now take to make one. I am not your nephew, naïve to your work, I known your work, carefully studied, see what you see.”

For the next sculpture Adam is allowed to advance in his apprenticeship,

allowed to touch the materials, to bring her pieces of wood, to hold them in place, balanced in the air to show how it might appear in the final construction, but he is not allowed to touch the wood with any tool, even when it is the most difficult of tasks, causing her the greatest physical pain. He is delighted to no longer be held at a distance, closer, almost inside the work, but he is still refused the privilege of marking, of cutting the wood.

A new sculpture is completed in three weeks, and of course he cannot but ask, "Am I now not ready? I have watched. More important, I understand. I know how your fingers function, the manner in which you hold the tool, how you position the wood."

"Something speaks to me from the wood, it tells me how it should be cut. After so many years the wood and I have come to an understanding. I am fearful it will not be the same if I allow you to cut the wood."

"But I will merely be your hands, it will still be your heart and mind making the sculpture. I will be your sharp tool. Didn't you once lecture me that you are of no importance, what matters is the sculpture. If so, let me be your hands."

"I like you as the 'sharp tool,' but only as I direct your hands. Alright,

I will allow you only because I am weak. I will allow you to cut the wood. But I insist, even if you see the wood splitting, say nothing, do not question my instructions. I see what I see. You are only to see what I see.”

No longer is Adam passive, now allowed to enter the sculpture. The cuts he makes, the placement of the parts, how and where, she slowly, carefully shows him, placing her hand over his hand, moving it gently, guiding. He does not move on his own, she is the operator of the tool, their hands, moving as one. It is not easy, he feels clumsy as he tries to place his knife against the wood, to cut, his fingers in the air, too often failure, the sculpture discarded, trying again until it is how she sees it, how it should be. Within weeks she no longer, even lightly, touches his hand, merely a slight nod of chin, or even a small lifting of one eye reassuring him of her approval. He has quickly learned to imitate, execute the movement she would have made. Studying her for that excruciating period before he was allowed to touch the wood, so many hours, how could he not but see, even with eyes closed, how her hands move, how the parts fit together to become sculpture. He is the perfect assistant doing whatever she requests, in the next few months completing many works as the skilled instrument, the obedient tool.



**It is a time of great pleasure.** Satisfied, knowing his work is her work. Adam selling the new sculptures for astronomical amounts, each sale dwarfing the last. The buyers know she is growing frail, each sculpture possibly her last. The money of no consequence, working each day with Adam, partners, in a large room at the back of her house, with a glass wall facing out into a garden. The materials they might need for the next sculpture arranged, but also scattered everywhere, in an abandoned frenzy, so absorbed in their work, order is unimportant, materials flying around the studio in flights of fancy. They sit on opposite sides of the sculpture, facing it and each other, as he builds, she offering him, in the slightest of gestures, approval or disapproval. Working together for slightly more than a year. Eight months ago, her hands became still, each finger in pain, no longer able to build, no longer able to hold the smallest piece or tool. Her presence in the work is not diminished, as she says, "We are partners." These are her sculptures, she is their creator and Adam the assistant who makes her work possible. Looking back at this time in his life, he will remember it as a period of harmony and happiness. In this last year they have created over thirty sculptures. Slow and sure, she is succumbing to what can only be called aging. The first calamity, aging, where the second is disease, the last, death. Her body no longer

will comply with her will, taking her through many small declines to inability, to inactivity. She knew, when she reluctantly first asked Adam for assistance, the decline would be inevitable and imminent. She possesses no malice, she never utters a rude remark even when the sculpture collapses under Adam's clumsy hands. Accepting her disappearance with an equilibrium paralleling her life, possessing an elegant balance. Slowly, her sharp eyes becoming cloudy, her trust in Adam becoming clear, he no longer needs to be carefully guided, no longer needs instruction, secure he is shaping the vision she is imagining.

As he works, he watches her disappearance. Adam too is disappearing, as he fulfills her vision transforming, becoming her. Her eyes closed while he works, she sleeps in her chair, seldom waking, in the final days, opening her eyes only at the end of the day, to see how Adam has progressed, invariably approving. The lessons she taught now complete, her wish, not to be present in the sculpture, fulfilled in this middle-aged man, who can now be trusted, to take up the task of creating her sculptures. Adam is aware he has earned her confidence. When she brought him out of his place of business, placed him in the studio with her, he was unsure he would be successful as the assistant, able to see her work to the end. It is with pride, Adam envisions

himself the adept student, he has learned, not just her techniques, but the essence of her work. Adam has assuredly become the master.

**Adam organizes a quiet funeral**, her body put to rest by his family and her nephew. Adam constructs the casket in her studio, using wood they would have used in her next sculpture. It is a simple coffin, Adam attempting to embed it with the spirit of the woman, adding a gesture she would appreciate, cutting, carving, placing a small talisman across the hollow enclosure, precisely where her eyes, if open, would rest. He plays a short choral on the flute, Ev plays the piano, no one cries, no one is emotional, everyone has known for months. Adam arranges with the nephew, as the sole surviving heir, to take possession of her house and its adjacent studio, asking him if he wants one of her small works, but the nephew says it is not necessary, if she had wanted him to have something, she would have given it to him when she was alive. Adam pays him a fair price for the house and studio, the nephew, content, returns home to his family. Adam and his son clean the studio as Ev and their daughter, visible through the studio's glass wall, play games outside. Adam does not want to touch, to arrange anything in her home, securely locking the door to her house, leaving the only entrance to the studio by the garden door, the house preserved as a shrine, in the dark and silence to gather dust. He sets the studio in order, as he has done many times, stacking the wood, arranging the tools, ready to begin a new work, and this is precisely how he feels, the

inexplicable, strong urge to begin working again. Picking up a piece of wood, he does not ask himself, what would she do with this wood, how would she shape, make this wood into sculpture, an intuitive not a cognitive questioning of how the wood will move. As he fits small pieces into each other, as he performs gesture after gesture, he does not ask himself how she would have proceeded, he merely works, the sculpture taking life in his hands. The first work he completes looks and feels as if she made it, precisely like the sculptures he built for her while she drifted in sleep.

He is not sure how to respond when a collector, seeing the sculpture sitting proudly on a plinth in his gallery, asks, "Is this her latest work?"

Lost, wondering what is the proper answer to a question he would never have asked. Adam cannot answer.

Ev, as they lay awake in bed late one night, asks, if he thinks, perhaps, he is too involved with the old woman's work. She explains to Adam, "Many artists have studios where assistants are hired to help in the fabrication of their sculpture," explaining the long historic tradition, but she is suspicious of how Adam has worked with her, pondering if it is more than a role as assistant, "The manner in which she touched and guided your hand," Ev can't explain further, she is not certain,

only a suspicion.

Adam's turning away, his eyes fixed directly on the sculpture at the far end of the bedroom, "Is this her work? She may no longer be alive but it is her work. Not my work."

The client asking again, "Adam, is this one of her works? Are you sure, completely sure?"

"Yes, of course," Adam forcefully replies.

"Ok, then how much do you want, it must be one of her last works?"

"In her last years she produced many sculptures."

When the transaction is completed, the client departed, Adam sits next to the empty plinth feeling he has sold the sculpture for far less than its worth. "I will double the price of her work now she is a dead artist." He knows there will be a market, many articles have been published, two books are soon to appear, in the last few years glorified for her unique sculptures.

When he tells Ev what he has done, selling her latest sculpture, she asks if he thinks what he has done is ethical, "She did not make the sculpture. What you sold is an imitation of her sculpture. It is in fact

your sculpture.”

“But if I had told the collector, it is my sculpture, he would not have purchased a work by Adam, an unknown artist. You are wrong, it isn’t my sculpture, it’s her’s.”

“Are you saying, you feel she is still here directing you?”

“Not an apparition sitting opposite, but a presence. I know if I attach one piece to another, move it this way or that, it is how she would have done it.”

“So, it is not you who is making these sculptures, but her. You are her complying servant, like a machine once turned on you cannot stop. So, when you sell the sculpture, you believe you are being sincere, that it is her sculpture?”

“Yes. I think, at first, I was not sure, but looking at the work, I see beyond any doubt, it is her sculpture.”

“It will be best if you do not tell anyone you made the sculptures after she died. Working with her in the studio, even with her only watching, providing no instructions, is a great divide between you making the work without her presence. Is it her work or not? while she is alive,

is one question, but when she is no longer alive, the answer is no, it is not her work.” Adam is still not sure. “It doesn’t matter how you feel, that you are creating the work of the dead artist, she is dead and cannot create new work. But, if you are practical, if you are selling it as her work, do so with caution.”



**Adam is confident** he is producing her best sculptures, but Ev knows the truth, the world does not, he is the instrument for her sculpture. The studio, he feels, is where he belongs. Each morning the walk from home is invigorating, exciting, each step taken with eager anticipation, infused with the desire to make the wood come alive. Each sculpture beginning with the selection of wood from the large stock his assistant has purchased, arranged respectfully, ritualistically, leaning the taller pieces against her chair, as though asking her approval, arranging the smaller pieces neatly on the long work table. Sometimes, she indicates her disapproval of a particular length, the wood sliding from her chair to the ground, forcing Adam to search for an appropriate replacement. With each new work, the first few days are a struggle to discover what it might be, sometimes by the end of the first day Adam can envision what it will be, but often, a week of delightful, excruciating trial and error is spent looking for the sculpture. If careful at the beginning, what he sees will be realized, but often Adam pushes against what he is seeing, further, resulting in the work failing, in the custom of the studio, the failed wood not reused, rather burnt in the stove for comfort on cold nights. Most of the time Adam is careful, not beginning until the future sculpture is seen, his production prodigious, averaging over ten new works a year in the first three years. To avoid suspicion,

Ev advises Adam to quietly spread a rumour, “The old woman had secretly stored years of unsold sculptures in a hidden storeroom, works she intended to sell when she became too old to produce new works.”

Adam, in confidence, whispering quietly in his ear, informs a client about the discovery of the secret storeroom, asking him not to tell anyone, “If it becomes known there is a large quantity of her sculpture it could create a buying frenzy that would astronomically increase her prices.” So of course, the rumour spreads, becoming part of the old woman’s mythology. Adam does not immediately raise her prices, but, over the next two years, is able to double, then triple the market value. At auction he witnesses the sale of one of her sculptures for an amount, even for Adam, a wealthy man, enough to live in luxury for two or three lifetimes. Although the money is satisfying, his pleasure is in the making of the sculptures, the completion of each makes his heart race. Standing before the new sculpture, he cannot help but critically admire her accomplishment.

**At first, he only goes into the studio**, never entering her house, leaving it untouched, a sacred place, but one night, working late, he is too tired for the walk home, dusting the blankets, he spends the night on her couch. His sleep is comfortable, refreshed, entering the studio only a few paces away, able with morning energy and clarity to instantly begin to work. After this first night, he often repeats this pattern, finishing a strenuous day of work, he cooks supper in her kitchen, the night in her bed. With respect, he has her clothing, her knick-knacks placed in an archive, the furniture, old and creaky, he gives away and replaces. It is not long before her home becomes his home. At first, Ev would visit, initially, finding spending nights in the old woman's home, "enlightening," as though, as she says, "You are touching the spirit." In time, all presence of the old woman is slowly removed, Ev soon finds her own home more comfortable, his children away studying abroad, more and more nights Adam sleeps alone. Except for his assistant, with whom he hardly speaks, who he never permits near the sculpture, keeping him always at the edge of the studio, he spends his time alone. Ev is only an hour's walk away, he often talks with the children by telephone, but at night, when he cooks his meal, when he wakes in the morning, when he works, the only voice he hears is his own, alone, the sculpture talks to him, but it is

only wood, his own thoughts, an echo. Ev tells him she is happy “He has found peace as a sculptor,” adding with an ironic smile, “but of course, she is the sculptor.”

**Through the glass wall**, Adam watches the assistant cutting the grass and weeds with a hand-held machine, swinging, cutting. Two white birds with thin long necks, follow the assistant, pecking at the insects disturbed as he cuts the long grass. The closer the birds come to his swinging blade, the greater is their feast of insects, playing a dancing game with the sharp blade, one mistake and their thin legs severed, but the assistant trusts the birds' instincts, cutting, swinging the machine in a slow arch through the tall grass. Adam works at a self-imposed distance, allowing the assistant to arrange the studio, organize the wood, allowed to garden as much as he wants, but Adam will not permit him to come close. "To touch, not one piece, not to hold wood in the air for my approval. No. I do not like when he watches, from the back wall, sitting on his stool, smoking, as though taking a break from a hard task. But I know he is watching, watching and learning. He inches closer, inch by inch. He thinks I don't notice. I know what he is doing. I will not allow him." Adam is tempted to mark where the assistant's stool is standing today, to measure tomorrow to know if his suspicion is true, but he has no need of petty surveillance, he is certain. "He is progressing. He wants to understand how I make my sculpture." Perhaps, Adam wonders, if it is the act of hiding his work from the assistant that is the cause of

his insistent curiosity, inflating natural curiosity by hiding the truth. "Who isn't curious when they know something is being hidden?" It is only human, this curiosity created by forcing a distance, fabricating a secret he cannot possibly keep. "Will you become disinterested if I pretend it is nothing, I am not hiding. If I let you come close will you lose interest, become bored with what I am doing over and over again each day? Will you return to sweeping, arranging the studio into a comfortable order?" The next day when Adam arrives his new technique is to hide in the open, placing the assistant's stool across from him, on the opposite side of the sculpture, both equidistant from each other and the sculpture under construction. At first the assistant thinks the placement of his stool is a mistake, positioned not for him but a guest who will arrive shortly, but with a small gesture of his hand, Adam invites him over, indicating he may sit on the stool. "It is alright," he says, again indicating he may sit beside him.

The assistant nervous, Adam has never been friendly before, indoctrinated with Adam's rule of distance, does not sit but stands beside the stool. "If I am to help," he says, "I would rather stand."

'Help', shouting, "No, no, just sit. You can watch but you can't help."

Confused, the assistant asks, "Am I to be paid to watch?"

Emphatically, "Yes." Bewildered, the assistant is not sure if he would rather be doing some concrete chore to be earning his wages. "Sit." Adam says looking away, taking a small piece of wood, placing it accurately in place in the sculpture. The assistant sits as Adam works, he feels him watching, but it is as though Adam is alone. Numerous times during the day the assistant quietly, as though not to disturb Adam, rises and leaves to perform some work in the studio, shortly returning to sit and witness Adam's progress. A pattern is quickly established, the assistant working equally in the studio as the garden, Adam paying no attention to him, the assistant respectful and quiet. Adam has no need to look to the assistant for approval as he would to the old woman, he does not need to acknowledge the assistant's presence, but of course, he knows he is present memorizing his techniques. "What difference can it make if he comes to understand the building of the sculpture, he will never, by merely watching be able to see she is making the sculpture." So, Adam is no longer fearful the assistant will learn as he learned, secure in the knowledge she is no longer present to instruct.

**Adam struggling** with a sculpture, impulsively asks the assistant to hold in place a small piece of wood, stepping back, examining at precisely what angle it should be inserted. Adam does not acknowledge, unperceptive of crossing a dangerous threshold, it feels so natural, he only needs to see from a distance how the placement will affect the overall look and balance of the sculpture, he cannot do it himself, so it is natural to ask the idle assistant for help. It is not an auspicious beginning, the day's work a complete failure, at first there is the problem with the balance, Adam seeing it as central to the sculpture, then the structural failure, one of the elements suddenly collapsing, causing a chain reaction necessitating the throwing of the mess into the fire. It is not the assistant's fault, after the initial task of holding the wood in place for Adam's examination, he is not allowed to assist, but circulating in Adam's thinking, it is the assistant's fault. "He made me nervous. Watching is one thing, but his hands touching the wood. He should not be assisting. She allowed me only when she was weak, impossible for her to move the wood any longer, even then, she did not want me to help." Adam does not trust the man, the assistant's physical traits convincing Adam he is not trustworthy. "His eyes are too shifty, the way he moves his body, sneaking forward, the way his mouth opens so slightly when sitting. Sinister, his eyes,



how he stares without blinking and then suddenly blinking in rapid succession. Is this not a warning of something hidden that will destroy me.”

**The next day, the next day and the next,** the assistant sits watching Adam work. For the first week not a gesture, not a word. The following week, a small piece of wood drops at the assistant's feet, with a gesture of his eyes seeking permission from Adam to retrieve the wood from the floor, which Adam grants, the assistant handing him the wood. By the late afternoon, Adam is asking the assistant to hold pieces in place while he attaches or cuts them to the proper length. Instantly, he displays an unusual skill in the construction of the sculptures, his hand often steadier, surer than Adam's. Clearly, the assistant's period of watching was not wasted, he knows without being told, how to build, intuiting how and where Adam will add each new element, sensing the scale and desired proportions of the sculpture. Never once does a construction collapse into the fire. Within the first year, Adam is able to complete and sell over a dozen sculptures. They work, four hands in coordination, rarely speaking, a command here, a question where or which piece, or how, but absolutely no banter, no mention of the weather, of the assistant's family, no information exchanged, is he married, engaged, has a sweetheart, and beyond the occasional visit from Adam's grown-up children and Ev, the assistant knows nothing about Adam's family.

"I have no idea, does he live in a shack or a mansion."

The assistant addresses him as Adam and Adam never uses the assistant's name, rather it is a communication of commands, "Hand me that piece. Hold it. No. Yes." It is a dialogue of manual labour, Adam not certain the assistant knows what he is trying to achieve, though, without doubt, displaying an expertise in the physical manifestation of the sculpture. Adam never speaks about what he is trying to articulate, hardly utters a word. He understands, her sculptures contain a poetic, difficult to express in words, that reaches inside to excite your heart, your imagination, nothing she could have said, which was always little, with an innocent smile, would be helpful. Many years ago, the critics, the academic historians, which are now plentiful, decided, she is an important part of the cultural dialogue, some advocating one theory, others arguing for another, others interpreting, others reinterpreting. To which she would probably have merely replied, "The work is the work. What I say is contained there. All I have thought disappears into the sculpture. I disappear. What remains is the sculpture." For her it is a critical farce, a comedy conducted by those without eyes, with no hearts, whose ideas, like dust, drift onto the wood. Adam knows, her concern is not the prosaic, the every day, she has no interest in capturing a moment from nature, nothing so common as to recreate the beauty of a flower. She knows this is impossible, so

she reaches to transform the beauty of the flower into its essence, she looks not for the flower but the universal flower, not the flower as a symbol for all flowers, rather her flower as the essence of the flower, its universal expression. It is never the particular but a grand gesture toward the universal, lifting the stone to become the mountain. It is this universality that first attached Adam to her work. "Her portrait of me is me and it is all portraits, it is not my face but the face of humanity, male, female, young, old, black, white, yellow, red, all of us simultaneously and individually." Adam understands the sculpture, its articulation without words, possessing the force to penetrate to his depths. He hopes all the works he creates for her possess this quality, to reach out, embrace. Knowing he can never know, what he feels someone else feels, aware, he tries, sometimes successfully, making not just a sculpture, but an icon speaking clearly, emitting a resonance so harmonic one cannot but feel its complexity.

**Yesterday**, the sculpture he completed possessed this perfection. Working in an easy collaboration with the assistant he is, in the shortest of time, in less than a week, able to stand and feel the glow of a successful sculpture. It is the first time the assistant has seen Adam smile, who seems about to shake his hand in congratulations but instead, brings from the kitchen a bottle of wine. They sit on respective stools, facing each other, enjoying the fine wine and the fine sculpture. In the warmth of the wine and their mutual enthusiasm about the work they have successfully completed, the assistant, pointing to the sculpture, "It is clear, it is one of your best works." Slightly surprised at this verbal injection, Adam takes another sip of wine, looking not at the assistant, rather responding to the sculpture.

"As elegant as a sunset and a biblical psalm."

"A sunset, certainly, but I would say, a sunrise."

"And a psalm?" Adam mockingly asks.

"I have never read the bible. For me it is more a tale told at night to children."

Here is a man who might understand more than Adam had thought.

"Do you mean a fable, a story containing a lesson?"

“A story of my life.”

“Not my life?” Adam asks deeply intrigued about how the sculpture has induced the assistant’s response.

“Your life, my life, our lives told to us by us.”

Adam is not pleased by what he hears, he can feel it, the assistant is taking possession of the sculpture, claiming it for himself. “No, ‘you’ of course are present, but it is ‘my’ story. I am the one telling, it is my story. I talk and you listen.” Adam unexpectedly taken aback by the assistant, his emotions rising, afraid to speak, removing his hand from the sculpture, his voice cracking, “I want to be very clear, this is not ‘our’ sculpture but mine and mine alone. I thank you for your assistance in the construction, but nothing more.” The assistant sitting, head down, submissive. “Do you understand? If I am not here there would be nothin. You would create a disorderly pile of twigs scrambled together to make a grotesque mockery of true sculpture. Understand? Tell me you understand.”

Lifting his head, first to the sculpture, slowly to Adam’s eyes, witnessing the rage growing. “I just thought, I guess I am wrong. We work each day, equally, together, I don’t know, maybe I thought, it

is our sculpture.”

Adam waving his arms, a madman, getting up from the stool, the wine glass falling to the floor, screaming, “No. No. You are not my equal, we are not partners. I am the artist, you are my assistant. If you do not understand, there, the door, out with you and your arrogance.”

In the meekest voice, “No, I understand, no, I am only your servant, I am not the master,” in a whisper, “It is your sculpture, but I thought . . .”

“Don’t think, just do as I say.” Picking up the unbroken glass from the floor, pouring fresh wine, Adam notices the assistant’s glass is empty but does not offer him any wine. Adam quickly drinking the contents of his glass. The assistant is trembling, sliding from his stool, slowly walking to the door, stalling before exiting, waiting for an invitation to return tomorrow, but Adam says nothing, unsure if he wants to see this man again. “If he does return tomorrow, tomorrow I will decide.” Sitting before the sculpture, investigating every detail, not seeing anything but himself, seeing the absence of the assistant as much as his own presence, finishing the bottle of wine. “I will fire him if he dares come to work tomorrow. How can he presume himself equal to me. My equal! Impossible! He never met the old woman, how can he

say he is the creator when he has never seen her nod her head, or lift her eyes, approving, disapproving. He must be mad to think, not just be thankful, I have let him assist. Yes, I will fire him tomorrow.”



**That night Adam sleeps deeply**, waking late, close to noon, taking his coffee to the studio he is surprised to find the assistant at work on a sculpture. His first thought, tear it down, throw it in the fire and summarily dismiss the assistant, but even from this distance he can not help but admire what he sees. Without a doubt, despite this early stage of construction, it contains a presence, a life Adam is hesitant to destroy. Sitting down on the assistant's stool, sipping his coffee, not gesturing, not exchanging glances, not speaking, watching as though transfixed. He does not see the hands of the assistant but his own hands. All day and into the next week he pays careful attention, never, as the sculpture rises, making the smallest suggestion. He cannot distinguish it from the work of the old woman. He is frightened. He has not helped, not directed the creation of this sculpture, yet with certainty feels it is his sculpture, a work by the old woman. Admiring the sculpture, he feels proud of his achievement, the perfection of the line, the richness of thought, the ideas contained and expressed. The deeper he examines, studies, the more he believes it is one of his most flawless sculptures, containing an essential quality he has been striving to achieve for the last decade, proud to have achieved such an elevated and clear work. That evening when he phones a collector describing a rare work by the old woman, suddenly, unexpectedly

available, his excitement so contagious the collector arrives within hours and happily purchases it for an exorbitant sum.

**The next morning**, when the assistant arrives at the studio, he suspiciously notes the sculpture is missing, wondering if in anger it has been burnt, but when Adam presents him with a thick envelope of money, he understands, it has been sold. The reward is significant, so, of course, the assistant does not find it necessary to ask any questions, in fact, when he first began the construction of the sculpture he was nervous, seriously worried if he was going beyond the bounds of permissibility. Would Adam suddenly fly into a rage and fire him? To be generously rewarded, clearly not punishment, clearly, he has been successful. Stuffing the envelope into his jacket pocket, he cleans the studio and starts to work on a new sculpture. His nervousness, possessed during the first construction, now transformed to a quiet pleasure, a relaxed enjoyment of making something from nothing but cut pieces of dried wood. Obvious in the way he moves, a new confidence has descended, infusing him with a grace of movement. Adam, a cautious foreman, watches the assistant skillfully building two, then three sculptures, reflecting on his own awkwardness, how clumsy, the uncoordinated roughness of his hands, in comparison. Yes, this man is able to make sculpture Adam can only imagine constructing. It is obvious, Adam knows, he is no longer needed, unnecessary for these sculptures to be created. The assistant has become the sculptor

Adam, only partly, has been able to be. The movement, the manner in which his hands touch the wood, remind Adam of how she touched, reached into the wood to understand how it should return to life. Adam stops going to the studio, no longer does he feel the need or want to see the sculptures being built. At first, he misses the pleasure of making the sculpture, but this is only temporary, disappearing in his admiration for the refinement of each new piece. He is content to sit in the old woman's house, quietly arranging for the sale of each exquisite, expensive sculpture.

**For many years**, Adam slowly, not intentionally, it merely occurred, has separated himself from his home with Ev and his two children, who have married and left to pursue their own lives. The old woman's home has become his home. Watching the assistant create the sculpture, at first, he feels satisfaction, but soon it's the opposite, a growing bitterness. "Why was I not chosen to create sculpture equal in elegance to those of my student?" Feeling no longer the master, rather a dethroned teacher who opened a door through which he cannot pass, frustrated, angry for no longer being the one to bring life into the world. What he created in her name are now things of the past, forgotten in the warehouses of collectors and museums, now replaced by the sculptures of the assistant, a man who knew nothing before he arrived at her studio. What does it matter that he came from Adam, taught by a master, now of no importance, supplanted by a new greatness. Adam watches through the doorway, seeing a shadow, his bitterness blindness, too painful for Adam to watch him gracefully working the wood into art. Shutting the door, effective protection from sight but not the sounds, similar sounds he himself once made. He wants him to stop, he wants to throw him out onto the street, but when Adam sees what is produced, his heart sinks, it is clear, the impossibility of destroying the sculpture. Each day Adam

allows the sculptures to be brought to life by the assistant, no longer taking any pleasure in their creation, only their sale and even in this, as his wealth continues to grow, he has little interest. What he does not give to the assistant, he gives to Ev and the children. He needs little, living like a hermit in the old woman's house, sleeping in her bed, eating in her kitchen, sitting in her comfortable chair. He doesn't need new clothing, what he wears today is fine for tomorrow, needs minimal food, yesterday's stew is fine for tomorrow's dinner. He has moved a chair to the front of the house, sits on the front porch, as far away from the studio as possible, spending morning to evening feeling the sun pass from right to left, listening, watching the birds, small animals, insects. He finds smoking makes the day pass more smoothly, taking short walks adds some enjoyable distraction from sitting too long. Here he is relaxed, removed, the venom of bitterness dissipating slowly as he begins to understand, the further he is from the studio the better he feels. The studio containing the clutter, history, his failure, where each piece of wood, a well taught lesson, a reminder of his inadequacy, a symbol of what he could not achieve.

**He walks away from the studio**, taking the road, down the hill, toward the city, with the clothes he happens to be wearing, thin shoes, no plan to leave, just getting up from his chair on the porch, nothing thought out, just a series of steps away from what no longer possess any pleasure, is rather an irritant, moving as his body tells him to proceed. It is a hot sunny day, his only regret, he has not taken a hat or water, but it is nothing, too unimportant, does not wonder if he is going in the right direction, only, "Why am I going to the city? If I turn, take the opposite direction, uphill, it will be to the woods." The scent of the city calls, leading, directing each step. "So many cars, so many people." The city's chaos, its engulfing presence, his ears ringing with horns, trucks, cars, people, the clashing construction sites, he finds not unpleasant, rather uplifting. His heart racing, his eyes wide open, alert, alive, unlike the stillness of the studio, the slowness of the porch, the bitterness, rather the rough caress of the dirty, grinding, screeching city, here, he feels at rest. "If I had turned, to the woods, I would have disappeared, been alone." He sits surrounded, one among many, smoking, watching a policeman direct traffic, raising his hand, signaling with a smart turn of wrist, directing cars to go right, lifting an arm for them to proceed straight ahead, so ordered, so efficient, every car, truck, bicycle, pedestrian responding

to the policeman's commands. With some of the few coins Adams finds in his pant pocket, he purchases a large jug of water and a small bread. Seated on a concrete bench in the shade of a tree, he eats his bread and drinks his water, a few pigeons play at his feet eating the fallen crumbs. A young woman is having difficulty pushing her baby carriage over the rough, broken stones of a nearby street, an old man and an old woman holding hands, slowly passing scattering the pigeon. As it grows dark, he wonders, "Can I sleep on this landing, it is flat with no light to reveal my presence, unseen from the street?" Tired from his hot walk to the city, pressing into a corner, curling into a ball, he falls asleep.



**The morning sunlight**, he wakes, getting to his feet, energized, ready, after a few mouthfuls of water and the remainder of the bread, to begin. Holding the half empty jug in his right hand, setting out, unaware to were, walking, wandering, no purpose or reasoning, a man through the streets, sitting, watching, resting, walking. Wandering the streets is not the same as when he was a young man, a boy, now his legs grow tired after only a short distance, a few streets passed and a pain holds his legs frozen, he needs to sit, to find a place to rest. There are few public benches and those he can find usually occupied by mothers with baby carriages or old men, like himself, enjoying their respite from walking. Leaning against a wall or against a tree is not enough to relieve the pain. Sitting, allowing the pain to fade from his legs, able to walk a few more blocks before again needing to sit. The curb, at the edge of the sidewalk, usually the only place to rest, his feet dangling dangerously close to the incessant traffic, conscious of the approaching trucks, the wind moving the branches overhead, of men, women, walking, talking about their investments, questioning where to lunch, concerns no longer his concern. He never cared about the wealth he accumulated, it was useful, but he knew, of no importance. At first, the house Ev had provided was a place of security, the mansion later where they raised their two children,

a place of domestic equilibrium, but when the children left to live their independent lives, the house with its rooms and objects, each possessing its separate memory, became oppressive, each object, each memory pressing, narrowing his space, demanding, rigid. The old woman's home, at first, not his, so it felt open, free of the objects of his life, but too soon, after he left the studio, closing the door, living only in her home, it too began to close in. Even with the studio door locked, he felt its hold, its confinement, each and every sculpture produced endlessly surrounding, pressing. Without walls, the streets, here he possesses nothing, no sculptures, the clothing on his back, without the clutter of objects, without their choking memories, he feels free. By dusk, tired, he knows it is necessary to find a safe place to sleep. He is hungry and the water jug empty, the search now, of utmost importance, where to spend the night. He does not think of returning to the studio or of going to Ev, these are places of the past, vanished from his imagination like yesterday's rain.

**It is not easy**, emptiness comes at a price, his old body, when it rains, shivering, trying to stand, the pain shooting up his legs, a cough forcing its way down to his chest. He wishes to be stronger, wishes the years had not robbed him of strength. Cursing the cold night, not finding it refreshing, not welcome after a hot day of stumbling through the streets. Yesterday, passing his previous rooftop home, attacked by nature but not destroyed, he knows, not agile enough to lift himself and reclaim this roof top home. He spends nights in a hollow, a small enclosure created by the branches of a tree, a natural green cave. Constructing his home, building with the branches, bending, weaving, cutting to make an enclosure. With care and pleasure, equal to what he once employed for her, examining each piece of wood, precisely cutting, exactly placing, each day making his home. It is not a place one can see, anyone walking past, even standing at the hidden door, would not discern it as anything but a tree, its roots and branches naturally intertangled, no one would expect it is not a natural formation but a construction made by Adam. A home hidden from view to everyone but Adam. Every day he adds at least one piece of wood, bending it slowly, locking it into the branches, notching to hold it secure. A work in progress he engages in after the sun begins to set, leaving the streets to lie on his back, or sit on a rough three legged stool, with the light of a small candle examining each point

of construction, imaging how she would make the sculpture, how she would make the construction perfect. He works for days, months, a year, a project that goes on and will go on. Wandering the streets, scavenging for food and water, finding the necessities for survival, but primarily seeking scraps of the city, thinking not about survival but finding parts for his sculpture.

**He wants it to contain all** he knows, each well-articulated fragment possessing his essence, not an image of Adam, but Adam. Always critical, building, too often finding it necessary to take down what has taken weeks of painful labour, deeming it not what he wants, condemning himself for not possessing the physical skill, while knowing, how it should be. In the night, lying on his back, in the darkness, inside this rough, flawed womb, spending hours studying, from the minute detail to the grand arching presence reaching over him. In daylight, standing outside, sitting on the wobbly stool, smoking a butt found on the street, he critically admires and demeans his work. Finished smoking, continuing, fixing a horizontal beam in place exactly where the structure needs a beam, skillfully working to create, what he envisions, a hermetic unity. He now wanders the streets with a hopeful purpose, to find, it will be something he did not expect, but it will fit perfectly, unconsciously knowing what he is looking for, knows it will be material for his sculpture. "She would never use that," passing, leaving it alone, "yes, this is exactly what I want," carefully picking up an odd shaped piece of wood, carrying it back to his sculpture, sitting with it, studying, again the question, "is it necessary, will it work if I place it here? It is wrong, it's a mistake, I never should have picked it up." Suddenly, "No, there, it is perfect," waiting, thinking about it,

smoking another cigarette, the smoke curling around the new piece as he bends to examine it again. Not sure. He knows, it is better to see clearly before building, or what is built will need to be taken apart, so retreating inside, he lies down, closes his eyes, tries to see. It is not a dream but a drawing of how to build, an image of the sculpture with the addition of this new piece. In the morning it is easy, the piece of wood is placed in the small fire to brew his coffee.

**In just over a year** the sculpture, he is not sure, but believes, he hasn't touched it for weeks, is complete. "Perfect," is the word he uses. Standing inside, standing outside, arms crossed over his chest, smiling, proud of himself. For Adam this is unquestionably her opus, her greatest work. The last work. After this achievement, nothing more needs to be done, all work is over. He does not need to wander the streets to find more parts, he no longer needs to excruciate over the sculpture, all it now demands is admiration. It is complete. Evidently clear to Adam, he is no longer needed, understanding, he has done enough, "Nothing more needs to be done." He has completed her life's work, his life's work.

**In the darkness**, not dreaming, lying on his back, he sees her, she is not the old woman he remembers, her features softer, she is young, standing, holding in her outstretched arms a heavy sculpture. It is too large for her arms, the weight making her tremble. He wants to get up and take it, relieve her of the burden, but he can't help, invisibly tied, lying immobile. Painful to see her struggle, tears flowing from her eyes, from his eyes, the anguish of her struggle to give him the sculpture he cannot accept, beyond human endurance. Closing his eyes, weeping, he falls asleep. Waking in the morning, his pillow wet from the sweat and tears of last night's ordeal, she is gone, he knows what he needs to do. It is clear. It is the perfect sculpture, located in the centre of the city, built into a tree, part of the tree, integrated to invisibility, to even the most perceptive of observer, a public sculpture known only to one, part of the city and part of nature. Adam cannot help himself, feeling no longer any need to build, the task he sets himself is what she would want, what the sculpture demands. Manifest the voice calling to him from the wood, a sweet siren call, irresistible, under its spell, enchanted, how can he resist, he is not steel, only a man drained, led, it is her sweet call, her arms, not the wood, caressing him as he sleeps. A man with no will of his own. "A perfect sculpture," telling himself, "her most elegant sculpture. All she represents. It is her."



**Again, stumbling** through the streets, he knows what has to be done, so pure, so simple, a gesture demanding to be undertaken, “It is what she wants,” but he cannot do it, the perfection, its beauty, holding him back. He knows, it all leads here, his function, to destroy the sculpture, but he can’t. It is too perfect to destroy, it is where he lives, it encloses, holds him, it is where he belongs, nowhere else, in a simple, elegant symbiosis. The wood his lover, their bodies entwined, lying in bed, his hands caressing the wood, she comes to him again, she is older, older than when she died, as though she has lived and aged, and again she is holding out the sculpture which appears to have grown in size, or has she diminished, her body so fragile, thin arms, legs trembling under the weight. Again, she is weeping, the tears wetting her hollow chest, again, Adam cannot contain his tears. She needs help, only he can help, but paralyzed, locked to the bed, he can only cry at the sight of her impossible struggle. In the morning, he is still sad, crying, realizing, he is being selfish, this is not his sculpture but her sculpture. If she wants it destroyed, he has no choice, he must comply. “But it’s not just the sculpture she is asking me to destroy.” As much as he listens, straining to hear, it is unclear, something more is being demanded, but what, he does not know. Waiting, listening, hearing the wind playing against the sculpture. “Possibly she is not

happy with her final work? Impossible. It is perfect. Something else is making her angry.” Tired, unable to sleep, kept awake by the vision of her struggling under the weight, hardly able to stand, but it is not just the weight of the sculpture from which he must free her. There is no answer, it is a question for which he has no clue, only uncomfortable thoughts, an absence possessing him, phantoms to a sleepless insomniac. Drifting in the streets, oblivious, barely avoiding passing bodies, cars, or loudly honking buses, all allowing him to pass, all wondering as they keep him safe, how this resemblance of a man can still stand, observing how he walks so slowly, sliding one foot forward, the other following as though in slow motion. Some hand him food, others frightened by this skeleton, but he has little interest in their charity or fear, a sip of water here, a small piece of fruit, he does not care. Most days he sits on the ground before the sculpture, not possessing the strength to raise to sit on the stool, staring at the wood. Getting up only to retreat inside, slowly, carefully covering the entrance way, sealing himself in, lying near the centre, staring into the darkness, wondering what does she want. “Would it be best if I just remain here forever? I need no more than rest until I become the wood.”

**The more he ponders** her dream demand, asking “What is she asking?” holding out the burden of the sculpture, “am I to relieve her of the weight,” but there is more, “I have already taken, carried the weight”. The longer he ponders the apparation, the clearer, more certain, “She wants her sculpture destroyed, to preserve it forever in destruction. And she wants my disappearance. When I am gone her purity will be restored.” Not eating, his body wilting, obeying her wishes, soon. “Yes, we must go together.” For Adam, it is no longer a question, only an answer. “Together,” both together, Adam and her sculpture. It is perfectly logical, remembering her quiet smile on finishing a sculpture, the moment of satisfaction for work well done, then the small regret, understanding the work is complete, emptiness, the burden to begin another. “She wants it to end, I want it to end. Together. Should I wrap himself in a shroud and wait, without water or food, close my eyes, forever in silence?” Should he, can he, endure the parched lips, the knotted knife of starvation? “Yes,” he can, “but the sculpture will still exist. Why should it be here after I am gone, speaking without us.” It has to be together, he cannot take the easy way to destroy only the sculpture, he demands, “Together.” It is a simple question for which he has found a simple answer.

**That night she lies beside him**, they embrace, made love in the night, to the rising sun, a man moving in slow motion, painfully lifting his body. "A dream, this is a dream." He is present but not present. A few mouthfuls of water, a dry morsel of bread, providing enough strength to stand, to progress outside. Leaning against the stool, staring at the sculpture, "It will not be easy. But it has to be done." Sitting on the ground cross legged, "A fire," but this is not a failure he would be throwing in this fire, rather a masterpiece. The wood dry enough to burn. He will find a cigarette on the street, he will kneel before perfection, with one match ignite its disappearance, light both, cigarette and sculpture, sit on the ground, smoke, witness the end of her work. But he can't, "It's not enough. If she must disappear, I must disappear." The obstacle, cowardness, fear, the horrific image of fire burning his skin, the thought of his hair bursting into flames, too horrible imagining, feeling his excruciating disappearance in fire. "Is the sculpture my funeral pyre?" Holding one feeble hand in one feeble hand, struggling to uncross bone thin legs, "But I am already dead. Nothing remains but my eyes and heart." Stretching out on the grass, on his back, staring up to the clouds, it starts to rain. "Not today. Too wet." Returning to his bed inside the sculpture, in the half light, listening to the water flowing down the sides of his enclosure.

“Tomorrow or tomorrow.” Wrapping himself in the cloth which serves as his blanket and bed, whispering softly, “tomorrow.”

**His plan is simple,** elegant, something he might be capable of executing, but it is not easy, so feeble, a struggle to move his body forward, a rasping in his chest, complaining muscles. The pain, not just in his hands, everywhere, the body screaming, aching, needles stabbing skin, the sudden bending of his knees bringing him down to the ground, lowering his head, enduring, hopefully it will pass. He does not see himself capable of igniting himself. He wants to take control, to be the one who determines the disappearance, not waiting helplessly for imminent end, but taking control, challenging nature, admitting defeat, but not surrendering, fighting against the impossible enemy, useless, he understands, but he is not ready, "Cremate me when I am dead, not while I can feel."

**Lying on his back**, flat, a small knot of cloth holding his head, the pain reduced, the muscles, the bones, the heart, the chest, the breath. If not comfortable inside the tomb of his sculpture, at least endurable. It will not be difficult, he needs only to lie here, without water and food for a few more days and it will be enough, an excellent, simple demise, wrapped in the elegance of her sculpture, slowly sliding in and out, conscious, unconscious, conscious, unconscious. "Together," but what strength does he possess, allowed no more than the pleasure of immobility, in bed until his last breath, without strength. How can he make the moment of their deaths simultaneous? He will again need to be the inventor, the engineer, to construct a mutual end, to imagine a device, an apparatus, where a single flame will set the fire to ignite the sculpture, together. When will it be the precise moment to set the sequence in motion, not possible without life? How will he know, "This my last breath, the last movement of my hand," pushing over the candle to ignite the mound of dry grass and small twigs. Will he know it is his last moment? If he is wrong, awake during the inferno, but there is no other solution, he is too tired to be an inventor, it is enough, his simple system. Adam spends the next day collecting more dry grass, more small dry twigs, stacking the kindling in a larger, ever-growing mound, a pyre, guaranteed to ignite. But his will, the

strength to push the candle over at the last moment? He wants to possess the last act of his life, a small gesture to demonstrate his hold on the preciousness of life. Understanding it is a useless gesture, but still, an arrogant man pursuing a futile clarity, he proceeds to build not one small pile but two, the first to light the larger second that will ignite the sculpture and his body, the candle falling by a simple movement of hand, downward, as he finally falls. The candle is readied, lying in the darkness, his breathing rough, choking, the greatest effort to take even a single breath, an old dying man, he is not sure, passing into sleep before lighting the candle, he is not sure. He does not want to see another morning, does not want to spend another day admiring the sculpture, imaging the old woman. In the morning the sunlight on the sculpture is enough to make him gasp, so beautiful, too perfect. The pain, knives stabbing his body, everywhere, cloud his vision, a knot his stomach, telling him clearly, it is time, he has been wrong to hesitate. Wrapping himself in the blanket, lighting the candle, "She will be happy. No longer will she need to carry the heavy load." Carefully positioning his hand beside the small flame, "It will be a perfect fire."



