

BLESSING

Three things that are true:

1. The best story makes you forget what is real and what isn't.
2. Love lasts longer than memory.
3. When I was seven years old, I thought my grandfather was God.

Mostly, it was the smell of his wool sweaters, which he knitted himself from the wool he sheared. The yarn was brown, rough, and still rich with lanolin. He worked from his own pattern, and when I came down early in the mornings I found him sitting in front of the fire with his slippers on, reading the newspaper or adding rows to another knitting project. He looked like the illustrations in my *Treasure Island* and to this day I cannot see a sailor or a seafaring man and not think of my grandfather.

He made a fire every morning, even in the summer. I would creep down the stairs in my night gown and curl up next to him, under his arm, and he'd continue reading his newspaper as though I was not there at all. I could read and would pick out the headlines, but the clearest thing was the feeling of my cheek against the nubby wool and his deep, strong heartbeat underneath that. I was certain he was God, because he was both divine and just, to me, and he understood things that had barely started to appear in my mind, the way small fish will gather around the shadow of a rock and remain still and indistinguishable from the lake bed until a flutter at the surface scatters them and turns them into what they are, pure movement, and catch the eye even as they disperse into something un-seeable, ephemeral, gone.

There was a lot to see, and I had to learn how to look at it. He showed me how to sit quietly beside a tide pool and watch the hermit crabs fight over a shred of limpet. In the bottom of our rowboat, I learned to bait a lure while the burlap sack flapped at my feet, full of rockfish. Whales crested near us, breathing sour fumes, and once we saw a sea lion, fast asleep, as big as a grown man, and snoring as he floated between the waves. My grandfather knew the name of everything, and I was sure he had invented it, just as he'd placed each constellation in the sky and nudged its stars into place. There were craters on the moon that had names, and white mountains. When an osprey flew over us, he could tell me what kind of fish it held in its claws.

When I was seven, he was still taller than me and stronger than me. Stories came easily to him then, and to me. We made things up, building fairy tales. When I was with him, I felt like every good thing was possible, because he loved me and he told me I was smart and a good girl and that everything, even the difficult things, was going to work out just fine.

I believed him.

He started to lose his eyesight around the same time I started to lose my faith. I was in college then, had taken a few hard knocks, and found it harder and harder to make it down to Jenner and the tide pools. My childhood seemed far away, a dot on a map, and I struggled to recall the names of the birds and plants I found in the new landscape growing around me. I got lost. I didn't believe.

It wasn't his fault.

If I could make him God again, I would.

In the beginning, I was a child, and the world was a place that was safe and not too hard to understand. I counted seals and watched the long chains of pelicans flying low down to Bodega. My days were a necklace. I saw the waves bring sea glass to the beaches. In the beginning, I was never afraid, even in the worst storms, because the breath of my grandfather gave me words, and the words were his gift to me, and the words moved me—gently—across the water.