The Lobster

A boy was pulled from the fishnets today. Alongside the trout. We wrapped his fibrous body in a tarp slick-orange as his skin. After we docked the bag was carried away. That was all there was to say about that. The rest of us slung ropes over our shoulders and recoiled home on dusk-pooled roads. Not a word between us.

The road I took follows the shoreline of the Bonavista Peninsula as it meanders like a jagged stomach torn between hunger and sickness, or jagged like the graphics of recent temperature trends. When I first arrived in Bonavista there would often be children oscillating between the frigid ocean and the shore, worrying their mothers as they waded farther and farther from the beaded sand and the driftwood draped in styrene seafoam and rain. Back then, in the distance, some sun-fleshed schooners would rill in and out, in and out, in tidal time. Salt threads like bone erosions cast on their bowsprits.

But today these shores are foreign shores. There aren't any children. Other than the eight fishing boats that remain for sustenance, there aren't many ships either. Even the road appears foreign from its emptiness. Although to me it has always been foreign, sitting stolidly near the water, the water with its wind-toothed parabolas sharp enough to make anyone hesitate.

***

I turned up a muddy driveway and made my way to Tom's back door, nudging it open. The dog tottered out. You home? I asked aloud. Tom rarely ever left his house, a chipped white cabin with two windows—one facing south, the other east—and a wood stove, a decent bed, a toilet and bath, two chairs and a table. The question was more of a habit that has stuck around over the years.

Home, he confirmed, and I took off my boots and set them by the fire and walked back towards the door to hang my oilskins.

You want me to get you anything? You need anything just let me know.

Okay, he said, keeping his eyes on the fire.

How's your water? You got enough water? I asked. The government hadn't begun providing us with potable water until some twenty years after we had moved to Bonavista. Only a few years after that, though, some other government folks showed up and told us the water had traces of mercury or lead or graphite or something that we ought not to drink. So we went back to the wells and the rain and it's been that way since.

I went over to the pail on the kitchen counter and opened the lid. Half empty. Floating on the water's surface was a small brown moth with thin, ivory stripes running down its forewings and a circular nexus, a meeting point, on its back. I wanted to scoop it out with my hand but didn't. Instead, I made my way to the empty chair and sat by the fire next to Tom.

I'll go get you some more tomorrow, I said. We sat quietly.

I checked on Tom most days. My home was near his—it too an eroded cabin— and coming over got me out of the house on the days I wasn't fishing. I imagined Tom would often forget to let the dog out, so once a day I went by and watched as she ran to the road to do her business. At some point a car would come along and flatten the turds and then a few gulls would pick at what they could. A genius system, really. Tom even got a reflective vest so drivers would spot her in the dark.

Catch alright? he asked me.

Plenty, I lied. Good one today. I think the trout might be coming back again. Nobody says that anymore, though, I thought.

Ah, good. Good, Tom replied, gaze still set on the stove in front of us. I doubt he believed me. And then after a few minutes: You need new gloves, he said. Here, handing me a pair.

I caught the joke, but he wasn't laughing. He was handing me his tattered saltwater mitts. Very much used. I grabbed them from him and as I did I felt him bend under the weight of lost muscle. It had been years since Tom had set foot on a boat. Years too, probably, since he'd put these gloves on.

Why are you giving me these, Tom?

And then he turned towards me and told me the reason, and while he did I discovered new creases bordering his mouth and eyes. I didn't tell him about the body I'd fished out a few hours before—I never told Tom about any of them, and he never asked, though I knew he'd find out somehow.

Fine work, the mitts. Knit from wool and song by his *giju'* when he was first born, a mother's gift for a later life.

Did he remember where we buried her? Outside the church back in St. Evidence. On the eastern side. Her name meant sunrise, Tom had told me once, though I don't remember what it was anymore.

Tom had hemmed the fleece as best he could over the years, threading a new spine with each running suture across the orange wool. I didn't remember them being orange. He had made a dye of sorts.

Just in case I dropped 'em in the water, he explained, so I could spot 'em easily. Never did, turns out. His voice splayed into a mist-like thinness.

Outside the window, a hollowed spruce shook through the rain. Tom stuttered up to push another log into the stove and the roiling heat danced onto the croaking walls. Old wood. While the stove door was wide open, the light from the flames pulsed against splintered portraits, a few nailed photos, the swollen faces in them gnarling in the flickering light. Brushing like this against the past keeps the light pointing outward, to somewhere, to someone. I hadn't looked at those pictures in a long time. I doubted he had.

I promised to take good care of the mitts and opened the front door, letting the old dog back inside.

***

It took a few seconds for my eyes to adjust to the thickening dark I stepped into. Then a flashing light: a cop car near the harbour. An officer probably asking one of the senior crewmembers about the body and the net and how the two got tangled up with each other underwater and then how the boy was pulled out and brought aboard and carefully put aside while we pulled the other nets out and sorted the trout by size. The usual story.

The social workers probably went to have a chat, too, I thought. Not that there was any suspicion of foul play. Mainly they just wanted to know if there was anything on the boy's person. Wallet, nametag, note. Something that might help identify the kid. I turned away and walked on home.

I always felt something not quite like sorrow when I saw Tom these days. He had stopped fishing about two years prior. Doctor's orders. I don't think he would've stopped otherwise.

The last time he had been landlocked was after the accident, back in St. Evidence. He stopped fishing for a year or so and put his hands to use fixing old boats dragged up to the bay by storms or helping the townsfolk maintain theirs. I was too young to go out on the water so I spent a few afternoons by his side, watching him work in silence as time groaned on. After a while he began teaching me a few things.

You always start with a solid gunwale, he'd say. When the sea gets rough, and it does, you want a reliable hold. I wouldn't want you falling over, he had said once. I only understood years later that he wasn't talking to me that time.

Sometimes he would strip the hull right off and the boat would look like a decaying whale, ribs exposed and all. And he'd be walking around inside the carcass like some lost child, like a moving heart looking for a place to rest.

I was with him when the relocation order came. We had been working on his house then, peeling board after rotten board from the wall that looked out into the bay. I didn't quite understand at first why some men in nice jackets showed up and gave Tom an envelope and said a few words and then went on to the next house with another envelope, not only because I was pretty sure Tom didn't know how to read very well, but also because I'd never seen someone in a nice jacket before. And then Tom's face dropped and I think I got it then but it might have been later when I went home. When my mom was crying and my dad asked me to start thinking about the things I didn't mind losing. But that was later that day. Tom didn't really say much while I was with him.

Let’s get those new boards up before it gets dark then. That was all he had said.

The wind made the flame grass sealike.

A few months later I had packed almost nothing, and I was in the back of a truck when we drove by the church on our way out of St. Evidence. I saw Tom standing there at the back looking down at a grave. From far, I couldn’t make out whose. It could’ve belonged to anyone, really. Then someone in the truck whispered a prayer, and then someone else repeated it. My mother held me close for the duration of the drive and my father stood so someone else could sit. Most of the journey was spent in a silence so whole I fell asleep drifting on my mother’s pulse, which I could feel come through her stomach in irregular intervals.

Some time later, in the new house, which was really a cabin, which was really a few walls and no running water, I asked my mother if Tom had moved nearby. A little bit further up, she said.

He’s fishing again, my father replied. He’d seen him in the harbour that week.

Oh, good for him, I said. Though I now know that his return to the water had nothing to do with strength, but need.

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The Cabot Strait separates the island from the mainland like a massive gash.

From John Cabot, to whom the name Bonavista (*O Buon Vista*) is attributed. Where he and his crew first landed, smelling the arid coastlines first, the riparian fray of ocean crags spewing oil seep. Pearls in their orbits, heat in their hands.

In English, *cabotage* is the right to operate sea transport services in a particular territory. That one’s a weird one. *The right*. A word as a weapon. Who has the right to work in the water, which is always a moving being, which cannot be a territory? It seems to me the simplest truths about the sea have been eviscerated, forgotten.

Someone told me once that forgetting was never linear. Forgetting pushes in one year after the next like caravels. Or maybe forgetting came *with* the caravels.

From the Portuguese *cabo*, a point or cap. An extension of land outwards like a final synapse, shrinking every year from the thickening pressure systems of rising water, fiercer winds, the salt, the late snow, the glacial melt. One year a few stray icebergs crashed into the wall of rock at the point. That was a bad omen, at least for the people who believed in omens.

From the French *cabotage*, meaning to sail along the coast, or, loosely, the transport of goods or passengers (willing or not) between two places in a single country. The presupposition here is that the concept of the country in question is agreed upon by all, and that the movement involved is a beneficial one. But this can never be true. There are too many ways of defining movement. Change, loss, and growth all move a body, all wear a body down.

Cabot also means dog, or mutt.

***

On acrid days I helped Tom out of his cabin and to the bay if he felt up to it. The way he moved was more like scratching over the bulbous moss and swept barrens than walking. The dog followed, careful by his side.

Plenty birds out there today, he said once.

Sure are. I agreed only because I didn't want to correct him. There weren't many birds at all. There were scientists gannet-diving out of their vans and onto the boats and into the water, but they were so far into the bay I imagined you didn't need a failing brain to see birds. Pale white birds, machinic birds, landing on the jawed rocks to forage our blued bones and rot-wood, or to biomap a piece of inflamed skin and stratify water-columns, seal carious finds for census purposes, close a file somewhere.

Biomapping: A genomic practice of analyzing the mass of information carried by DNA strands in each cell of a given body, shedding light on where distant ancestors came from, their migrations, and the routes they took. Something about that didn't sit right with me when I first heard it.

When the bodies first began washing up the townspeople put forward a few hypotheses. Some believed it to be a far migrant shipwreck. That would explain why none of the initial bodies were ever claimed or identified. These same people believed that the reason all the bodies that were washing up were those of young kids was that their parents' bodies had been heavy enough to sink to the bottom. Others simply believed there were no parents on board, which was highly plausible.

At first the town wanted to organize a burial, but the government said that wasn't possible and held on to the bodies. We had a funeral anyways. That is, people gathered outside the Bonavista church with their heads down and their feet soaked.

But then the bodies kept showing up, so some thought a major oil spill had poisoned communities in a coastal place up north, and it was all part of some big government cover-up.

That got to be a popular theory pretty fast. The residents of the affected communities had reportedly gone insane from drinking oil and eating plastic fish and thrown themselves into the ocean and the older (heavier) residents sank and the children all ended up here. Carried by the currents. Just half-floating there with the fish, deep enough to go unnoticed, shallow enough to be moved around.

One morning it all changed. I remember it well because I was on the ship with Tom when the girl was pulled out of the water. I think it was his first. I had always hoped he would be spared the harrowing feeling of pulling a young corpse out of the water. I knew he'd be thinking about his own boy. But this girl had an ID. A name and weight and all. Said she was from Ireland. Her body was unrecognizable. Looked like an excised tumour as it lay limp on the deck. Both legs missing.

Barely an hour after, I pulled another out. Her hair had gotten caught on the pulley line. Olivine girl with leathered flesh. ID said Baffin Island.

That was the worst week. Forty-six kids. Each one a reflection of the last, lying there on the rocks. The shore was soaked with them. That's when the suicidologists and news crews showed up.

On one of our walks, pushing along the rocky beach, Tom and I ran into Ellie. She was one of the few people left in Bonavista who grew up with me and Tom's son in St. Evidence. It was clear from the way Tom said hello that he didn't remember that. Ellie didn't seem to mind.

I was actually in St. Evidence a few weeks ago, she told us.

I heard, I said. Someone told me you were gonna get there on a kayak?

Yeah. The water's the only way to get there now. The road's all gone, got swept up by hurricanes after a while.

As Ellie said this I looked over to Tom and noticed his breathing had slowed and his eyes had come up to meet hers.

What's left of it, then? I asked.

She shrugged and said, Nature's taking over fast.

I'd heard this, too. Last year's storms wiped out a lot of the buildings that had still been standing whole. I didn't remember the storms being that bad. Why'd you go? I asked.

Ellie sighed and said, Oh, that's where Mom wanted her ashes spread. I ended up burying a few of them, though. Couldn't bear the thought of her just floating around in the wind, scattered and all. I also wanted to write down a few of the names on the tombstones there. A few folks here asked me to do that. Tom, you remember my mom, Nomi, yeah?

Nomi, of course, Tom replied. Nomi, yes, yeah. How's Nomi? How's your mom?

She's resting now, Ellie said. She's good. She's well.

Good, good. Tell her Tom says hi. No way she's forgotten me. He grinned saying that.

Ellie's smile slipped slightly. Of course I will, Tom, don't you forget her either now.

Hey, I turned to Ellie, I might ask for that kayak someday if you'd let me borrow it. I'd like to go down to see St. Evidence too. I've never been back, you know.

Please do, she said. Take my truck too, and I'll draw you a map of where to go and all.

Thanks, Ellie. I'll give you a call.

She knelt to pet the dog. Then we went our separate ways, and Tom and I carried on towards

the boats. Nobody but the scientists were out on the water that day on account of it being a Sunday. I have a hard time knowing that traditions like that one stuck around for so long in a town like Bonavista, where everyone came from everywhere else.

While we were sitting on a bench that looked out into the bay Tom said, Remember how I taught you everything about fishing?

Nearby, a few scientists circled the docked boats pressing their contact microphones—stethoscope-looking devices that don't pick up any air vibrations but transduce only structure-borne sound—against the hulls.

You taught me lots of things, Tom, I said. I noticed out of the corner of my eye the half-smile on his face. But you know what? I said. I think I've forgotten all about fishing now. Mind giving me a refresher?

And so he did. And I sat there with the same stupid grin on my face and just listened.

***

First, the bleeding. Make a shallow incision below the gills and draw the neck back, so that the mouth stretches open. Ignore the crude carbon that spills out. Thread a rope through the mouth and remove its song. If you do it right you can hear the song. You can hear it in your own heart, in your own stomach. And from that moment on the song is yours to safekeep. Never forget what that means.

Obstruct the tongue and the shapes it knows. Home and mother, *mer, a'pi, jagej*. Then go through the gills. Don't remember the girl and the small cuts on her own neck exhuming sea moss. Don't think about the kids. Just hang the fish overboard until it hurls out all its dioxins.

Then, the cutting. Drag the spine of the knife across the scales. Bare the skin. Begin by inserting the blade above the anal opening. Pierce gently. Spread wide the thoracic cavity. Give thanks to the angling ocean. That gratitude is paramount throughout the process. From catch to swallow.

Stretch the body open. Expose its dilated organs, annex its onyx entrails, empty the story, leaving only a pulped shadow black as oil. Learn from your own raw fingers, Discard the odd bycatch, those ambient mutants, for boiling.

Do that again and again and again, singing the song for time entire.

***

In the year before the bodies started being pulled out of the water two strange things happened in Bonavista.

The first: A summer without icebergs. Usually, they'd drift southbound along the morning surface in the later months. It took two years of travelling, after they detached from Greenland, for those far giants to float by. I remember being a kid in St. Evidence and using my father's old spyglass to get a better look at them. I'd see a screech of gulls circling above like a halo, the pulse of sea-lick on the icy walls. From a distance like mine the icebergs migrated in a towering silence.

It turns out the number of icebergs visible from the peninsula had diminished with every year of sawtooth weather. But that summer, experts became reluctant to predict any sightings whatsoever. They had all melted before they could reach us.

Warming winters meant sea ice couldn't form far south, Ellie explained to me once, so the nomadic glacial limbs settled elsewhere, eroding in Labrador or Nunavut. Over the years, their decrease had been as irregular as the shoreline—only the steady thaw, the people leaving like seasons, and the lighthouse illuminating bays of empty meltwater remained unvaried.

The second thing was the trout. Washed up by the thousands one morning. Tongues leathered, scales a cystic glow. No one ever figured out why.

***

It must be something to do with gravity. As Tom got closer to the end on those grounded days his skin loosened and seeped downward, and his mouth hung slightly open as if warmed to release its sermonic stories. But really it wasn't much more than soundless air that escaped it.

With one exception. I couldn't tell if he had chosen to tell me this or if it was just his weakened body that slipped, but one morning he said he missed his boy. And then he repeated it in the other language, but the only word I made out was *gwi's*. Son.

I had never heard him say it that way before. It came out like a rust-filled croak.

We were in his home and I was playing solitaire and he was watching the fire and it came out of him, it just came out and I stopped what I was doing to let the words ring valleyed like oxygen in the wake and by the time I looked up to him he had leaned his head back and closed his eyes and I had to wait until I saw his chest rise to be convinced he was still alive.

I missed his boy too. We'd been friends. We were the same age when he drowned. Wasn't even that far out.

That night, after I helped Tom to bed, I laid down on his floor on account of the heavy rain, but only ten minutes or so after the rain stopped, and I started thinking about the afterrain. Then the dog curled up to my side in its reflective vest and I fell asleep by timing my little breath to hers.

In the morning, watching Tom put the kettle on, I wondered how he must feel, his body turned against itself. His ribcage, two hands sheltering weak organs in a prayer shape. His hanging mouth and eyes glossed over by a near century of mist. His trembling hands and feet, unsure of the simplest movement.

I wanted to hug him, not only because I wanted to but also to make sure he still remembered how to hug back. But in the end I only asked him about his dreams.

I still have dreams of St. Evidence, he said.

That so?

Oh, yeah. All the time. All of it. It's like being back there.

He told me that in his dreams he drifts into the church, feeling a loose shoulder blade and a crushed gut, and he starts eating up all the dust that's lying in the old building, even the grass that's started growing through the floorboards. He just shoves it all into his mouth, hoping for a familiar feeling on his tongue. His tongue, which is a muscle. A muscle that has also been alone for a long time.

It's as if I'm back there fixing old ships from underneath them, he said, swimming next to the fragments, thinking if I keep myself whole long enough and one ear on the wood, a few words will come back to me. Maybe a couple songs even.

Then in this dream he pockets the pieces of copper and cobalt and rotwood scattered on the ground. Collecting shards of the old gathering hall where his *giju'* flinched during the sermons and his boy deftly picked his nose. But every time he has this one dream it starts over and he is by himself again.

Though it always ends the same way, too, he said. My family stands under the arch of the church doors watching me wander further and further along the shoreline. Then it gets really strange and all.

He told me about scurrying along the grass-licked soil and bulbous rocks, trying to scavenge anything he can until he gets drawn back to the geological heat of the sunless seabed and once there he begins to bury his foreign body under the thread-like rock to rest for a minute in the callous and sound water.

By the time he finished telling me about his vision the sun had come up and in the growing

light that washed the walls in a thick orange shell Tom's pupils had become as small as I had ever seen them and I wondered what amount of light was making its way in.

It didn't take long for Tom to die after that.

***

One day two scientists asked me how far out we were when we caught recent bodies. I asked them, What happens to the kids we don't catch, with the saltwater and all?

They both gave me a weary look, but then one of them answered that the bodies eventually get eaten by organisms, and that the organisms that eat them get eaten in turn, and *those* organisms get eaten too. The bodies enter a cycle that goes on and on and on and on.

How long does that last? I asked.

Well, the blood in our bodies is salty like oceanwater, and the cycle of sodium lasts about 260 million years. That's called residence time. And 260 million years is the residence time of our bodies on the planet. Or at least, that's the time it takes for every molecular part of the body to be completely dissolved into the ocean. So if someone picks up a random molecule five hundred years from now it might still have traces of you (she didn't mean me).

They might get acidified before that, though, the other scientist stepped in to say. The oceans are acidifying. They're absorbing more and more carbon dioxide (they dumbed it down for me). You know how shells are dissolving faster now because of ocean acidification? (I didn't.) You've probably noticed over the years less and less seashells are washing up (I hadn't.) Well, bodies react the same as shells. Like dissolving slowly in a hostile liquid.

Hostile liquid. I said I understood, and they went on their way.

It didn't appease me, though, to think of all those kids as sodium molecules. To think of Tom, or my parents, or Ellie's mother, or Tom's boy, or everyone else from St. Evidence who had grown old and died, or who had simply died, as shredded molecules entering body after body after body. I tried not to think about it too much.

When we were kids, Tom's boy and I spent a lot of time on the shoreline, hopping from rock to rock, picking up shells on the beach and throwing them back into the bay.

Once, a storm came swift, unannounced, and we ran towards a small cave by the bay and watched the waves froth and collapse against the rocks and the seabirds face the wind to hover in place and the trees bend and unbend relentlessly. It was beautiful and we sat there in silence for the half hour or so that it took for the storm to empty itself or simply move on.

I remember using a rock to carve into the wall of the cave, but I don't recall what I wrote, if anything. Likely my name. Maybe Ellie had checked it out when she went with her kayak, and I thought about asking her. I think Tom's boy drew the blueprints for a makeshift boat on the cave wall. He was always going on about building a little boat. I hated thinking about that now.

When the storm subsided we stepped out to see Tom and his wife and my parents walking around the bay, searching for us in their soaked clothes and all. I remember seeing

Tom hug his boy and noticing that they had the same thick black hair glossy from the rain and I wondered if my hair was more like my father's blondness or my mother's opal black.

***

There were only a few photos in Tom's things, but all of them had been taken in St. Evidence. I took the time to go through each one, trying to identify the building, the road, the tree, even. The dog lay in a corner of the room as I sifted through the belongings left behind by her owner. In dog years she must have been just about the same age as Tom, so I'd been sleeping at Tom's since he passed, taking care of her and all.

The day she showed up at Tom's door we were playing cards with another two or three people from the boats when there was a wailing outside. A storm had just passed through and this dog, a little herding pup at the time, was all drenched, so we took her in and warmed her up by the fire and gave her some water and small pieces of fish meat to chew on. For a few days after that Tom kept asking around if anyone had lost a dog. Nobody claimed her, so Tom just kind of adopted her. He never named her, or at least I never heard him call her by a name.

Someone ought to name you, I said, looking at her in the corner. Dawn. Do you like Dawn?

Dawn didn't move, only let out an agreeable dog-sigh.

Dawn it was.

In a drawer I found a letter I hadn't seen in years. About a decade ago, the government had sent Tom, me, and a bunch of other people in Bonavista a letter with a royal red stamp in one corner and a bolded title: LAND REPATRIATION ACT CLAIM. It went on and on with fancy words and numbers, all to say that a piece of land in the area formerly known as St. Evidence and now known as #NL292 officially belonged to us once again. I had only received a letter addressed to my mother and I had to call the officials and explain that my mother had passed twelve years prior, so they'd sent another one addressed to me.

The other abandoned towns on this massive island were given back to the other people who had been displaced. As far as I know, nobody in Bonavista moved back anywhere.

I found it odd that Tom had opted to safekeep his letter for so long. There was a faintly printed map of St. Evidence with a red square indicating the land in question that was to be Tom's, and although I hadn't been there in over fifty years, nor had I ever seen St. Evidence on a map like this one, I was sure it was the right land. That same land we had stood gap-jawed on when the relocation order was handed out and we put new boards up on his house anyway. It felt funny seeing it in red on a piece of paper. Made me think of the salt in our blood.

What do you think I should do with this, then? I asked Dawn, who didn't answer. You're not so different from him, you know.

She gave me a side-eye, which I grasped as a plea to let her rest.

I put the letter back in the drawer and sat down by the fire. On the table next to me was a navy fabric bag that tied shut with a drawstring. In that bag was a rosewood box within which was a plastic bag that was sealed shut and in *that* bag was Tom. Tom as a fine, grey sand. Tom as a gathering of molecules.

I tossed another log in the fire. A moth flitted around the room for a while, circling the light in the corner, until it settled on the nearby window, and soon enough after that I got up and walked over to the phone.

***

Ellie offered to come with me, but then we remembered there was only one kayak. She stayed behind and looked after Dawn while I took her truck and made my way southwest.

It might sound odd, but after five decades in a fishing boat I had no idea what I was doing with that kayak. My hands were raw and overused and it felt like the wind was catching like filth under my nails and the water kept lapping me and the damn thing kept tilting left and right almost toppling me into the water on more than a few occasions.

And then I saw a few crippled buildings near the shoreline and knew I was looking at St. Evidence. The dock had rotted away and was half-underwater; the air was frigid and rust-licked. I tried to find the rocky beach where Tom's boy and I had hidden in that cave, but I couldn't and figured it too was underwater by now.

It seemed as if the blistered town had shrunk back into the bay. Saltbox homes dilating in the forgotten light, weeping from the bloat while a cast of hawks perched on rock and waited for a few lost fish to swim by.

I wondered what sounds and songs and stories would come from those ruins if I had one of those fancy contact microphones the scientists carried around. Though I knew I wouldn't need one to hear.

I found a place to berth and pulled myself out of the treacherous embarkment and onto the changed land of my childhood and my parents' childhoods and Tom's. The land of the full lives of so many others before that.

Before I left, Ellie had shown me an online group dedicated to St. Evidence. It was full of folks with surnames I recognized who were sawing through archives for a shred of a family home, a marriage or birth certificate, a newspaper clipping, a record of death.

It's funny, Ellie had mentioned there were more people in this group than the town ever had inhabitants. When she had come to St. Evidence she had taken as many photos as she could for the people online asking about their ancestors' lands and homes and lives.

I told her the story about sodium lasting 260 million years and she said that by then all the land masses on Earth will have piled up into one again. One big country. The thought of that

made us both laugh.

The stone roads were completely overgrown. I was somewhat comforted by that. Ellie had told me that it was still easy to recognize a few homes. The church is still up, somewhat, she had said. She could retrace the steps between it and her home with her eyes closed, even after all this time. I understood what she'd meant by that.

Welcome back, friend, I said to Tom under my breath as I pulled the bag that contained him out of the kayak's dry hatch.

I spotted the church first. Its modest spire still stood above the tall grass. But the building had been eaten from below. It looked like a washed-up boat, its ribs pronged to the palled ground, capillarous with the past. The stained-glass windows had long been shattered and given way to moving views of coastal hills, seagrass tickling itself, and windswept trees.

One bench remained upright, so I sat down for a few minutes and listened to the distant waves hitting the shore, hitting the shore, hitting the shore, before making my way to the rear of the building.

Tombstones fallen like trees, names weathered and covered in moss, traces of the swallowed and the fossilized. Who had lived here and left more than a shadow?

It didn't take very long to find Tom's boy. His name was still fresh enough. The gap between the numbers of his birth and his death saddened me. Decades may seem like a shrug in geological time, but for us humans it's all we have. That was something one of the two scientists had told me.

I brought you someone, I said to the air.

I shuffled a little bit of vegetation around the neighbouring tombstones. I dug into the soil just enough and poured Tom's ashes in the hole. A few were carried away by a spit of wind. I then took his old orange fishing mitts out of my pocket and settled those into the hole as well and then I filled the hole back up with soil and moss and patted it down a little bit so it wouldn't look like anyone had been here at all.

Sometimes at sea in the curtains of rainwater, I watch as Tom moves between spherules, gives my shoulder a tap, and goes. I'd like to believe that means he's thanking me. I'd like to believe that means I buried him close enough to his family that they got to share a cosmic word or two. I think about that for a little while, then I continue to sort the trout by size.