

My Job Was Basic

M. Steven Neal

Engrams is what you called it. Memory traces you said. Said it's the brain's way of tending traumas. Pairing them off like that. You said talking helps. Said writing does too. It doesn't bother me to talk about them. If I'll ever unhitch the two memories is beyond me but I'm inclined to keep at it. I reckon I'd like him and I laying eyes on each other for the first time to set sacred. Reckon too I best get on about it lest I never put the story to paper. Talking and writing they're something altogether different. So here is this story.

The day I met Anton I lay awake in bed and my figure was unmoving for a long while even before the sun rose and then continued on that way yet the whole while was afire as if it were of a siege done unto itself. The spoils, the lifeblood, the selfsame. It was 10 a.m. The time was early and peculiar to me. I was unpracticed in waking early. I usually worked the night shift at Homero's but I'd been scheduled for lunch and happy hour. I don't remember why. My dog Scout, a female beagle colored brown and white or liver officially per the American Kennel Club, was firmly curled up under the coverlet. The more common coat for beagles is tricolor made up of black brown and white. But I'll come back to the coat patterns in a sec. The name Scout I'd eagerly preserved since adolescence to confer upon my inaugural pet as it was the namesake of my favorite fictional heroine and I'd made a promise to God

that her, the heroine's moral strength I would endeavor to echo. Still despite my word being ironclad under the most of circumstances it was so I would on occasion concede hard fought principle in tender of an acrid yet modestly less painful respite. In fact by and by I began to withal find my quest for probity challenging and profound and utterly contradictory to how someone who was just trying to be a good person should feel. Which brings me to the patterns. Which brings me to the memory I was reliving lying there next to her. The glum memory of separating her from her tricolor sister. Why glum? Well not just owing to the separating part. See the way it went at the breeder was as the canine pair, them the last unclaimed of the litter, whined in a cardboard box I faced my petty horror: I preferred the brown beagle not the tricolor one simply because she was brown. I did I'll say think of bearing both darlings but only for a moment. A moment in which I beheld my anticipated intimacies. Nurturer of hounds. Wife. Mother. Grandmother. Yet in each role I envisioned myself vexingly alone. I later wished I'd lingered a bit longer and engaged my uncertainty and probed the content of my unpleasant imaginings as they say one should do. But true to form I right off left the sibling, nearly puked carrying Scout away too. Turned out I was still down about it. Also turned out like myself the pup had a leaning toward sleeping in and what's more on the day I lay indisposed at such a godly hour a frost had come into Austin giving the both of us yet another cause to stay unstirred.

It'd come to pass another hour until I got myself out from under the coverlet and swung my feet to the ground and stood all in one motion. I'd done it that way for years. I was twentytwo. Fore I told at Jim's I was but ten and since had grown tall and lank and my hair longer and turned from blonde to brown. My eyes had turned too. They were yellow. They'd be pasty when I woke. More than most people's I would bet. I'd wipe them the undersides then the corners to rout what had overnight accumulated and I'd set the kleenex I'd wipe them with to pile on my nightstand. I wiped them that morning the same. I'd done it and then tossed the kleenex in the wastebasket. Two points. I hadn't shot the wastebasket not once since I was a girl and I suppose in that moment something had just rose up. Sometimes it rose up. Became the dark into light that way. I yet went then to thinking on other things. Physical things.

Mostly puberty hadn't been kind to me and my jawline had become strong and tapered hard anteriorly, hyper-projecting or rendering me a protruding chin. What I often judged looked like a witch's chin. And my eyebrows had thinned. I was thinking on that too. Oh how I'd wish them thicker. I began each day resuming in the disquietude I carried during waking hours and in the prayer the night was eternal. Yup that's how my mind would operate. And until I finally stopped thinking about all them things and shuffled into the bathroom I'd been standing there for some time and save the wiping and the wastebasket I'd been still and gazing out into nothingness as if I was contemplating the edge of the world. As if I might just go ahead and step off it.

By now I had leaned in toward the sink mirror to scrutinize my face, and I got right into it. Despairing over my blackheads. As I would standardly in that there mirror and this time around they looked no different I just remember despairing. Blackheads run in my family. Daddy has them and so did brother. Daddy's momma had them worst and so I figured they got that way with age and I must in the end yield deeper grittier pores. I scrubbed my face for a few minutes. Then I paused. Then I squinted at the small antebellum pocket watch set in mother-of-pearl case, what granddaddy bequeathed me and what I kept open and lying on the sill of my bathroom window, and I could see time was outpacing me. I was going to be late for work. When I'd took up I was to clean myself daily I'd meant it and yet I wished to make good the hour was limiting me to a shower instead of a long-needed soak in the clawfoot tub my bungalow bestowed and had boasted as incentive on Craigslist where I'd located the housing rental ad: \$400 A MONTH / WEST AUSTIN / SMALL / CLEAN / QUIET / TUB YOU CAN SPEND A NIGHT IN. I found the whole thing difficult however. Showering. I mean the general effort it took. Being upright and all behind there what I had a Chagall Lovers and Daisies vinyl shower curtain and beneath my rainfall shower head. For behind my multicolored Expressionist screen in right veiled seclusion I'd reverberate with thought and reflect and be assaulted by memory and be made vulnerable. As I'd be made vulnerable equally and reliably in another kindred overly private hideaway the public bathroom stall, for you to know. And it'd happen then

standing, accessible, penetrable and teetering and head descended and bowing below the shower's arriving cleanse under the deluge warm and bearing down against my soft and weary flesh my entrenched truths would be leached readily from my body and left pooling on my skin them refusing unlike sin to be washed away by water. I skipped my ablution this day. I moved back to my bedroom. I took my robe off reluctantly. I liked being in my robe. I got into my work clothes. A white shirt and short plaid skirt. I had long legs. Knew I could make more money working at Homero's wearing the skirt than at some office. Besides Jake used to bartend there and got me the job. I'd come to remember my brother there behind the bar. Smiling. He'd always be smiling. He'd die in an automobile accident a few years after I was married. I don't know what to say about that. I really don't.

Finally I'd finished dressing and I let Scout in the yard and took an orange juice juicebox from the fridge and slowly went outside toward my car. I as a rule moved slowly. I liked feeling my feet pressing the ground in tempo with the pace I perceived the world and if I went any faster believe you me I would fall. Or at the least stumble. Taking it that pace suited me just right. I had seen him when I come out. My neighbor Vince. He was mowing. Mowed every week frost or not. By the time I got to the curb he had shut the machine and I could tell he was watching me and then he said Could you park a bit less in front of my house next time? Now I readied my reply of it. Took a quick minute too. Thing is I'd kept a whole lot of replies ready so to issue out for when the right time would come. When they ask you things and one set of words might could get you in sorts of trouble and if only you had the other set they'd come to expect, well. Can't say I wasn't a civil girl about it. Made so I could get through the day proper is what I found. I'd fixed the replies by the years but I never did have any notion of how long it would take to do the fixing. No notion the toll it'd take neither. Fixed them by a drawn-out process of trial and error it turned out. I had a sharp sense of one's disinclination is how I'd put it. Precisely in moments I'd falter in conversation that is. A sharp sense of one's subtle even subliminal distaste for my inadvertently ill-chosen words. Like some kind of bug-feelers I suppose. It'd be painfully evident to me. Shifting eyes. A half-swallow. A hitch in speech. A change in their

cadence about the breach in momentum, in discourse. And it was any or all of these traces what would emerge upon them hearing and then re-hearing me violate both new and primordial wounds. Was any or all what would rouse their overwhelming feelings of discomfort and fear and fury. I'd have the sense of it all. I wanted to say the right thing. Better my verbal volley. Please my listener, and myself. Though I often even when extra careful ended up erring and then after all peering at their inevitable muscular and emotional unrest as their composure and psyche was tested. And what was most grim for me in the offendees' metamorphosis? You'd asked me that once. Twice maybe. Most grim by a far ways I can tell you right now was their sorting out just before they settled on whether to carry on or exit the dialogue or lash out at me in defense. The reckoning I reckon. I never could witness it any other way. Never quit trying not to either. What's more for you to know: In myself the same traces any or all plus added corollaries I'd yet to observe in others including shallow breathing and inability to shout or compete with background noise and urgency for self-harm and high-pitched ringing in both ears emerged exactly when and every time I received ill-chosen words. And here I might thank them for it. Might thank Him too for that matter. Because I'd become—I was lexically equipped to respond equally, like I was saying. Even more handily than most. Even more markedly. Not to sound off about it too much but I was. And would if need be respond with defined intention so as to resist and avoid, primarily avoid being wholly provoked and cornered. And under equal impetus so as to protect a friend. Or Jake. Or momma or daddy. Or my lover. Or Scout. Or really anyone I deemed begged safeguard in the form of a verbal offensive. And when I spoke my words wittingly and squarely to the perpetrator under the combusive and generally all circumstances regarding conversation I was racked with terror but never blinked. I chose then: Good morning Vince that'll be fine. My answer was safe. For his neighborly iniquity I had weighed impugning him but refrained. And I even spoke his name which I detected people liked. The sound of one's name. Especially when uttered earnestly during conversation.

I arrived at work in the maroon Ford Bronco daddy gave me. He got a new truck so he gave me his old one. He'd take care of me that way when he could.

Always had. Momma thought him a kind man when they married, thought he'd make a fine begetter. Thought him troubled all the same. No more was he than any other man who ever lived I suppose. No less either. The other week I had a dream about him and in it I was there in my bungalow back in Austin except for I was a little girl. Was the same age as in an old photo I used to keep there of daddy and I, and in the dream I was looking up at the photo and therein the image what sat frameless and propped on a shelf in my bedroom I maybe five or six-years-old was standing near daddy on a dirt road before a dust storm backdrop and Reconstruction era stone courthouse his daddy had occupied as county judge. I was wearing a yellow summer dress and long braids which were both windblown. I was leaning slightly in daddy's direction into the wind as if to keep my footing. I was glancing up toward him. His face was rugged and hair fiery orange. He was standing with his knees slightly bent and was also leaning into the wind, digging firmly in the dirt with his boots. He was gazing directly forward. He was the idol in my life. My hero. I thought it so in the dream and then I turned very old and then I woke up. Have the photo right here. The same as I had seen it. The same as it was. Would think him a hero when I was a girl. Still as he would long for the bygone cowboy era of his youth, when he'd worked herding and tending cattle, when he'd felt realer and freer than he did, he was intermittently absent from my life. Told me once was the way it was. What he couldn't help himself. Toiling to reclaim the capstone of his past. Wept before me on all he'd said. I was ten years old and that was a very hard thing to see. Very hard. Forgave him right there. I always knew his genial aspect belied dread. And I could relate. Sometimes in the years what followed when studying the photo I'd imagine our bodies dematerialize and join the hovering dust and disappear together, blown away by the wind. I'd come to display momma's looks but was a true picture of daddy, to carrying an unsteady gait and misunderstood eyes and even rioting—mostly—in unflappable silence. Even was finical like him. That there maroon Bronco I began telling about being homage to his letterman for instance. Devotion I reckon. Or Shibboleth. Years ago when he bought it a wreck he had it painted over factory Ford Maroon with a high gloss finish—the kind of finish where the flecks of color pop in the sunlight—and had it

fashioned with maroon vinyl seats and maroon vinyl dash and maroon vinyl racing-grip steering wheel. Daddy and his maroon. I appreciated his gesture. I just felt burdened hitched to his particulars. I'd a firm sentiment of beauty. I labored to adorn my life according to my persuasion hoping an authentic esthetic would shepherd me toward tranquility. I stood there looking at that truck for a good minute fore I headed up from the lot.

The restaurant was large with a seating capacity of 500 spread over fifteen server sections, ten inside and five patio. Today I worked patio. Shifts began and ended around traditional lunch and dinner meal times and also included a daily happy hour from 3 to 5 p.m. featuring half-priced menu items: L. Armstrong, LBJ, and Ladybird—or queso with ground beef, surf 'n' turf enchilada, and pink margarita on the rocks with salted rim, respectively. As far as Texas goes Homero's portions were particularly mammoth. Weighed 2 times the state average. I can tell you too 6 times U.S. government recommended. Told it to us the first day, both sets of facts. Said it was bragging rights. And patrons consumed shocking amounts of alcohol. Brimming drink sales during all three shifts and top liquor revenue in zip code—ten years running—made the establishment a civic tax treasure, also was bragging rights they said. I must've told you about Homero's. Must have, right? The inside dining floor was terra cotta. The tiles were reddish and separated by wide white grout. The servers would sweep and then mop the tiles between shifts stirring up spilled beverages alcoholic and also dry local favorites including sweetened iced tea and Coca-Cola—regular and diet—and a variety of Jarritos soda flavors such as apple, fruit punch, watermelon, and guava. Additional collateral floor waste included chunks of pico de gallo, gobs of guacamole, broken tortilla chips, pieces of chicken and steak and pork and shrimp, and a variety of splattered, prototypical Tex-Mex restaurant sauces including salsa, tomatillo, deluxe-tomatillo (with sour cream), and traditional ranchero red. And also regrettably often we'd find retch or puke or vomit or upchuck, the specific locution depending on the server voicing the ongoing and unheeded complaint to management that cleaning customer overconsumption just plain sucks. At the time I walked in I smelled charred meat and tequila. I also smelled floor cleaner. When I'd come upon here for the first time I'd

thought deeply in the same entryway about one's standing in the world and the un-lived lives of those before me and those after and still yet to come and I'd thought about those things like I said deeply and then abstractly to where the faces I'd seen became translucent and then had gone into waves and then I'd pulled up my knee-highs and set to work. I don't guess I ever did tell you about those things I was thinking then at Homero's. About un-lived lives and all. I guess we ought to talk about it.

Now I was smelling the floor cleaner. And I wasn't thinking much at all except for about it. I can tell you not a thing deep or abstract. I was watching a waiter ridding the floor of a neglected mystery amalgam must've stayed over from last night's last call. The space smelled like absolute death. Suddenly I turned cold. My arms and legs grew goosepimples. They felt heavy. I was overcome by torpor. Took to regret. And rage. I was struggling to stay present. I headed to the kitchen whereupon entering after negotiating two recurrently swinging saloon-type doors managed to gracefully nod, gesturing hello to the busboys, before pouring and then swilling a large coffee with extra cream. That being something I'd do, take extra cream with my coffee and also I'd sip orange juice both for the calories on account of I'd find it difficult to eat.

While I was reacclimatizing myself, I stood leaned against the metal cooler door and I retrieved from my back pocket the notebook and I took to reading what I had wrote the evening before. Had wrote that when entering/exiting the kitchen per the Be Safe section of the employee handbook staff was required to shout incoming/outgoing hot tamale. Wrote that the incorporation of hot tamale as motif in Homero's corporate culture was instigated partly by a Dang Pro televised competitive-eating event that showcased eight of the country's top professional eaters urgently consuming the restaurant's fiery twist on your basic tamale: the addition of altitudinal, limit-pushing Scoville measuring peppers to beef wrapped in cornmeal, cooked and served in steamed corn husk. Had wrote still more: Filming of the event occurred on location, in Homero's southernmost patio section. Pro-eaters were tucked along a plastic cafeteria-style table set in direct summer sun and wore headbands and wristbands, each for manufacturer, anti-sweat intention. But wristbands were also employed as a sort of appendage-like, makeshift napkin most commonly utilized in back-

of-the-wrist swiping across mouth or nose but never eyes, for obvious reason. Headbands and wristbands additionally served as promotion, each black and emblazoned Homero's in red, five-inch lettering about a sunglass-wearing fireball as logo. Donning the logo at Homero's fulfilled step 1 in 7 STEPS FOR BOOSTING EMPLOYEE CAMARADERIE AND COHESION, an addendum to the employee handbook written and distributed by one recently ascended shift manager whose career aspirations were corporate. The event's main celebrity draw was the infamous 450 pounder from Ohio, Jimmy "Jelly" Bean whose monstrous calves were legendary and turgid and overrun by blue-ish veins that looked like small snakes. Jelly wore a t-shirt that read Eat or be Eaten. Jelly's signature moves per the event sponsor bio data blurb on DP PR flyer totaled 1. Dunk headlining food in cocktail sauce [qua lubricant] for swallowing / 2. Choke down eight-scoop banana-split [re disport] as victory jig. Jelly clinched the blue ribbon after a gaining Yuran Wang the underdog from Brownsville, TX was disqualified for regurgitation. Lastly about it I'd wrote that the restaurant's hot tamale motif also saluted the chewy cinnamon candy that was the childhood favorite of founder Homero Villarreal FL. 1947-2005 COD SUDDEN CARDIAC ARREST. The one and the same confection made popular by U.S. movie theatre chains in the 1950's and whose trademark red box with flames and urbane fireball remains recognizable and stocked in cinema concession cases and convenience store check-out zones to this day.

I put the notebook away and stayed on in the kitchen. The busboys they went in and out continually. They fancied me. I was kindly with them. I also spoke Spanish with them. I liked speaking with the busboys being I felt safer with them than most people, being they didn't expect much from me. And I felt honest exercising my Spanish with them being they didn't speak English. I found no revelry in refining myself at another's expense. I cringed when customers tooted their Spanish on bilingual, English Spanish speaking Latin servers. For example, and overheard by me earlier this week: Excuse me, Senorita . . . Could I get some agua, por favor? and Hey partner, where's the bano? and We need another round of cervezas, pronto. Did I ever tell you I was fluent? Nearly fluent. I'm finding that I might've left some things out.

It came by way of my finding the language come easy and as well owing to my very first boyfriend, my first heartbreak. I was thirteen. He was born and lived in Mexico, Nuevo Laredo, about two hours from my front door. He would cross the border often for work and to see me. And one day he stopped coming. He told me that it might happen. That he might be removed. He shared his resilience with me, his belief we'd each emerge stronger, better in light of it. De carácter superior he would say. He introduced me to Fuentes, and Llosa, and Márquez's magical story of Macondo and its mighty first sentence: Many years later, as he faced the firing squad, Colonel Aureliano Buendía was to remember that distant afternoon when his father took him to discover ice. I sure was in love with Armando, his words and his authors'. He is long gone and I'd been wondering these past few years about whether we might ever come upon one another again. Wondering what he was up to. Wondering what I might say. I found that it was too much to consider. Then I started asking myself whether it was something I did ran him off. I can't stop asking it, Jane. Can't stop. Which is not something to be doing when you're a married woman.

Well. My job was basic. I took mostly orders for tacos and booze. I existed as a liminal visual stimulus barely perceptible as more than passing object in skirt. But I was functional as server and self-preserved, knowing what words to utter to sate the patrons and allow myself to Ruminare unnoticed. Uh-huh ... sure thing ... be right back ordinarily spared me from captive chit-chat, and so let me get on with it. I could in relief continue quietly Ruminating, meaning rehashing my familiar and unsolved dreads what without fail awaited in frenzy though I'd hope might flee forever upon closing my eyes to sleep. For the most part I presumed rehashing worthwhile, more so than praying along with fantasizing along with pleading, which I did as well, all three without exception and in unison for good measure, experiencing the particular trinity as distasteful and particularly reminiscent of my childhood efforts, but as efforts still and as better than no efforts, better than hopeless, darkness, lying down to die. Yes, much better to pray along with fantasize along with plead. But to my prior point I presumed rehashing more so worthwhile, so I'd been giving it a go. More so worthwhile even considering my mental exhaustion

due rehashing since rehashing stretched from the first to the last waking hour, minute, second of my day. So why more so worthwhile? Why giving it a go? Certainly in part for character building. De carácter superior he'd say remember. And I'd been of late reliving his words and so I'd been feeling up for redoubling my efforts, feeling that my familiar and unsolved dreads could be up for becoming, instead, non-familiar and solved and that really the good riddance of my dreads could be within my control, owed to my hand, my might, my next turning over of just one more woeful recollection. Not that I really had much choice in rehashing or not rehashing, as it happens. Ruminating is invariably a pitiless going-over that emerges, that creeps up on the Ruminator and lets the Ruminator Ruminator that they can Ruminator themselves out of Ruminating. A real round and round going-over, unceasing, unyielding, a firm will-not-stop-ever-until-you-are-dead, or sedated, or in-treatment going over. I suspected its pitiless nature and even suspecting I presumed Ruminating, i.e., rehashing more so worthwhile. For I—and here is the other part—saw myself in my core as existentially humbled and running out of options. So maybe rehashing was the way to flee forever my dreads and the way I could leave the praying/fantasizing/pleading once and for all behind. Turns out about my dreads however there'd been as yet no signal of their departure, no diminishing, no tiring of them. Indeed then I'd come to expect, even when rehashing, even when praying/fantasizing/pleading, even more so as time went by, that my dreads they'd endure sedate in my dreams, they'd stir upon opening my eyes to wake, they'd build while shuffling my body to the bathroom, they'd when settling myself on the toilet be fully returned. I couldn't shake them. They demanded my utmost attention, my complete regard, like wailing children I was obliged to them. They're my duty. I reckon it goes without too much further telling then I hated being a waitress. Even went so far as praying on the bug-eyed drunks who stuffed their faces and pawed at me a justice'd come. I can see now where I was wrong about that. For the divinity in the hearts of men over eons passed down, therein the justice passed down the same. I wrote that. I think it's fitting. I'd been reared via faith in God's word and over time came to perceive that storytelling constructed upon rescue from this world could mightily rule one's day-to-

day. For a long time I'd held that a period of future bliss awaited me, that my meager present was plainly a moment to be tolerated as I bided my time. I still believe in God but I'd split with my church because for one thing, after Jake had slept with our pastor's daughter the council then armed with cause did what they'd wanted from the start—removed the Fitzhugh trailer trash. And for another thing, so as to cut loose my deference for the Coming. I believed the lure of an alternate and ethereal actuality moved one not to live but avoid life, to skim earthly meaning, to be reckless. I still soothed myself with the help of stories but they were more improved, more nourishing for my psyche, such as perhaps most grad students drudged as servers below living wage in this pitiful economy.

When at last I'd gone from the kitchen I went to the patio and began to clean a four-top in my section. I was wiping the table surface with a rag, in circular motions. With my free hand I began pinching the back of my thigh with intent to harm and even slapped myself once across the face, undetected, I believed. I'd used slang with the busboys and that's what I was set off about. I'd used *Qué onda?* which meant *What's up?* and I was presently considering that my choice of words had been overtly informal and that maybe the busboys found me now foolish, or coarse, or worse, phony. Of my earliest memories there'd been in my young mind a sense of self-reproach and -disgust and -hatred the same I was braving this here moment flailing like some demongirl at Homero's. I can't forget slapping myself even all this time gone. It was the first time I'd done it public. The last time too. She'd made me that way deliberate is what I thought back then. Still sometimes think it. Considering momma and daddy were evangelical Christian and committed to their faith and they'd divorced when I was two years old and momma grew more religious trying to raise me alone. And seeing what I'd grown up attending sermons under John Harry, the powerful Pastor of the bursting-at-the-seams mega-church, Roundstone, in San Antonio, his role and method in conjuring up evil and the most dire of threats being legendary amongst us awaiting the imminent Second Coming. To lay it out, Evangelical Christianity in Texas is culturally centered around divine authority and inerrancy of Holy Scripture and surrendering to salvation is a desideratum for devotees espousing the apocalypse. In the

New Testament, the Book of Revelation details the Second Coming of Christ, an impending paradise on Earth and a variant of it Millennialism practiced in my church prescribes that once very specific predicated events transpire as the Ronald Reagan assassination attempt in 1981, or the assassination of Israel's fifth prime minister Yitzhak Rabin in 1995, or the occurrence of three blood moons the Rapture will commence sending believers rising to the heavens safely removed. The Tribulation period will follow as the Antichrist arrives to punish those left behind whereupon completion of horrific reprisals including war and famine and utter darkness, Jesus returns for a millennial one-thousand-year reign of prosperity granting the "saved" immortality. The impression of being "left behind" was firmly established in my parish and since enshrined in modern pop culture following Tim LaHaye and Jerry B. Jenkins's best-selling series of sixteen novels aptly titled *Left Behind's* big-screen adaptation starring blockbuster juggernaut Nicholas Cage. Point of it all being, momma especially uneasy as a single-parent was bent on befriending Jesus and carried a well-worn bible on her person to the supermarket, bank, my primary-school ballet recital, etc. To escape her proselytizing and growing rigidity I would seek comfort in Jake, who was older than me by three years. He was sweet with me but burdened with waking me and getting me ready for school and watching me after school while she worked. Lina's in God's hands! momma sounded aloud one day at church after Jake finally went to go live with daddy. As it went shouting or crying out and other types of verbal eruptions was regular at Roundstone, by clergy and congregants who when overjoyed or troubled or simply agreeable with the Lord's way acted fully upon their preferred mode of audible inclination. In the end I became a latch-key kid. The small stretch of mornings I did spend with momma was mostly awful, for both of us. She believed I was imperfect and unfinished. I was sad most of the time and was usually sick with a cold. Here are some healing drops of joy she'd say on our car ride to school as she'd hold a pretend watering can over my head. I knew she sought in me a child of God, content and confident and happy bearing a divine glow. But her intentions were less than pious. She molded and kept me for her self-regard, in her image and to carry her name, Carolina. I was unseen. And in this case unseen connotes that the nature of the

subject is what is being conveyed. In other words unseen is the embodiment of the phenomenon. Unaccepted, undesirable, undermined, unvalued and also denied, refused, rejected, repudiated, vetoed, and invalidated. As such I subsisted. And because being unseen was I sensed the beginning of the end of my ideals and courage and standing firm resolute with my chin up and potency and lexical prowess and really stamina to go on, and because I was all told terribly frightened, I longed to be seen. Given the stamp of approval, the go-ahead, the green light, the nod, legitimized, ratified, substantiated, and appreciated. More so I did long amidst my unseen embodying than amidst my waking, feet on carpet, dressing, feet on linoleum, toilet-flush, feet on carpet, feet on linoleum, cereal, feet on carpet, feet on linoleum, shoes on, turning the lock clockwise ... turning the lock counterclockwise, shoes off, feet on linoleum, feet on carpet, feet on linoleum, cheese sandwich, feet on carpet, feet on linoleum, toilet-flush, feet on carpet, reading, silence, waiting, being regular, run-of-the-mill unseen. Yes, more so, though really by a hair's breadth, even amidst my so many un-mothered, lonesome days. Withal I quietly yet broadly shouldered momma's anxiety and breakdowns from her parental failures and relationship failures and religious shortcomings and all-out marginal existence, and during one of her notably terrifying nervous prostrations, I, desperate to help her, shared with her my private, self-soothing mantra: Every setback leads to a bit more character building. In several years from today at my wedding she gave a speech divulging the story of my magnanimous mantra share. She thanked me for my insight and helping her during a tough time. My husband was piqued. He knew little of my upbringing and later during the wedding while he was dancing with her, he asked her when and how I arrived at my mantra. She poised in chichi dress and with cheerfulness that only if carefully audited would reveal her as inescapably used and bullied and long ago cracked replied, darlin, Lina's been saying that since she's a teenager, it's just something she must've picked up somewhere.

Stood there on the patio I wasn't thinking about Pastor Harry or the Coming or momma, save the busboys I wasn't thinking else. I'm at best as I said prior trying to unhitch this day. Trying on Freud's gambit. For I'm thinking it, I

ought to be telling it. That's the effort I got in me right now yet when he came up to me I had much less. I reckon he'd seen what I did. He came up still. Excuse me, he said. Are you working this other section too? I stopped wiping the table. I looked up. I crumpled the rag in my fist. No, I said. My eyes were big. When I'd look at you it was hard to tell if I was angry or injured. My name is Anton, he said.