

I Tell No One This Is My Life (III)

My plan is to set sail unnoticed in the wake of the morning. It has nothing to do with the stray dogs circling the hospital's dumpster nor the smell of piss in the parking lot, nor the air's taste of rotting grass; but with the deep sea-currents coming in from the north. I think of Basho himself rowing along the broken spine of clouds and feel the cold. *Alaska's a coldish place*, the wife says in the ER waiting room. *At times, less than zero three weeks straight*, I say. *Afternoons, dark by two*, she says, *how bad is he?* Before I answer she tells me about making snowboots for her husband, as she did for all their children. She'd hoped they'd *make something of themselves, with all their own places to go*. Over the blaring TV the newsman announces that twenty people were killed in a suicide bombing in Taloqan and reports that if unidentified bones cannot be counted as bodies, then nobody has to worry about mass graves, but I prefer the way Basho's small red sails might really be parting lips in the teetering bowl of sky. There's other news I'm avoiding for now. Until I can't. The wife looks at the CNN reporter and wants to know *what do the condemned ask God for before they die?* *Maybe grace*, I say. She puts her hand in the air and through the window, a gust shakes needles loose from their branches. She tells me *the world's after us again*. I think she wants me to agree.

Instead I ask her to step into the private conference room. In the morning, when I put my hand in the current, I'll want to be careful with her losses. Before he died, Basho almost finished his list of stories to be forgotten. But that's not even the news. There were days when sun-rippled pools reflected heaven and other lifetimes when barn owls mated. The wife sits down and pulls a tissue out from the box. I tell her he didn't make it. Each time her shoulders shake, her right hand steadies the tissue box on her knee. Basho might say the wind will shift in the second before her hands lift

to cover her face. No one can be too sure of change. But when the water returns to us, isn't the plan always to set sail in the morning, even if it's still thick with veils the light won't pierce? Not for hours. God, not for a long time.