

if a story like a river. loose and fretful, twine. if a story
with debris and froth, pulling from the banks as it
comes, never the same twice, step in and be renewed. if
glass-bottomed boats and red-dotted fishes. if another
line just under the surface, if you can't see without
drowning, if sometimes in storm, sometimes becalmed.
if each person carries her own boat, dam, leaf. cutting its
own way through or swept along and over the cliff, story
as waterfall and prised light, story as gravity.

to betray yourself as evidence, shoving ahead in the dark. her brother's blond head rising above waves; a man on the bed telling stories. little girls in exquisite ice, beaded swans, a soldier inside a hollow tree. three sets of enormous eyes. and when the story bolts out of the tree: an old woman as mound and x's on doors. incongruous. the man with one glimpse wishing her forever. he smelled like salvage. damp books that hadn't been opened in years. dust along the corners.

when the soldier sees the craggy woman standing next to the tree, bent, a rent in the fabric. pass by, stitch that door shut. her mother carrying laundry down the hall. when he speaks she searches for a word: *crevice. basket. bandage.* the instant of distancing, her hand outstretched. she promises him all the gold he can swallow for one tender box. the moment he enters the tree is the moment the war is real, mud and bone, forsaking and forsaken. *i never heard you. you never told me.* falling softly through the branches of a tree.