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Distraction

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Distraction

Eyes shut – but not in death, no: he’s breathing. A single mother-of-pearl stud at his navel catches parts of the light, holds onto them. He’s paler than pale. The blue veins show like map-work, as in *Here winds a river*, or *Here one state becomes another so imperceptibly, we’ve drawn a line – see? – to say so...* I keep thinking about force, its dehumanizing effect, both on its victim and on the one who wields it. Who did this to him? Could this be what he wanted? All across his face, at the mouth especially, that mix of skepticism and fear reminiscent of slaves set free too suddenly. Too soon. Which way’s the right way?

There’s that feeling a secret can give to the sharers of it, of having been stolen away from the world and given some wildering throne from which to watch it – one hand shielding that bit of shelter that the brow gives the eyes already, the other hand for – what? balance? Of course I’m frightened. Everything I’ve wanted in this life settles soft around me, then lifts, curtain-like, on a darkening field. It sways like the one that divides prayer from absolute defeat. The thinnest skein of smoke, barely visible, rises up from it. I walk into the field slowly. Until it looks like home.