

## Elk Rapids, Lake Michigan

After lunch, having squirreled our way into quilted coats and home-knitted mittens, we walk with the dog out onto the lake, frozen with the poured cement of snow, and feel the wind blitzkreig our faces, as our heavy-tredded leather boots leave a chain-mail of prints behind us. In the middle of the lake, we look back and see a rim of house lights, a strand of pearls, looping the neck of the lake. We pause like gladiators in a cordoned stadium unable to move or think of what to say to one another. We are like statues, bolted to the ground, a refuge for unmigrated birds. We are silent street performers with plastered faces, keeping our gestures to ourselves. The only thing signalling life is our breaths glinting in the late afternoon light. Standing there with our faces tuned to the sky, I recall a lava lamp in the corner of your college room and the hours we'd spend watching the slow moving sugar pink globules cling and dissipate. Behind the clouds of altostratus, a dim disk tries to make an impression on the white ground, but it has no shadows, only the ambition, to make its mark on the world. Suffering comes from both what we are denied and what we are granted. The dog circles its tail, watching its reflection in the mirrored ground, waiting for the springtime call of a loon to bring sense to this benumbed world. One time we took him to the vet and to stop his inclination to unzipper a wound, he was forced to wear a cone on his head. For weeks he kept bumping into furniture, unsettled by everything that up until then had been so familiar. And when the cone was removed, he took another few weeks to reconfigure the world, which having narrowed, suddenly opened out again. Water flows beneath the ice on which we stand, a makeshift floor, a temporary fixture that could open like a trapdoor, sending us, with stage fright, down a chute into the grip of a Hyperborean world. You make a movement and without a word we head back to the shore of trees which wears its greenery like camouflage, hiding an assassin's gun. Tomorrow the clouds will lift and I will leave this place of happenstance and return to a place beyond the imaginings of Roman Empires, far north mythology and street performance. As we get closer to the shingled beach, each house takes on its shape and the black-stilted heads of our neighbours seem to leap from window to window like puppet heads in a Punch and Judy show. Moving up the steps to our house, you stop at the site of last night's bonfire and kick the blackened embers back into the stop gap fire pit, as the dog's door flaps in the wind.

