

## THE AFTERMATH

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*Joanna Goodman*

My child jumped from a tree on to my back. Night dropped its green awning.

And walking away from the woods we saw roads opening out into roads.  
We saw birds lifting from steam, and we did not look away  
from the bricks breaking in pieces where the houses should have been.  
We did not look away when the trucks came, carrying ash.

We climbed up a ladder, slipped inside the ruin.  
And the window was an eyelid, sifting air.

I imagined I was someone else, finding us.

I heard a woman call *Gabriel, Gabriel*.  
Up ahead, pages turned. A voice said, *this is the left side of God*.  
Then the chimneys caving in, and the stars piercing the inside darkness.

My child and I walk across shingles. I whisper, *the sea is not far*.

And then, for the first time, I sleep with my arms tight around him.  
I stare at his back until I see double.

No, I sit on a metal chair. He stands

with his hands on my shoulders.  
I say, *how long have you stood here with your hands on my shoulders?*