WHO IS IT?

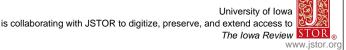
Words drift in, whose I can't say. It's late. All yesterday the sun poured itself out over the yards and houses but it's cloudy now, a small rain dampens the street. Those words seem to fly around inside me, blue wings, blue tails, whizzing and flapping. Who is it trying to tell me about her grief? A darkness only the old can swallow begins. I taste the bitterness she tastes. Mine. April. Fuzzy green breasts everywhere. I sit under them on the steps in the stunned air, the lamps open their light and the stars grow visible and silence like a hand thrust over my mouth suddenly covers things human.

REMEMBERING AND FORGETTING

I don't know where my father's ashes should lie. I drive to the cemetery to find out and when I get there, passing under the gnarled walnut trees by the church-like crematory fortress, on the office windowsill there's a box the size you'd wrap a wine glass in for a gift with brown paper and string around it and a white label on top with Sidney H. Berg typed on it.

I put both my hands around it, *him*. and stand there holding it out in

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front of me, staring across the field of thin stones to the edges of the grass where the streets and houses begin, like yesterday at the supermarket when an old man pushed his cart by and we smiled and suddenly I was studying the long shelves of bread, crying, lost.

I look through the maps of possible graves, telling the director what kind of place I want my father in. Maybe a few bushes and trees around it, I say, and I think of myself as bushes and trees. We step out into the cold to look for a spot but they're all friendless, naked to the naked sky, until I see one next to a row of family stones fringed by purple bushes on one side near a few small elms.

All this came back when that old man went by me shopping and I heard my mother wailing her loneliness and rage. Three black men dug the plot and placed the ashes, I was told. I wasn't there. I taught classes. A windy October day, the sky a blue cloudless glare. I hope they lowered him gently the way they would have if I had been there. Recently, five months since then, I asked a sculptress I know if she'd pick out a stone and carve it into a marker and I'm still

remembering and forgetting to remind her to do it.

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