

My father stands by the water. It is a lake, large as any small sea. My father knows what it's like to drown, what it's like to be taken by a storm or by passion. He stands at the edge of the lake, picks up something heavy—a pebble, the heel of a shoe; let's say a pebble for the sake of argument. He throws it in the water. At first there is only a loud splash; the depth defining itself, turning into something tangible; something one can talk about after dinner, a cup of coffee in one hand, an entire vocabulary of silence in the other. So this is depth, he says to the trees on the other side of the lake. He notices how the trees begin to tremble in the water. And he wants to make them stop. He wants to snap his fingers and stop all the trembling in the world. He watches the ripples now, how they start at the center where the pebble took the plunge and the depth made itself noticeable. He watches the ripples grow, one after another. Then he notices that they're not really growing but rising as if out of nothing. Each one a bit larger, less pronounced; each one closer to the shore where my father's bare feet stand so firmly between the wet ground and the rolled up trousers. He doesn't know fear now. Not here. Not while the possibility of yet another ripple exists. Theoretically they could go on forever. He knows their willingness to go on for no apparent motive other than momentum. And that, he thinks, isn't exactly a motive, not by itself. He is worried about the number of people gathered around the lake, all of them with pebbles in their hands. He worries about the ripples when the pebbles are thrown in the water and the dark depth makes itself known time and time again, and all the ripples begin to form and overlap one another. The widest ripple from each pebble linking with the widest ripples of all the surrounding pebbles. And pretty soon the lake is one huge quivering body, like an animal with very warm blood left out in the cold. He has a dog he keeps in the yard between his house and his little store. Even in the tropics the nights sometimes get too cold for a warm-blooded dog. This year the nights have been kind to León who is large and brown and paces the yard more like a determined man than a dog alone in the night. When the day runs out of light and my father runs out of pebbles he goes home to the dog and what he calls a meal. Those who know him well tell him how thin he looks these days. He cooks what he has, eats, washes everything. He hears something on the roof. These days thieves find it almost

morally permissible to walk from roof to roof, to take what they can from any house with windows weak enough to snap open at the slightest touch. My father takes out his gun, walks out to the little roofless strip between two buildings he calls a yard. He shoots at the few stars above him. León goes for my father's leg, his teeth working their way to the bone. My father asks: León, what have you done? León retreats like a sudden tide at the lake, quivers like water where too many pebbles have fallen. He will die from this, but now he only quivers. He will not forgive himself and he will die, but now he growls out of habit. My father points his gun at the stars, sees no one on the roof, goes back inside. Even on a tropical night a dog can die like a dog. My father has invested everything in this life. He says it is like barking or shooting at the new moon.