

JOHN HODGEN

Look, Look

In the grainy news footage an old woman in a bathing suit standing on a beach.

Overweight. Heavysset. Seen from behind. Suit too small. European. Not the way an old woman should be seen, we say. We look anyway, first with disdain, then dollops of pity, in the way we have come to look. We say *Cover yourself. You are no longer young.* We say the world is always looking at our bottoms. We consume her, spit her out, the woman and the others looking out at the ocean. Then we see it too, what has them up looking, what they must have seen first as cloudbank horizon, until they saw it truly, until it rushed at them spitting, *tsunami, tsunami*, the god of a wave that was coming to kill them.

The image turns over like a bird in a loop, like a photograph tumbling all night underwater, then come to the light, this old woman on a beach. She is all the old women we have seen and forgotten, like paintings we have passed on our way to the other, aunts who have died, Mother Courage, Käthe Kollwitz, relatives distant as trees overseas. But she does not turn, the woman on the beach, nor do the others. They look at the wave, sun-filled, that is coming to eat them, bigger, whiter than anything they've ever seen. They do not run, not yet, caught in the web of their looking, the way shepherds must have looked at the angels above them, struck dumb, agog, the way we all look sometimes at the world that loves us and kills us, the world that bamboozles, flimflams, Dick and Janes us again and again, crying Look, Look, this world that keeps coming, this world we behold even to the cup of our deaths overflowing and still never fully believe, this fleshy, ancient, crepuscular world, this old woman on a beach who turns, opens her arms, runs to us screaming, asking nothing but all of our love.