That Child Who Smiles

That child who smiles from within four corners of this photograph embraces the rough bark of a tree at a forgotten park, in a moment like the thumbprint of an illiterate swearing earnest money for the bearer. Even now, seventeen years later, two scarlet insect bites scar the chubby arm that clings unselfconscious to the trunk, immediate and near as his milk teeth unevenly grown.

Calcium returned to earth. No scabs remain. Only this round-cheeked photo propped between audiotapes and cd's, a Grecian urn bright after-vision in a general blankness. Justice of a sort, I suppose, generation after generation disappearing at each end. A stranger posed tall, rough as that trunk on which the child rests his cheek, is vanishing. Coming behind, all motherhood stops, all Eve is fallen.

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