

# Grace

A long time ago I had two sisters and we lived on an island. There was me and Jeannie and Em. They called me Grace, but I have never had much of that. I was an awkward child. I still am all these years later. Our house had two doors, one to the south, one to the north. Its garden looked towards the setting sun. It was a garden of apple trees and fuchsia and everything in it leaned away from the wind. Dry stone walls encircled it and sheep and children broke them down. My mother lived there with us. Boats came and went bringing food and sometimes sheep, and there were times when we lived by catching fish and rabbits, though we were not so good at either. Richard Wood came in the *Iliad*, his wooden yawl, always it seemed when a gale of wind threatened. He dropped his anchor in the sound and stayed for nights at a time. Mother said he liked his home comforts. He was younger than her, though not by much, and she was younger than Father. Father liked to come first, she said. In summertime we swam naked in the crystal water and saw his anchor bedded in the sand, the marks the chain left where it swung to tide or wind. Many a time I swam down that chain, hauling myself deeper, hand over hand, until I could stand on the bottom. But he took no notice. In calm weather we could

see my footprints on the seabed as if I lived down there and had stood a long time in one place looking up. Or perhaps that was not how it happened. Words have that way of invading memory; the stories they tell us become our stories. What I remember and what I forget may be one and the same thing, or they may merely depend upon each other. And what my father remembered for me.

There were three islands and they were youth, childhood, and age, and I searched for my father in every one.

# Jeannie

My first memory, the first memory that I can certainly say wasn't given to me by someone else is of my father hoisting me onto his shoulders so that I could see something. What do you see, Jeannie, he says, what do you see? We're in a crowd and my mother Jane is there. I don't remember whether my sister Grace is there or not and I don't know what it is that I want to see. It must have been before Em was born. What I remember most clearly is the enormous sense of safety and sureness coupled with a giddy vertigo. I remember looking down on the crowd. Many men wear cloth caps and the women wear scarves, as they did still in those days, and my father is smoking a pipe and I can smell the tobacco. One man turns and says something like, What you think of that then, Tom? And Tom takes the pipe from his mouth, releasing my leg in the process, and says something I don't catch. Even now it only takes someone lighting a pipe outside a restaurant for a great wave of security to possess me. Tom is not a tall man but from the height of his shoulders everyone around looks small. Hold on, Jeannie, he says to me, and swings round and moves through the crowd and out onto the street and there I see a horse; a man is holding him by the bridle, and I remember steam coming off his

back and steam coming from a large greenish-brown shit on the road behind him. I can smell the horse and he smells like Tom's old coat.

All my early memories of him are like that. Shelter, comfort, pleasant smells and sounds. I hear his voice sometimes—in the street or in a park or in a quiet room—and I turn expecting to see him. My expectation is always of a young man, trim, loose-limbed, fine-boned, coming towards me in his tweed jacket with something in his hand. My father the gift bringer, bearer of news, the world traveler bringing stones from Italy, California, India. I was a collector of stones. I was his favorite. I make no apologies. I loved him the most. Grace, on the other hand, could never love anyone or anything without some reserve of herself; she has a kind of native hostility or cynicism that prevents her from ever being wholeheartedly loving towards anybody. She's one of those people who feels the world has cheated her of some special experience. I pity her for that.