The boy on the plane is coming home from his grandfather’s funeral—his first exposure to the way it’s done, how we comb and scrub and manicure and dress the body, wiping away the evidence of life’s final squalor. He stares into his lap, while a half-dream plays along his lips.

On either side of us, the clouds are climbing into mounded, coalescing heaps—how voluptuous they look, viewed from the side, their secret folds and cumulations riding on shafts of wild, sliding air. Yawning enormously, the boy turns and smiles with pleasure at the girl across the aisle.

I think about old men, and of the boy beside me, how it’s almost time for him; and of the girl he will someday press against in a cool, darkened room. And the heaviness I’ve known before, that profound wrenching I recognize grinds forward, and settles into place.