

## The Rock Gardens

MaryEllen Beveridge

Along the Post Road, on a grassy tract of land behind a barricade of wooden guardrails, a half-acre of closely packed shrubs and flowering plants stood in green plastic containers. The prices were listed on a hand-painted board. The plant sale took place from mid-May to early June and benefitted the state park that lay adjacent to the town's borders, a coastal area of meandering trails, dunes spiked with sea oats and bear grass, great ribbons of kelp discharged onto the shore, a nature center, and the Sound lying bluely beyond. Lucia and Douglas walked across the gravel parking lot toward a guardrail that marked the straggling edges of the lot. They had heard about the sale the previous spring, their first year in town, from a neighbor's mother strolling her baby granddaughter along their street, who told them to look heading east on the Post Road for a white tent on a meadow of grass.

The tent was like the tent of some traveling show favored by bountiful weather and fortune, its twined wire ropes staked taut to the ground. Already in mid-morning, the hour the plant sale began, the parking lot was filling, and Lucia and Douglas could see a number of would-be buyers, some under the open scalloping of the tent, and some bending over the plants laid out on large metal flats on the grass. In the distance, at the head of a paved trail, were the silhouettes of biker and bicycle, the heads of the bikers otherworldly in their padded helmets. The sign before the turn-off from the Post Road read PLANTS BELOW WHOLESALE, and Lucia and Douglas had come with a mental list of the common names of the plants they hoped to find.

They had been away three weeks, called away by the obligations that had made possible the purchase of their house, so that they could see an end to them some day, here, in this new place. Before their departure they had volunteered for a three-hour stint on the grass, taking short-bladed scissors and cutting away the dead growth from the flats of arborvitae then bringing each plant to be put out for sale. The others, the more damaged plants, they put separately to be sold at a discount or discarded. It had been a hard winter; people were still talking about it this late into the spring. Lucia and Douglas could see, driving the country roads, that the shrubs especially and the fir trees had suffered severe damage from the unremitting cold and the weight of the snow, the needles brown or fallen away from gray stricken branches.

In their own yard the plants they had set in the ground the previous spring and summer and watered and fertilized with such profound care had come up this year irregularly or not at all. Douglas, who had owned two other houses before he married Lucia, tried to tell her that it was a foreseeable consequence of making a garden; some survived, some did not. It could be a failed connection of root to soil, he told her, a bad winter, the quality of sunlight, something unknown. Now there was one bleeding heart where they had planted two, three weak-looking peonies and two strong where they had planted six, tangles of blackened branches where there had been a rose bush. Starting in the fall the deer had bitten into the newly planted Rose of Sharon and eaten from the old established hydrangeas. Douglas was telling her now, as they walked between the flats of the remaining arborvitae, that deer eating plants they usually had no interest in had probably been a sign that the winter would be hard. Lucia had planted crocus bulbs in a large clay pot on the patio, but something had unearthed and consumed them. The squirrels destroyed a birdfeeder Lucia bought Douglas for his birthday; they returned again to the house to find the feeder ripped off its pole and lying in the grass, the bar that was to prevent seed from dispensing

when a squired stepped on it hanging by one hinge. Lucia tried to make peace with these encounters. She had come to their small rectangle of land so hopefully and earnestly, and she often experienced the frustration of her ambitions, some betrayal of her desires for it.

They made a quick pass inside the tent, where the annuals were displayed in bright hanging baskets and on long side tables. They admired the flowers, the begonias and petunias and fuchsias, but Lucia could not see the point in purchasing the radiantly colored plants that would die and never return. The act of permanent death offended for her every notion of life and its predictable cycles. Outside, the plants on the flats seemed to change each time she and Douglas came there and Lucia thought of them as if on a revolving platform, these plants this week, these plants the next. They were donated by a local nursery, depending on its overstock, though Lucia could not imagine hundreds of arborvitae as being a mere miscalculation. The morning they volunteered to trim the arborvitae they bought three witches' broom bushes, and Douglas planted them by the fence in their back yard. They looked again now for bleeding hearts and peonies, so plentiful last year, but instead they found rhododendron, mountain laurel and Scotch broom. After a brief exchange they loaded four mountain laurel onto a rusting child's red wagon set among a nest of wagons outside the tent. Lucia carried the containers of Scotch broom to the table where a man and a woman, sitting in the shade of an awning, oversaw the sale of the plants. Among the flats Douglas had found somehow a small boxwood to help repair the one that had been partially destroyed by the plow that winter.

The man stepped around the table and helped Lucia. She said, "Hello, Gerald," and the man, dressed in a gray T-shirt and worn khaki pants and wearing a sun visor, said, "Hello," in a barker's voice and she realized he didn't recognize her from the morning he showed her and Douglas how to cut the dead scale-like leaves from the arborvitae. Douglas had said to him,

standing somewhat painfully to his full height from the tedious chore, “We bought a house here about a year ago. We plan to retire there eventually. But then, how does one do that exactly?” He was trying to make a joke of it but it had occupied him ever since they had bought the house. Now they had a place, a definite place. But no plan. Many plans. What does one do? Douglas may as well have been talking to Lucia, or himself.

Gerald swept the visor from his forehead and put it back again. Pointing up the Post Road, he said, “There’s an archaeological dig just beyond those trees. I sit in every once in a while. They’ve begun to unearth Paleolithic artifacts made from flaked chert and quartzite.” Douglas took a step toward him. He said, “Arrowheads, I imagine. Stone tools.” Gerald arranged his visor on his forehead and said, “It should take a good while. They’re always in need of volunteers.” Douglas said, “Well, well,” in an interested but noncommittal way. Later, after they were done with the arborvitae and had returned the short-bladed scissors, Douglas told her that he would volunteer for a dig when he was done with his work; it was one of his many other ambitions, an interest he had never been able to follow, because how many can a man have at one time. Lucia foresaw nothing but rest and peace and she thought here she would have the clarity to account for herself in this lifetime in ways she was just beginning to understand.

Gerald had continued to converse with them over the damaged arborvitae and had led them to a better understanding of the mind of the town, which Douglas later pronounced to Lucia to be good. Gerald was speaking to Douglas now about the wisdom of their purchases in the same impersonal voice. Douglas, taking out their checkbook, said, “I take shovel to dirt and immediately the blade hits, as if by divination, a monster rock.” He held his arms out to show them what he meant. “New England,” Gerald said, as if announcing it to a crowd. Douglas wrote out the check. The woman behind the table, who had been smiling pleasantly at the scene of

selection and purchase, took Douglas's check and placed it in a metal cash box. "This will go to the nature center," she told them. "We have plans drawn up for a new one, a green one, with more space. We've been holding the plant sale for fifteen years. Now we can go ahead."

Lucia imagined the woman here, every day for six weeks of every year for fifteen years, under the spring sky. She had short graying hair, deep wrinkles in a handsome face, and a strong body. She was dressed much like Gerald. "We were looking for bleeding hearts and peonies," Lucia said to her. "We wondered if we missed them."

"There haven't been any this year," the woman said. "We never know what we're going to get." Lucia knew then that there wouldn't be any bleeding hearts or peonies this year, that there wouldn't be any plants to fill the barren spaces the hard winter had made.

They said goodbye and Lucia said good-bye to Gerald and he said good-bye to her in his barker's voice. Lucia returned the rusted red wagon from their car and the woman helped her with it. Gerald was asking her if she would like him to get her a sandwich for lunch in a voice he used for people he knew.

They drove back along the Post Road, the plants secured in the back seat on a cushion of old towels, past glimpses of marshland and further, past the low trees that bordered the marsh, brief sightings of the Sound. In the center of town they drove under a banner strung across the road that changed with regularity, announcing an event sponsored by the Lions Club or the Exchange Club or the Historical Society. Lucia read the banner and said, "Look. Lunch on the Green." Douglas slowed the car and turned it onto a narrow drive. He parked in the shade of a tree, checked to see if the plants were still secure, and left a window cracked in the locked car.

The centerpiece of the Green was the Congregational church, set back on a sloping lawn, with tall white columns and the steeple rising above it. The parsonage, beyond a brief stretch of

lawn, was almost completely hidden by thickly leafed trees. Across a sidewalk was a wooden one-room schoolhouse, a relic of history, and the Memorial Hall. Lucia and Douglas knew **by** now that if no other event was taking place on the Green there were always the food trucks with their menus hand-painted on the side panels featuring lobster rolls and tacos and elaborately frosted pastries. But often there were fairs and festivals, people sitting under small tented awnings selling jewelry and soaps and hand-made birdhouses, or farmers' markets with freshly baked breads and cheeses resting on beds of crushed ice and bunches of beets and leeks heavy and long as rope.

Douglas took her hand. They walked past a table laid with beaded necklaces. He said, "Do you want anything?" He bought her things. He bought her a necklace of seed pearls at Christmas; a radio. He bought her books and CDs of the old songs she used to sing. He bought a Laura Nyro CD for her and she sang "Stony End." In their yard he could use his phone to play music and she knew where he was by the songs she heard. She would go to him and they would sit together on some impossible rock uncovered of leaves by Lucia or unearthed by Douglas's shovel and he would sing "Wooden Ships" to her or "Tuesday Afternoon." He would say, "Does anyone sing like this anymore? Does anyone write a poem like this anymore?" He had his arm around her. They listened to "Hello Cowgirl in the Sand," the high tenor voice emerging from the small phone in Douglas's pocket that seemed to have no source, that seemed to exist in their minds.

Lucia glanced at the table of jewelry, all handcrafted but all the same at every fair, and she squeezed Douglas's hand. People were stopping at booths and Lucia and Douglas moved around them and then at the end of the tables were open spaces. Lucia could feel the grass on her ankles. There were generations of people, small children and young parents and people their age

and elderly people, and it seemed to her as if the Green had gone still and there was only the slow movement of their forms on the grass. She became aware of a band playing, a jazz band, and Douglas said to her, "Hear that, that beat right there. It's a drumstick beating against the rim of the drum."

Lucia listened to the beat of the drum as if from far away. She watched a young father walk with his small daughter toward some destination that only the child seemed to know. She looked up at the sky, a high, thin blue, and behind it, a darker blue, dense and turbulent, as if containing something yet to be revealed. A few plump white clouds seemed not to move in the windless sky.

"Look at them," Lucia said. "Even the young parents. They're all moving about as if in a dream."

"No one's in a dream with young children, not in that way," Douglas said.

The young father now had his daughter's hand. They walked together on the grass. "Jeff and Debbie look to be that way," Lucia asserted. She wanted to be part of a place that made one feel like that, walking across the Green on a spring day, after such hardship.

"They can't be, not with two kids," he said.

"Jeff takes his son for a ride on his bike with the training wheels. Debbie's mother walks the little girl in her stroller."

Douglas was quiet. She knew he didn't want to talk about children. If they talked about children perhaps next it would be other children and he didn't want to talk about other children. But often he looked at children, sitting with her in a restaurant or waiting in line at the grocery store. He would say, "Look at that beautiful child," and Lucia would hesitate to look. How would they seem to others? A couple longing for a small child. Well it was a dream, another dream. At

the line in the grocery store he flirted with the little girls in their mothers' arms, playing peek-a-boo. He wanted a little girl. He wanted to go back in time with her and have a daughter. He would spoil her, he said. He would carry her in his arms. Lucia thought he was telling her he would love this child in a different way that didn't involve any of the bitterness of the past.

To perhaps divert her Douglas pointed to the branch of a tree. Lucia looked upward. She could see nothing. Douglas was always pointing out the miraculous that Lucia could not see. She thought there must be something deeply wrong in this. He would say, "See, by the garage," and she would look by the garage when he meant twenty feet in front it, a rabbit appearing now against the gravel like a figure in a puzzle. Or driving he would point to something out the window that his head and shoulders and the slope of the car roof hid from her. He wanted to show her things and she often failed at seeing them. But sometimes together they saw a chipmunk sprinting in kinetic bursts across their lawn, its tail rigid, or a cardinal on the ground under the birdfeeder offering its mate a sunflower seed from its bill. And once, standing in their front yard, they had seen a pileated woodpecker, though they didn't know its name at the time, its long, prehistoric body held straight against the trunk of a tree, then watched it fly across their neighbors' yards into the woods. They saw it again in the back, where their yard bordered the woods, a severe, angulated profile in a far tree, and heard its terrible call. In the evenings sometimes they heard the call again, and Douglas was certain he heard a return call. He liked the world in pairs or small families. He planted shrubs and flowering plants that way, arranged in orderly lines or in groupings facing each other.

Working in the yard, they saw two red-tailed hawks gliding above the trees. Lucia brought him into the yard at dusk to see the risen moon, a white irregular shape pale and almost translucent, while the dying sun lighted the tops of the trees with a radiant yellow light. Once she

showed him an indigo bunting drawn from the green shadows of the woods to flicker above the birdfeeder. So she had things for him as well, to bring to him, as he did out of some continuous wish to witness the miraculous that often, here, seemed to hover before them.

Douglas pointed again so Lucia could see. She took her cupped hand from her brow and stopped squinting into the tree. She had finally seen the hummingbird, a dark outline against the sky. It didn't move. Then it was gone. Douglas took her hand.

At a booth Lucia bought their tickets: eight tickets at a dollar apiece bought two strawberry shortcakes, the purchase of which was to support the Congregational church. They moved up in line before a table overseen by three women, one cutting biscuits and placing them open-faced in a thin cardboard container, one scooping cut strawberries over each biscuit with a large metal spoon, the third taking a large dollop of whipped cream from a ceramic bowl with a serving spoon and snapping her wrist over the berries. Lucia placed their tickets in a glass jar with the others and they said "Thank you" to the women and carried the shortcakes across the grass to a table under a small open tent. They sat in recently vacated chairs. Lucia waited until the strawberry juice had soaked the biscuit before she began to eat. Douglas was watching the dogs in the open space in front of the tent. The dogs were all on leashes. There was a Standard Poodle, its fur black, its bearing noble and contained, and a white Standard, its fur bobbed and reminding Lucia of a plant whose branches have been forced to twine or bend, and three or four Golden Retrievers, one a pup with ash-blond fur being sniffed by an Airedale, its tail tucked and quivering.

An Aussie, its fur freckled and in patchworks of color, crossed near the table. Lucia thought them a strange breed, the coat oddly patterned, the tail usually clipped, the shape of the body to her eye slightly distorted in the neck or the legs or in the slope of the hindquarters.

“That one’s about the size of Bonnie,” Douglas said. “The color’s right too.”

“You should get a dog,” Lucia said. Douglas’s dogs seemed to haunt him, ghost dogs that appeared in the bodies of dogs they saw in a park, or from the car window.

“They die,” Douglas said. “You outlive your dog by any number of dog lives. It’s too sad.”

“It is,” Lucia said.

“We travel too much, back and forth. And what if we wanted to get away?”

Lucia let the argument go. He was, she knew, convincing himself more than her. But she was the one who always brought it up. She didn’t know what else to say to him.

“See how that Aussie keeps turning to look at its owner,” Douglas said, “even on its leash. Bonnie would sit at the threshold of the living room and follow anybody who dared leave and then attempt to herd them back.” Douglas had told her how the family he was part of then was in such disunity, but the dog didn’t seem to realize this. She had wanted them together. She herded them back. At night she slept at the head of the stairs, listening for any movement. Then she followed the transgressor to the kitchen or to the closed door of the bathroom and waited until she could herd him back. Their other Aussie, Errol, Douglas described to Lucia as “twice Bonnie’s size and stupid as a turnip.” He told her how Bonnie would drop a tennis ball before Errol then pick it up swiftly with her laughing mouth and dance away when the bigger dog turned his great head to investigate it. Douglas imitated his bark, a low, bass assertion of protest. An earlier dog, Pinky—which Douglas described to her elaborately but Lucia imagined otherwise as a terrier with dirty white fur and alert ears—one day as a puppy, left momentarily alone in the kitchen, chewed through the flimsy wooden gate and upended the potted plants, shaking their roots as she ran through the house. When Douglas drove the car on an errand the

dog sat up from her place in the back seat and rested her chin on Douglas's shoulder. He had a Tuxedo cat named Ben who brought gifts of squeaking mice and writhing garden snakes to the back steps. The cat liked to be carried around in Douglas's arms, belly up, like a dog or a baby. Douglas often reverted to these stories and Lucia wondered what was really on his mind. The cat Ben died one day of no apparent cause, a handsome, still-young creature. Lucia didn't know what had happened to the other animals, where they went or how they died, for they must be dead by now; that wasn't part of Douglas's need to tell her these stories. But she suspected they were sent away by Douglas, adopted out, in brief moments of clarity while enduring the unexpected redirections of his life.

They had seated themselves a number of empty chairs from two elderly women who sat in repose at the head of the table. Whatever they had eaten was gone; or perhaps they had just come to sit for a while. They held themselves as old people do, beautifully erect and motionless, as if to hide the slow betrayals of the body. Only their heads moved, dipping slightly one toward the other. They spoke to each other confidingly in their old voices. "You will have to see my garden," one of them said. "Are the roses out?" the other said.

Lucia pressed her fingers against the tines of her plastic fork. They had finished their shortcakes. She wanted another, she wanted five others, she wanted the sun to remain fixed in the sky. Douglas was turned away from her, looking toward something she couldn't see. The women held their arms in their laps. Their skin was pale, thin it seemed, not aged by the sun but as if having been cared for, protected, all their lives. Lucia leaned toward them. She thought she should acknowledge them. She did not yet know the protocols of the town. "It's a fine day," she said. "It's a beautiful day," the woman nearer to her said. The day was green, and blue, the clouds suspended in the sky like an intake of breath. The woman held Lucia's eyes as if to say,

this is all, this is all. This is what I know from all these years, and all I need of today and the next day and the next, after the hardships of the past. Lucia and Douglas pushed their chairs back. Douglas had collected their containers to bring to a trash barrel. He nodded to the women and they regarded him politely with their old eyes. They sat under the tent still as idols, turning their heads to each other and speaking in murmurs.

They drove north on roads that angled sharply then led straight through woodland. Douglas turned the car into their driveway. He set the Scotch broom by the fence and the mountain laurel in the front yard, triangulated with an oak tree. "As the laurels grow they'll form an interest point in the yard," Douglas said. Lucia did not know this phrase, perhaps it was a homeowner's phrase, but she thought the laurels as they grew would form a place of shelter. Douglas set the boxwood next to the larger, plow-damaged one by the driveway.

They changed into their work clothes and Lucia spread sunscreen on Douglas's arms and face. They tucked their pant legs into their socks and Douglas sprayed himself and Lucia with Cutter's along their socks and shoes and on their clothes and arms. He sprayed Lucia's palms so she could protect her face and neck. The deer carried almost microscopic ticks and they dressed themselves as if for battle and immediately afterward, when they were done in the yard for the day, they unpeeled their sweat-stained clothes and put them in the washing machine then took hot showers and scraped their skin with loofas lest one had found them.

From hooks on the garage wall Lucia took down a trowel and a small rake and a larger one and Douglas brought down his shovel. They wore thick gardening gloves. He was going to plant the Scotch broom first. At the fence line Douglas put the blade of the shovel to the ground and stepped on it to make the first cut. He would dig and invariably find a rock and if it was a big one he would call Lucia from her work and show it to her, large and damp with soil and lying on

the grass. Sometimes he used a railroad tie, left behind by the former owner, as a fulcrum, lifting the rock and pushing dirt under the tie then working the rock; sometimes he used a rail from an old bedframe and brought up the rock in sudden propulsion like a strongman performing a feat of strength. There were thick stone walls in the woods behind the house, demarcating a long-abandoned field or pasture. Farmers once pulled the rocks from the earth with chains and oxen but still the land defeated them, the topsoil a poor mixture of clay and sand and broken rock, the endless rocks revealed by the plow again each spring. On their rectangle of land, removed from the elementary concerns of survival, Lucia could admire the rock that Douglas had harvested practically with his bare hands. He would perhaps still be panting a little from his victory over it, and then wonder what they were to do with it.

It was hard work, not just planting but keeping the lawn, keeping their small piece of land. The woman they had purchased the house from had relinquished it after a long struggle. She had left much of her life there behind. They arranged to buy her furniture, living, as they were, somewhere else with nothing of their own to bring with them. She left a kitchen full of utensils, a chest full of summer blankets. Lucia found a photograph of her in her wedding dress, a woman younger then by twenty years, smiling at her new husband. There had been a divorce. The house, her own house that she had purchased and moved into, was beautifully appointed. But Lucia found that the furniture they had bought from her held scrapes and cracks as if from carelessness or some larger failure. The yard was overrun with crabgrass and dandelions. The bushes grew to untoward heights, straggling toward the sky. The former owner left them a congratulatory card and a bottle of champagne, propped on the kitchen counter. They heard from her once, from where she had gone to undertake the task of recreating herself, when she sent her new address, should, she wrote, any mail slip through. Lucia wondered if she wrote in truth to

hear about her house that she had appointed so beautifully and then had to abandon. Lucia wrote to her with a brief paragraph of news, careful not to intimate that the house she had left behind had become a place of refuge for Lucia. That would seem unfair. Further, Lucia believed that that sort of thinking could harm her.

There were small rocks embedded in the lawn and Lucia gave herself the job of dislodging them with the trowel and bringing them to the woods so the mower would go more easily for Douglas. She picked up sticks and branches that had fallen in their absence and raked the debris into small piles. She and listened for the muffled, chopping sound of Douglas's shovel. If she didn't hear him she went in search of him. If the lawnmower stopped she went to find him, to see her husband standing over it or having decided to break up the slow shearing of the lawn to bring a plastic trash barrel full of the sticks she had collected to the woods. She feared sometimes he would vanish, not of his own volition but out of the cruelty that she knew existed that could take everything important away. The world used to feel sharply that way. Of course now, too, everything could be taken away, her husband and all that they had made together of their lives. In the night she held him in her arms, and he was still and aware of her as if conscious of this moment of need and rest that was felt by him being held and her holding him. She held him in piques of love when he sat back in his chair after dinner or when they lay together in their bed listening to the tree frogs and the howl of the neighborhood dogs over some perceived disturbance or some reality they could not imagine.

Lucia brought the rakes and the trowel to the strip of yard by the driveway and propped them against a tree. The yard was ringed by years' of leaves, fallen or swept by winds to its edges, and caught in the brambles and the rocks and the elaborate roots of the trees. She had

raked the leaves for three seasons now and part of this, their second, spring. The yard itself had been neglected in another way; the soil was thin and depleted. Douglas told her it was impossible for the soil to hold, patched as it was with sparsely growing tufts of grass, and the top layers washed away under the rains and melting snow. The yard, especially the front yard, which sloped toward the road, was full of rocks and exposed tree roots. Douglas wanted to order a truckload of loam and bury it all but Lucia liked the rocks, they were so severe and somber. They seemed to be a part of the land—of granite cliffs blasted through to make the highway they traveled to get here, of ancient ledges and of spruce and white pine and some austere way of thinking brought from across the sea that the landscape seemed to have already articulated.

She went to Douglas, who was leaning on the shovel near another hole he had dug for the Scotch broom, and put her gloved hands around him and kissed him with her mouth tasting of Cutter's and told him where she would work. The soil around the rocks was rich with a compost of decayed leaves. The previous year she had raked out a border in the back yard. Now she could look out the window or go with Douglas and see the rocks, heavy and immovable, against the deep-brown soil and the background of woods. At the border of the woods was a formation of two rocks Lucia had uncovered, set one on top of another, exhibiting glacial scratches made by the drag of the retreating ice sheet. Douglas proposed edging the dirt where the rocks lay to make a more defined space, to incorporate them into the design of the yard. They would plant ferns and lily of the valley there. Lucia didn't have these words—defined, space, design—as he did. But she could see in her mind's eye what he meant.

Lucia took the small rake to the leaves by the driveway. The rake allowed her a finer precision, to bring the leaves from the spaces between the rocks whose tips and edges she could just only see, to reveal them completely. Douglas worked within her sight so she could look up

and see not the absence she feared but he himself pushing dirt around the newly planted Scotch broom and emptying a watering can over them.

She put her rake up and turned her forearm and looked at her scar. She had tried to show it to Douglas but he couldn't see it. She had held her forearm this way and that. It was another evidence of the miraculous, she wanted to tell him, like a red-tailed hawk or a sharp sliver of moon in a lavender sky. When she was two she lived with her parents in a rented house in Montreal, and her mother, in a gesture of friendliness, went to visit her next-door neighbor and left Lucia in the back yard with the boy, the son. The boy was four. She remembered now nothing of this except that the boy suddenly bit her arm. Was it a sunny day? Was she wearing a summer dress? Were they playing with blocks or following the trail of an ant? Had she held a dandelion to him? Did he lift her arm, or stand over it? She remembered the shock of his teeth, the terrible pain. It was her first experience of pain. It seemed to her she had known that moment her entire life. She screamed in shock and pain. Her mother ran out the back door. There was a wound, a red welt; then a crescent of white, serrated skin; then a fading line of silver. They never visited the neighbor again and she moved back to the States with her parents and every once in a while one of them would say do you remember that boy who bit your arm and she would turn her arm and run her fingertips over the silver crescent that no one could see.

Lucia raked the leaves away from the rocks. The scar rose above the movement of muscle in her forearm. It was clear to her that the rocks had deliberately been moved to form a natural boundary. They were too big to be used to make a stone wall. Had the plow turned up more rocks in the endless task of clearing the land? Or had they been uncovered in excavating the foundation for the house, or, littering the yard, deemed unsightly there? They were surely glacial boulders, broken and carried from granite ledges and the bedrock itself with the retreat of the

continental ice shelves. So they too were a product of violence—a larger violence of more duration, but nevertheless—of the glacial invasions and in their slow retreat the northward dragging of rock and soil.

When she was done with her rake Douglas gathered the leaves into the plastic trash barrel and carried it to the woods. Douglas admired the rocks, their irregular shapes beginning to be revealed by Lucia in their severe beauty, the product of unimagined forces come to rest in their yard. They seemed half formed, their bases covered yet with wet under layers of leaves. Lucia and Douglas sat together on one of them. Douglas said something, he whispered something to her. Lucia embraced Douglas with the spent muscles of her arms. Every once in a while she was angry at the woman who had sold them the house she had so carelessly looked after. The rectangle of land was too much. They raked and mowed and planted and watered. And did so again. But something would come of it, some design.

Douglas went back to work. He brought the watering can and the shovel to the containers of mountain laurel under the oak tree. She could see him from where she worked. She was pulling the leaves away again, making a long line of them at the edge of the driveway. She stopped and flexed her fingers in the heavy gloves, then went back to work. To uncover a rock took many steps. First one raked; then one raked the farther leaves, making a path; then one raked again. She wondered what she would be here and what she would do here when the yard was done and all around it the woods breathed. She put her rake down and went to the back of the yard, to the rocks she had already uncovered, scarred by the glacial invasions and neglected under the leaves, now somber and eternal in the shade of the woods, the deep striations visible under her eye. She heard Douglas's phone playing a song, and as she got nearer she heard the words, and she followed them to find him.

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