

# Shell

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For to forget him was to forget what was, which was, of course, she thought, a kind of beginning in itself, like an egg. Which didn't help, and she looked at her hands, and remembered how before sleep he would take her palm and tell her to close her eyes and guess, and then he would draw things there, starting simple with a heart, a figure eight, then more complex things, constellations (the Big Dipper), a horse-drawn carriage, a caboose (he was obsessed with transportation), a dictionary, a tree, a butterfly wing (which somehow she guessed), a baseball (she knew by the stitching he marked with his nails), a sombrero, Russian dolls, wooden puppets held by strings, and when they had filled her palms with mountains of kotchkies (how many months had passed) he started with the images that merged to abstractions: wind through a rabbit's ear, a child eating a plum, a man waiting for a bus that never arrives, the color of evening light on a factory wall. "Like Hopper," she asked? "As if peering through a window at strangers," he answered. He laughed less, listened more. And how often she was correct, and yet she couldn't hear how he was becoming—transparent? She only thought later. The faintness of the yellow sheets they slept on. It was spring by then, a spring of hard rain and children plashing in puddles. The spring he couldn't find work, and often—more than not—she fell asleep with her hand blank in his. And then the nights he wasn't there, she touched her fingers to her palm, folded them and peered inside to see the dark egg, like a

cave, heard it growing. And then he was gone. *It* was gone. She kept waiting for *him* to come back. She answered the phone at work, she walked. In the park, she found a robin's egg, broken and blue on the sidewalk, gathered up the shards, carried them home in the pocket of her purse. She took them out when she entered the empty apartment, spread them on the placemat he had bought. She leaned over them on the dining room table. On the tiny, white pieces of shell she scratched out with the head of a pin the secret hieroglyphics of her new life.