

၁၉၅၆ ခုနှစ် နှစ်က နှစ်က နှစ်က
 ၁၉၅၆ (၁၉) နှစ်က နှစ်က နှစ်က

၁၉၅၆ (၁၉) နှစ်က နှစ်က နှစ်က
 ၁၉၅၆ (၁၉) နှစ်က နှစ်က နှစ်က
 ၁၉၅၆ (၁၉) နှစ်က နှစ်က နှစ်က
 ၁၉၅၆ (၁၉) နှစ်က နှစ်က နှစ်က
 ၁၉၅၆ (၁၉) နှစ်က နှစ်က နှစ်က
 ၁၉၅၆ (၁၉) နှစ်က နှစ်က နှစ်က

Explode

I never met Franny, but I know his face. In my mind I walk my father’s family house in Nahant, Massachusetts, north of the Boston Harbor. Inside, I see Franny’s black and white high school picture everywhere, the same one in different sizes: flaxen crew cut and upturned head, delicate cheekbones like his mother, shoulders squared in suit and tie. And the eyes. Melting almost, like you can step into them.

There’s a life-size version outside the master bedroom where Grandmother would iron shirts; a smaller one in Grandfather’s study, where relatives now keep dented wiffle ball bats, towels, tennis rackets, a croquet set, dogs; another along the stairs to the second floor, where Grandfather fell a year before his fatal stroke; and then on the third floor, a photo from freshman year in college, the tiny oval of Franny’s face among his classmates.

No one speaks his name. But if it is the first weekend in July, at the Nahant Village Church next to our house, the bulletin will state that the altar flowers are dedicated to Henry Francis Callard, 1937–1956.

When art students have trouble painting negative space, teachers often give them a viewfinder and construction paper and ask them to cut out its shapes instead, paste them on a surface. In the negative space surrounding Franny, in the holy glow of photos, a ghost.

When I visited my parents' home in Washington, D.C. several years ago, I noticed a watercolor painting of tiny houses on a snow-covered mountain hanging in the guest room. I had never seen it before. The hills looked blurry, submerged. The sky was dark; yellow light shone through tiny porthole windows. Three trees in the upper right hand corner, two in the lower left, the rest bare snow. A road winding diagonally, down, up, over, disappearing. "H.F. Callard" scratched just below the road at the bottom. An MFA writing student at the time, I felt a sharp jolt of recognition—here was a fellow artist, one who shared my father's blood.



"Did you see Franny die, Double?" My younger sister Hannah, just out of college. She calls my father Double, for T-Double C, Timothy Cooley Callard. I don't like the nickname; it shrinks him down to a baby, helpless, not in control.

"No, I was not there." My father's voice, far away. It's 2001, August, and hot, nearly a half century since the accident. He wears a green knit shirt, sweat stains under the armpits. He's driving all of us—me, my brother Andrew, my sisters Hannah and Katharine, my mother—to a New Hampshire lake.

"Who told you what happened?" My twenty-eight-year-old voice.

"Aunt Libby told me."

"Was Franny dead when you found out?"

"Yes."

"What happened to him, Double?" Katharine too. Double.

Two boys and a girl go sailing in Nahant. Franny and his brother David and Anne Bangs. They swim in from the boat, David sees his brother go under, dives down, finds him, pulls him to shore. People try to resuscitate the unconscious Franny, he's swallowed water, they try an artificial compressor, no use.

“We need to get gas,” my father says, and takes the next exit. Hannah massages his shoulder by the pump as he fiddles with the handle.

“You never have said that much about Franny, Double.”

“Nobody asked me.”



I got my father’s attention with deeds. As a boy at a boarding school headed up by his friend, I couldn’t stop pushing myself—I measured my worth in A’s and athletics. Until my body and mind gave out, until I had to leave Groton and enter the hospital, a twenty-three minute walk, on streets, from where I had once lost a shoe as a boy (“Use caution,” says Google Maps—“this route may be missing sidewalks or pedestrian paths”).

After the hospital, I began to reconstruct myself through writing. When words—and emotions—swamped me, I ran away to find my other shoe—retreating to schoolwork and sports to keep from drowning in rumination. From then on, caring so much about anything scared me, but so did stopping—pauses could lead to paralysis.

Franny was a painter. He made the mountain covered in snow at my parents’ house, the samurai cut out of reds and blacks hanging in the Nahant living room, the watercolor of the Nahant Village Church in the dining room, the lines of its stones rising and falling, like it’s floating, a ship bearing people and prayers aloft. Franny could touch its wall from our driveway, just walk thirty feet across the grass.

Franny is only nine this Nahant summer. Maybe his short sleeves droop loosely on his arms, one hand grasping a brush, the other a palette. His knobby knees perhaps poking out of his shorts, his tennis shoes gripping the gravel. He’s learning to be still, to view the church in front of him through small strokes, the edges of its walls and roof forming the sky.

I came to believe, as a child, that the silence around Franny meant that someone had done something wrong. But now, I’m wondering if there is a link between my own fear of stopping, and my lack of knowledge about Franny. If in both cases I have misperceived, if in pausing to raise my voice, I am breaking the surface of my shame, and a family’s pain.

My father doesn't want to put a halo over Franny's head, he explains in our interview, but he marvels at how kind and gentle he was, with a vulnerability that was almost Christ-like. I've come to know Jesus as much for his lacking as his giving—like Franny, or my gung ho, pre-hospital self, or perhaps even my father, he is the figure just around the corner, the person who loved us, left us, and whom we always desire to return. We tell stories about him. In her novel *Housekeeping*, Marilynne Robinson writes that Jesus's friends missed him so much after his death that they started to see him on the road, or on the beach, or in their home. As if his negative space allowed them to know him.

Jesus kept busy. But in the midst of his labor, he had the courage—no, the need—to stop. He worried. He wept. “And in the morning, a great while before the day,” Scripture reads, “he rose and went out to a lonely place, and there he prayed. And Simon and those who were with him followed him, and they found him and said to him, ‘Everyone is searching for you.’” Prayer became his power. Perhaps there is agency in letting go.

Franny is permanently still. He stands in relief to my own life of frenetic motion, a trait picked up from my father.

I found my father sealed in pages of yearbooks, leading a football sweep, searching for someone to block. His helmet, a u-shaped bar curling down from the top of the mask, made him a saber-tooth Princeton Tiger. He moved. He could not deny ambition, despite Franny's death; maybe he too was trying to win someone's affection. His father, like mine, was principal of his son's school.

When my father started up a school in a cornfield in my teens, he drove us there every morning over dirt roads in a green Peugeot with a hole in the floorboard. I treasured this time with him—I could reach out and touch his tweed jacket from the back seat. The road rushed beneath my feet, so close, as close as his breath to my cheek in the night corridor of my fourth year, bending, singing to me *hush, hush, whisper who dares / Christopher Robin is saying his prayers*, then in the early morning spinning on a yellow bike to Princeton, satchel over the handlebars, the university's youngest admissions dean, tense as a tripwire.

Jesus dunked his head in the river, and God said, “You are my beloved son, in whom I am well pleased.”



Franny was born as a surprise. After Grandmother gave birth to Uncle George, her first, she was told she could not bear any more children. When Franny arrived four years later, he was a miracle. He was named after Grandfather, had his red hair—something I did not learn until my interviews, because in early black and white photos, he looks almost blond—slack-jawed, his mouth an O, eyes wide as a fish.

His three brothers are natural athletes; he is not. They all go to Princeton; he does not. As a teen, Franny is timid, does not date. School is difficult for him, he doesn't fit in, has to work very hard to get B's.

I see a boy in Baltimore walking like a metronome, bullet head wagging back and forth, tracing lines in sidewalks on the Gilman Upper School campus with his eyes, noticing how cracks form shapes. A lone artist in a male-dominated family living at a jock school run by his father. I've stared at the same cracks, holding my father's hand as he led me to Gilman, he to work, I to first grade.

Franny's art teacher befriends him, invites him to Italy and France, and over the summer the boy becomes an expert in art history, grows in confidence, writes long letters home. His family joins him the next year when Grandfather does a Fulbright Exchange with King's School in England. On trips to the Continent, Franny is their guide, the most adventuresome of them all.

He returns from England to repeat the eleventh grade; his brother David, originally a year behind, now joins him in the same class. Franny bulks up. See him picking up his wooden lacrosse stick, cradling the hard rubber ball and whipping it against the brick wall of the porch at home, thud, thud, thud. Maybe he notices the space between the bricks, how the cement holds them together.

"I mean he was really maybe the strongest of all of us," David tells me. "We used to wrestle and I could beat him but it wasn't certainly because of strength. . . . He was very powerful, didn't know his own strength."



Once I worked at a prep school in Providence, Rhode Island. I lasted only a year as a college counselor and lacrosse coach before burning out at twenty-six—I

wanted to be a writer, I wanted to be still and know that God is God, beating no longer the educator path of father, grandfather. A colleague bought me breakfast at a diner before I left the school.

“You’re in free fall,” she said.

I have never been to England, but I go there in my mind when I’m afraid. It’s where my strong self runs on the beach like the Olympians in *Chariots of Fire* with the anthem “Jerusalem” as a soundtrack, William Blake’s words wondering whether Jesus visited England during his younger years, and made it heaven.... *And did those feet in ancient time / Walk upon England’s mountains green* I sang in Groton School’s chapel at sixteen; someone preached on the *dark Satanic Mills* and days later I couldn’t think. When I ran my body hard in football practice, squeezing out endorphins to counteract black moods, I strained a groin, had to stop, and panicked—no longer, it seemed to me then, a master of my universe.

I’d left my father’s school—where he had taught me philosophy and religion—to shine on my own four hundred twenty-four miles away in Massachusetts. I’d chosen Groton to become the kind of iron duke, replete with lacrosse stick and well-defined latissimus dorsi, I’d seen strutting the campus of Connecticut’s Hotchkiss School when my father was its headmaster. I reveled in FDR’s engraved name—class of 1900—on the wooden wall next to my Groton Schoolhouse desk, famous alums like Acheson and Bundy and Harriman who began and ended global wars. But I could not keep up my pace.

I was focused, like a beginning drawing student, on objects and objectives, and ignoring the negative spaces that shared their edges—the hunger in my stomach, the M&M cookie I ate out of desperation, the loneliness, the need to lie down—all threats to mastering my universe. I marveled at suicidal thoughts, strange shapes that they were. My head had engulfed me.

I spent the night at the school chaplain’s apartment, and when I couldn’t sleep, he told me to picture lily pads floating, holding me up, and I thought of the ones my family found in summers at Squam Lake in New Hampshire, still tucked into green bulbs—we scooped them up, tugging gently at their stems, and brought them back to the cabin and placed them in bowls of water; some bloomed at breakfast. I tried to imagine them in the chaplain’s guest bed but

I kept slipping off them into the lake, and like Franny's heart when he hit the water that July day thirty-three years before, I fell out of rhythm and fell out of Groton, out of my football pads and into my father's rental car and flew home and became sick, very sick. Jesus was far away.

When we lose something close to us, Uncle David says, we close a door on it, we focus on its absence. But this lacking itself takes its own shape, one that we often miss. Some call this resurrection; for David, it's simply that his brother Franny is "still very much here"; he tries to "leave the windows and doors open for that continuing presence."

Maybe early morning, summer 1956. Franny lies in bed on the Nahant house's third floor, waits for webs in his eyes to clear. When did he rise? I have slept in this same bed, smelled the sea, heard the foghorn warning ships away from shore.

He removes the screen from the window. Climbs out, scraping, lifting his body up the tiled slope to the flat metal tin of the roof, the chimneys. He sees the sun dance on the water. Standing with him on the roof, I am still, praying, listening—gathering strength.

He once spent a summer steering a freighter to Newfoundland—for those moments, the captain of his ship, scanning the horizon for icebergs. Perhaps, in his watching, he glimpsed a green flash—horizon plus sun rising, yellow mixing with faraway blue, which is the color, Rebecca Solnit notes, for distance—the light that doesn't travel all the way to our eyes.



My father loved England. He lived there the year Queen Elizabeth II was crowned, anointed with holy oil, when Grandfather led his family across the Atlantic. I can see my father's house. Faded fieldstone, dark windows, iron workings around their edges. Old, old trees towering over cottages, where breaths make smoke in the cold air.

"It was so soon after the war," he likes to say. "You could see the devastation. They were still on rations. They were still rebuilding. You saw entire sections of cities, still demolished. No one complained."

My father inherited a footstool used in the Coronation, blue with yellow

trim. Someone knelt at it in 1953 in Westminster Abbey when the choirs sang *and all the people rejoiced and said God save the queen, Long live the queen, may the queen live for ever. Amen.*

Thirty years later, he lost his job as headmaster of Hotchkiss, the Connecticut boarding school. “Callard resigns,” the *Lakeville Journal* headline read, and to me, that meant he had elected to leave on his own, though I didn’t know why. I couldn’t fathom somebody firing him.

I never saw him cry. He played records, paced back and forth across the parquet floor of the dining room in the school’s white mansion. *Long live the king.* He smashed his fists in the air to the gale of notes.

I was reading my father’s paperback *Day of Infamy* at the time, about Japan’s surprise attack on Pearl Harbor. In it, a Japanese submarine captain runs aground, and decides to scuttle the boat by blowing it up. Before he and his mate dive into the water, he speaks to the sub, and says, “We’re leaving now—explode gloriously.” Then he swims to shore to surrender himself.

On the day we moved out of the white mansion, I wrote “We’re leaving now—explode gloriously” on a piece of paper, tiptoed to the corridor connecting the house to the school, where in the day, the sun poured through windows so old there were bubbles in the glass panes, like we walked under the ocean when we flowed past them, following our father to the dining hall.

I lifted the wooden ramp abutting the doorway, slid the paper underneath. “Explode”—from the Latin *explodere*, to drive out by clapping or hissing a player off stage. I swore to work harder, for him.

Franny and his brother jump off the boat in Nahant, following the Bangs girl. Franny’s arms pull through the water, he watches bubbles shoot from his fingers. “Explode”—from the Latin *displodere*, the bursting of the bladder to drive forth air. His heart trips.

“Explode”—all you thought infallible, destroyed. Turning yourself over, Franny corkscrewing, releasing, stop the strain.

Two boys, then just one. I can’t see him anymore.



On the day Franny drowns, my father stands still. The sidewalk buckles outside the house. My father's sister runs to him, Franny is unconscious, no, he's dead. What does my father's face look like?

In one photo before Franny died, my father looks like a monkey in an oversize black suit, too big in the shoulders, dwarfed by George, Franny, and David.

I'm fourteen, and my father is seated in his black wooden Princeton University chair, his name in gold letters on the backing. We're holding a family meeting. Something upsets him. He takes off his glasses, and I see the marks on his nose where they squeeze his skin.

I'm thirty-eight, asking him about Franny. He pauses several seconds between sentences. His mouth curls up and down, as if the lips are arms, they have nowhere to put the thing they are holding, where does it go?

I am dredging up something that has been buried under the sea, trespassing a threshold, the way I stepped up into the Box, my father's childhood room, in Nahant when I was little. You approached it through the dark hallway, which split Grandfather and Grandmother's bedroom from the bathroom across the hall, where I could hear Grandfather splash in the tub behind the closed door.

Instead of my father, the pictures in the corridor spoke to me then, conjuring wished-for strength—one of Grandfather as a young headmaster, his face hopeful and turned to the side, wearing a suit with a folded white handkerchief in his breast pocket, and one of Franny, his head blown up almost two feet tall—my father now tells me that when they tried to resuscitate Franny with the compressor, it distorted his face, and my father did not want to go down to the beach to see him, and as he says this I feel as though I am poking into his privacy. Yet I am the one who closes the hour-long interview—he's showing me Franny's face in the class photos, wondering aloud how Franny shaped him. I'm the one who is withdrawing, have what I need, thanks.

Maybe grief can be its own sealant. You lose something, and the gap of it does its work inside you. You become immune to any leaking. Unlike the tides, nothing comes in, nothing comes out. Others around you marvel. How can he stand it? What does he feel? But you steal yourself away, leaving behind pools—a crab crawls, the water reeks, the seaweed's sick.

Grandfather blamed himself. Doctors figured it was arrhythmia triggered by Franny's leap into the cold water, but Grandfather couldn't get over the fact that Franny, like him, did not love the water, was not a strong swimmer. Grandfather had taught him late, pulling his arms through the shallows at the beach.

A family friend, who at that time was a Gilman student, recalls running into Grandfather on campus after Franny's death. He did everything as the school's headmaster—stoked the boiler, subbed for the night watchman, preached in chapel. To me, he was wire-rimmed glasses warning me and my Frisbee away from the French windows.

"Something terrible has happened," Grandfather told him, and began to weep. This friend, only fifteen, stopped in shock, as his leader stood there, exposed.

I try to picture his face breaking. I want to see this, if only to excuse my own struggles to keep it together; I don't want to see this, if it means that I must let go of the illusion that I can achieve mastery, that I too can be mythical, a portrait on the wall like Grandfather is today at Gilman.



We fight the water. Making sand castles as a child mainly meant digging around them, which made the walls stronger, and higher, so that when the water flowed into the trenches, the walls did not crumble at first, but turned smooth, like gilded stone. My father taught me this; we patted down sand on Joe's Beach, not far from where Franny expired.

"And I turned around," Uncle David remembers, "and he had surfaced, his face looked a little white, and rather blank, and then he just sank."

When I read the report of my hospitalization years later, with words like "dysthymia" and "unmet oral needs," I didn't know the patient, as if he'd run through a door and left an outline of his shape, and the report was tracing the borders—but he was gone, no longer there.

In one Gospel story, Jesus heals a madman, casting his demons into pigs that run off a cliff into the sea. Grateful, the madman clutches at Jesus, says, take me with you. Jesus says no—stay and tell the story of your healing. And Jesus climbs in his boat and crosses the sea without him.

Fearful of drowning again, I keep moving, until I am exhausted, then I collapse. Surrounded by boxes of books in a new apartment, lying on my bed in the kitchen while the steam-cleaned carpet dries, I am adrift. An injured knee keeps me from the swimming that regulates my moods. A failed relationship triggers grief. My impending unemployment raises questions of whither hence, what for. A wisp of grey flashes between the cupboards below the kitchen sink. A rat? It can't be. Three black rodent droppings and several weeks later, I'm sitting at the kitchen table, when suddenly a long tail, furry body, not a whisk but slower whirl, the tail hanging out against the white baseboard. No mistaking that tail.

The rat is my mind, the sadness I've been running from for years. I turn to embrace it, if only because nothing else has worked. I kill the rat in a trap, a carcass on my kitchen floor that I place in a trash bag. Another may come, but I begin to value negative space, the slow time where something new in me can be born. In depression's coldness, clearness—"an articulation of thoughts otherwise hidden behind the screen of lighter moods," writes Thomas Moore. As if there is a loss of perspective in getting too happy, too close.

Today my father walks fast, even with a prostate removed, two corneas replaced, a cataract cleared. He visited England with my sister Katharine several summers past and made a mad pilgrimage to Somerset where he lived that Coronation Year. He dashed in and out of old churches. My sister could barely keep up with him.



In Florida, at age eight, the boy climbs onto his father's shoulders. They can afford to go here because the father is still king of the Connecticut school and the white mansion. The father wears a red-and-black-striped shirt with a collar to protect his skin from the sun.

They wade out into the waves, the father's legs straining, his breath growing louder, until he cannot stand up anymore. His head dips. The boy can only see a floating mass of black hair, the edges curled in the green water. "Are you ready to go under?" the father gasps. "Hold your breath."

"Yes," the boy says.

A Gilman teacher told my father that it was like everyone in the family took on a trait of Franny after he died, as if they lifted a limb of him from the beach, attached it to their bodies, so that he breathes in them, dispersed.

Franny opens his mouth. He begins to sink. Behind him, the boat, his brother swimming towards him. Ahead of him, the Bangs girl. Joe's Beach. Below him, through green water, the old house he lived in during that Coronation Year in England, when his hands froze in the cold. It is Sunday, July 1, chilly, grey.

Inspire: "to breathe in." I seek him in me too. So that his wound and my father's and Grandfather's and mine are all the same, nothing separates us.

The father kicks them high into the air, the boy inhales, snatches one last view of the horizon, and then they drop beneath the surface. Things slow down. The father's legs are pale white. Someone is pulling on them, the boy thinks, down, down, down. The father's grip loosens; the boy clings to his bull neck.

As Franny falls, he remembers painting the mountain landscape, how the houses nestled in the snow and made him want to walk towards them, to the heat and the light and the people who lived there. When the snow melted, the water would raise those houses up, bear them aloft, like arks, and they'd land on a high plain. Surrounded by a snow sea, the people would grant themselves permission to rest.

Franny's head snaps back to the sky. He does slow somersaults. The water fills him, and on the beach I can hear it roar, engulfing the house in England, rushing over my castle walls.