

The Island

by stephen hastings-king

There is an island behind the house in which I grew up. It is a network of bicycle paths and booby traps. The past is snared there. It spreads over everything.

The island is a film sequence of walking in the same way through the same composite afternoon sunlight suspended in the air along the edge of the river. The water is black with paint. Its surface is wrinkled and what it is thinking pools in slow-motion spirals among the rocks. The embankment opposite is covered in trees and slopes steeply upward into forgetting.

When I think about the sequence, I cannot understand why I am in it and not another. I know that the island is suspended between the river of paint and a long straight narrow canal and that the water there was motionless and bizarre and hedged round with prohibitions until it froze over in winter and we skated on it. I know that the island is triangular and bisected by a gully that was used as a jump. I know my memories are more differentiated at the narrowest end among the complex of walls from disappeared buildings and the large metal gear that doesn't turn anything and the narrow path that crossed them on the way to the dam across the river. But that is the dam. It is a separate space. And the others are stored in a register of memory that collects things.

The island is a film sequence of walking in the same way through the same composite afternoon light suspended in the air along the edge of the river. Every time I find myself inside it, I stop and arrange some sticks beside the trail to mark my passage. I always find them in the same places.

