

## THE ARGUMENT

The day you could not be found, I had been writing but the phone call came, the work shrank and my hands abandoned everything, only held my head as if to weigh it and find it wanting, weigh this – I sat soundless as others might in prayer but hands useless not knowing where, a pause in which nothing more could be undertaken, an arc of waiting.

Someone had seen your car, a stranger, hundreds of miles from us – *this is how it comes, out of the unrelenting distance* – a whole twenty-four hours on the same spot, they thought, parked by the ocean, word that rang pain from the voice of that policewoman who didn't like to utter it, accent so thick I could not at first understand her, though in my own vernacular, as if the ear rejected clarity, as if delay could lessen revelation. *The ocean*: we knew then, suddenly, such a day was always hovering, like something just out of the eye's corner, ambush or pounce, a narrative available, ready for any of us, cliché we must counter with invention, with option after option hit on from the thousands open for continuation, racking collective brain for argument, moment last seen or spoken, to contradict the report, building our case for cosmic error. *He's a surfer. He's just gone back there for another session.* Or: *engine trouble, got a lift home with a mate.* The more we could talk you up, the more we hardened, emboldened. I dug out a brush and scrubbed a week's worth of kitchen, of bathroom, anything left undone as if uncared-for or ignored, to bluff, to show that cold cross-examiner there was someone, yes, someone in control here, no ground to be gained, no substance to these allegations of loss, our logic fending him off with success this time but still too close to the real thing for my liking.