

tures, people in mourning rock or sway from side to side—not only to recall infancy and the mother's heartbeat, but to keep time. Only time can hope to fill the void. The body of my father is gone, but his place is here and occupied by something that cannot just be called memory. It is alive and current. How could the complexities of being, the mechanics of our anatomy, the intelligence of our biology, and the endless firmament of our interiority—the thoughts and questions and yearnings and hopes and hunger and desire and the thousand and one contradictions that inhabit us at any given moment—ever have an ending that could be marked by a date on a calendar? Hasn't it always seemed that way? Haven't I always detected the confusion of funerals, the uncertainty of cemeteries, the bewilderment of a headstone? Perhaps memorials and all the sacred and secular rituals of mourning across our human history are but failed gestures. The dead live with us. Grief is not a whodunit story, or a puzzle to solve, but an active and vibrant enterprise. It is hard, honest work. It can break your back. It is part of one's initiation into death and—I don't know why, I have no way of justifying it—it is a hopeful part at that. What is extraordinary is that, given everything that has happened, the natural alignment of the heart remains towards the light. It is in that direction that there is the least resistance. I have never understood this. Not intellectually anyway. But it is somehow in the body, in the physical knowledge of the eternity of each moment, in the expansive nature of time and space, that declarative statements such as "He is dead" are not precise. My father is both dead and alive. I do not have a grammar for him. He is in the past, present and future. Even if I had held his hand, and felt it slacken, as he exhaled his last breath, I would still, I believe, every time I refer to him, pause to search for the right tense. I suspect many men who have buried their fathers feel the same. I am no different. I live, as we all live, in the aftermath.

A few days after my return to Libya, I flew to Rome and