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IN HISTORY: II

The room was an emblem for loneliness—no toast in the toaster, blinds carefully parted. One finger, tugging. The neighborhood was full of strangers. He recognized that. They argued in front of, no, *behind* their picture windows. The bullet would have already entered, piercing the newly reupholstered davenport. No: *couch*. That was the name history had found for it. "Late in the Twentieth Century there was a great spiritual awakening." Announcers on some channels kept saying that. It was a voice-over while the many well-groomed Americans looked skyward. Later they would play the Super Bowl. Everyone had to watch or be left speechless at break time. The man entered the woman from behind. Later they would pass a law. He couldn't help feeling that objects were pressing up against his eyes. He tried to push them away. If he could have painted what he saw. If he could have written it down. The crowd was cheering in unison. In unison, they wanted the quarterback dead or maimed. Outside, a building rose until it filled the window. There were no shots. Not yet. But he couldn't help feeling he had caused them. He had wanted to move the couch. To hang the Monet on the wall above the stereo. He had wanted to obliterate his feelings. Quit his job. Burn the house. He had wanted to place a single rose in a thin, crystal bud vase. He muted the television with the remote. The woman moaned a little; he whimpered, grateful. Opening his eyes he saw the building, people slapping hands: 49er fans. *Gold rush*. History was incomprehensible. Intolerable. The blinds were barely parted. The bullet already tearing through fabric, the cotton batting splashing around the bullet. An emblem of his sickness. He should kiss her afterward. He should explain himself to the dust motes circulating in the afternoon light. But she was gone. He was listening to the Pentagon spokesman: "Bomb damage assessment is an art not a science." He wondered about the implications of this confusion. And why did he think of it now? We leave him there, wondering. We resist his attempts to draw us into the puzzle. He leans to touch the already unscarred fabric.