

1971

Near London. Summer 1942

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NEAR LONDON. SUMMER 1942

The field is filled with brown casings. Looking at them from the height of this pine, I recall the whole area was on fire, as if it had been stuffed with flames. My father carried a mattress and my sister, my mother a few pounds and me.

My grandfather, who taught religion years ago, came up later from the nursing home in the city and helped lift charred barrels with toy animals soaking away at the bottom. All around, the trees had fallen into the gutted cellar, leaving us

alone at such a dizzy height. The bark on the only remaining fir, like one that may have saved some ancestor, was oddly notched and made me think of teeth. Months ago a supper without fresh asparagus from our victory garden was muted, like the sky

before the bombers came. They had come over the poor channel, with a certain physical and financial authority. Once dropped, their bombs turned over and over to support themselves. With a slow hand my father defused the far one easily. It was

more delicious than if it had come up from the earth. The photograph of my father in the paper in his youth proves that he earned those last expensive years. After the burial, where he invariably fell asleep, I knocked on his plate and cried: My God, are you there?