ELIZABETH T. GRAY, JR. Albania

On Sunday I went to Albania.

No one understood, clearly, at first, why I (or anyone) would go to Albania. Except my father, who knew at once: "Because, before, you couldn't go to Albania."

It had never occurred to me, before, to actually go to Albania. For years it was there, a Mars, the ultimate hole in the atlas: Albania.

Our government said you couldn't go to Albania. Passports self-vaporized, I thought, if you went to Albania. The Middle Ages with Missiles, over there in Albania. And somehow also China, Albania.

- But then it was suddenly Sunday, forty years later, and it was right there. I was right next to Albania.
- There's a thin strait, with small islands. You pay a ferryman to cross to Albania.
- Before, people who tried to swim away were shot by men in trenches and towers guarding Albania.

Everyone was surprised when I left, alone, for Albania.

"Given her history, were you worried when your mother went off to Albania?" "No. Well, maybe a little," they said. "She had never mentioned Albania."

When I came back everyone asked about Albania.

They said, "What did you see in Albania?"

I began to reply but that was enough of Albania.

Perhaps it was hard for them. The idea of Albania.

Maybe they never had an Albania.

- They weren't panicked. They didn't ask, "What will we do, now that we can go to Albania?"
- It's been a few days now. It's as if nothing happened. As if I never went to Albania.
- The chart shows two ports and several small harbors but from this far offshore there are no lights anywhere on the coast of Albania.
- As we move north, somewhere to starboard, steep and with snow, is Albania.