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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.