

## CHARLES SCHMIDT

*Salt Water Inlet, 2015*  
Oil on canvas, 38 x 58 in



COURTESY THE ARTIST

## RICHARD CHIAPPONE

### XTRATUF

I'm up on my roof examining the iridescent green moss smothering the shingles when my granddaughter, Melanie, comes home from her mindfulness seminar, upset because someone stole her rubber boots from the meditation room.

It's summer in coastal Alaska, maybe fifty degrees, clouds like wet cement, a persistent cool rain seeping through the big spruce trees surrounding the house. Not a day you'd choose to spend on a roof, and I'm getting a little creaky for climbing ladders anyway. But suddenly a fifteen-year-old lives with me, and I'm taking my responsibilities seriously now. All of them.

From up here, I can see our town's namesake, Lost Bay, where a boxy white cruise ship appears in the layered mists like an invading troop transport. Across the bay, glaciers chew through the stony mountains as they have for millennia, and I'm reluctant to buy metal roofing that will outlive me by decades. Melanie pedals up the driveway on her bike, wearing her bright yellow Helly Hansen slicker. In spite of the cold rain, she's riding barefoot, and laughing out loud, an ominous sign that she's slipping again. By the pitch of her hilarity, I know this is going to be a bad one.

In the house, we shrug off our rain gear and she drops into a kitchen chair, quiet now, but eyes still wild as she massages her wet, wrinkled toes. She's ridden home barefoot through our puddled streets to avoid soaking the beautiful wool socks she knitted in rehab. She's adept with those long-paired needles. She's also learning to spin yarn, another activity I've encouraged since her arrival here a month ago. Despite the generational differences, our relationship has been mostly peaceful, most of that time, and I think we're going to be all right. Still, I've locked up my guns.

When Melanie was a week old, her father, my son, John, took his own life. Soon after, my daughter-in-law declared Lost Bay unlivable for a young widow: winters too cold, too wet, and too long; summers too cold, too wet, and too short. She took Melanie and left for warmer, drier climes. Over the intervening fifteen years, I've mailed checks to every major city in the American Sun Belt. I should have made an effort to see Melanie more often, should've sent for her sooner, and I know it. My wife and I split around that dark time too, and I never reached out to her again either. So, I'm on my own now with Melanie, and I have to remind myself that under the bright-blue haystack of