SÉANCE

by

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PART I
BARN BURNING SEASON

If you get far enough away you’ll be on your way back home.

--Tom Waits
**The Body Never Lies**

My mother was a cigarette.  
She’d fall asleep with smoke  
in her mouth. She’d leave the room  
empurpled with gauze. She’d curse  
in pots and pans, door slams.  
Her silence seeped into the walls.

There was a time I knew quiet  
better than I knew the sound  
of my own voice. My mother  
made me into her husband.  
My mother hemmed in the house.  
She was the night. She was the crow  
at dawn. She was the tremor  
and thunder of a thousand whispers.  
And then she left to a hospital  
of hallucination and doctors  
plotting paranoid death plots.  
Her room grew stale behind the door.

Her body was in the dust and ash  
left on picture frames and nightstands.  
Her body was in the urine  
left as film in an unflushed bowl.  
My mother who has no mother.  
My mother was fed to a machine.

Her eyes became milk. She breathed  
out blood and honey. No one told me  
that change is only perspective,  
that progress can easily be decline.  
My body is a litany of forgiveness.  
My body fools itself with forgiveness.

A closed mouth stings more  
than an open hand ever could.
we get 20 tries (matchbook prophecy)

A fist-full of bees,  
an jar of sparks,  

a sunflower  
in a glass bowl  

of motor-oil;  
this is tomorrow.  

This is false applause  
a mouth of punk  

like the shooting star  
that fell wet with fire  

and razed a town  
to its lake stones.  

I strike a match  
against my chin  

and put it out  
on your thigh.  

swoon baby swoon  

This song is a plague  
of good intention  

before it realizes  
before it dies,  

in sulfur burn  
of cherry head.  

What happened  
to the little boy  

who smokes  
and smokes?  

He ate his father's  
ashes and danced
across angry coals
never saying a thing

only laughing
or was he crying?

You never said no
and never said yes

so I thought
it would be fine

to drink the wine
and eat the plums

but now my teeth
are stained with juice

and my head's heavy
when the door closes.

Sunset turned the trees
to sackcloth, and burned

like a match held
to a book's corner

or a boy's ear.
Training Exercise

Father turned fingers brick bone and mortar cut beneath the backyard ash. He sharpened my body against brother the way struck stones gather spark. I liked getting hit. It was honest, intimate. I’m okay with copper in my mouth. Getting hit makes it easier to hit back. Father said my hands were hummingbirds. Father said losing is just like dying. Father said love. I tried to break brother’s teeth so I could see a smile like father, ashamed of his mouth, always lips masking gaps and rot. He sat in brother’s corner. I sat with the berries of the ash tree. We’d go at it until father could declare brother the winner. I turned boxing into brawling, science into violence. I’d get brother on the ground and snake my arm around his neck, squeeze-pull-pop. The will lives within consciousness. A separation of heart and head kills all desire. Father would pull me off brother the way you pull a neck-scruff pup off a thighbone. Brother throat-hack cough slurp, dust on his lips salting the air with each gasp. Father turned my face wet and hot like he was at the kitchen faucet cleaning dinner dishes, gray water, steam fogging window, digging hands at a face, desperate to make it shine.
the stone, the leaf

A calf that died early last spring, April
a quickening, lightning on a Sunday

dthey buried under some stones so its body
wouldn't be scavenged or attract the crows,

and the mother's mewing hung so heavy
like honey through clouds of humidity

that she met her own weeping echo
before it even had a chance to fade.

We were told they don't understand it,
of forevertudes and eternities.

We can't believe what's been taught to us
because nobody knows anything

about anybody. I swallow lies
like a jar of flies, frantic and humming.

Things break down. I lick iron clean of rust
and walk on. Our town has forgotten

about children crying in their bedrooms
waiting for the bottle to go dry

and the short-skirt homecoming girls losing
their stomach, and more, on cans of Keystone

and the true lost ones, the heroin-orphans
who fill obituaries on Thursdays.

We plant stones with names over their bodies
to keep scavengers away; grass still grows.

The dead are younger than they've ever been
and they outnumber the living in town.

Old homes are dozed for cemetery holes.
I've watched generations pushed into the ground

but before that, I watched them in varnished
poolhalls and bowling alleys polishing
pilsners to the bottom, stoop-smoking Winstons,
telling town-stories that will disappear

when they do. I've already forgotten
their names, their faces (ash), contain the earth

that was scattered over boots and flannels.
It's still that way. Someone hit a streetlight

the other night, left it jagged like a tooth
rising ragged and metal from gray gums.

The calf fell out cold, steaming. I was dreaming
about my first grade teacher in a sundress

serving me lemonade on a blanket. Pale
lifeless form looked fake, from my window.

It wasn't TV so I couldn't change
the contrast, the brightness; it looked slickly

coated in syrup, something had stolen
the thick red. Shoveling had kept me awake

that night the calf died before it was born
and stones were stacked to mark where it now lays

which reminds me, of what you said you read
about babies who die in the crib, gone,

that they're the smart ones, they're prophets and seers
'76 Sportster

The family horse is in pieces it's a basket-case a mess. My dad did it a decade ago left its heart dripping on the bench. He put the rest of it behind glass a curio-cabinet dustless varnish shelving steel organs. I think there are parts missing otherwise I'd put it back together. The skeleton is still standing dripping marrow into a pan. He wouldn't let it stain the concrete shit soaks in and won't wash out.

I can't go in the garage without closing my eyes to hide the gore of a lovely machine left to rot-rust slow breakdown. It's there won't ash won't crumble quick enough to feed the earth scrap-yards keep a mouth's mettle from waning like a jawbreaker moon. Instead it gathers cobwebs it harvests spider legs grey moths the cocooned bodies of juiceless flies bones before the bleaching.

I still harbor visions of it alive: exhaust-blue flame and smoke a helmetless rider charring the road blacking the sky fueled by stars oil and spark. He was Mad Max I was the feral kid and we were kings of the wasteland.

But I can't make old bones roll again can't rattle a moan down a road I can only watch like I watch my father pieces of an actual whole separated waiting in blood.
Histories of Hauser: Saint Jude

One day, when my father was 7, he skipped school. He’d spend his day in the junkyard. He pissed in old Coke bottles and smashed them against brick. He stole car parts and become a surgeon. His father was in European skies. His mother buttoned jackets in factories. One sister was married. One sister was tied to a hospital bed. One sister wasn’t born yet.

He went home to find his father’s wet magazines. He drank amber from decanters and smoked his mother’s Kents. The insane behind the fenced yard moaned his name. But his mother was home that day. She was ginned. He laid his lies on a pillow. Her ring cut his jaw-tooth. She drove him in the silent echo of the after-slap back to school. He walked through Catholic hallways. Nuns married the cross. Priests kept cold hands in vests.

The classrooms were black. The organ groaned from the chapel and choirs psalmed their songs. He followed the melting voices. All the children sat in pews, red bibles over knees, their mouths whispering all holy. Cobwebbed idols rusted the walls. He sat in the shadowed corner and picked his scabs. His name dripped from the ceiling. His name waxed the mouths of the Fathers. His body was announced. It moved down the center aisle. His spit-shined shoes glimmered under the frankenstein candles. The cloth held my father’s shoulder before the rows of no smiles. They slipped a medallion over his greased hair, over his sunflower neck.

My father wore Saint Jude’s honesty. My father was honored for his willing mouth. For his pure attendance at mass. After school, on the way home, he put the medallion in the engine block of a belly-busted Buick. He never told his mother.
Removal of Expectation

I like to smoke a cigarette when I get my hair cut. Haze covers the mirror so I can’t see me as clearly as I usually do. It’s why I’m always lighting up when I roll out of bed to take a piss. Smoke softens the edges of a face I wear and can never take off. I look too much like my father and not enough like his father. Leather earflaps and aviators. I’m in blue jeans and cotton. We’re all supposed to be better than the blood that made us run through dawn’s cornfields. My Opa flew mustangs. He hovered alongside Oppenheimer’s spitball. My wings are made of oil and rust. How can I touch the clouds beyond the swallowing fog moats? I can’t even look in the mirror how can I face the constellations? If history could speak, it wouldn’t. It would be like laughing in an alley, the echo bursting against fire escapes. The sound my mouth makes when I open to check the rot, where a girl crawls out and sings.
**Barn Burning Season**

**Chapter I**

*Holding the sea in his mouth*  
sandy time stopped before  
the consequence of action  
fossilized to a reaction  
could be merited a moment  
of reflection, of the valley  
he salted in his departure.

* * *

The barn loft must-motes of a forgotten summer  
cling to the walls of my room this morning

but it’s winter, and the barn burned down a decade ago.

It was always fireflies and cicadas, stellar star floats  
the taste of her mouth,  
like my father's Winston-smoked flannels  
under the moon. She was never born  
to be kissed or held, because stone is stone  
and salt is salt.

We were old before we were young.

Polaroid-flash skies of summer's heat  
the silver glow of friction in violet night  
crept along the avenues of Mohawk paths  
and revolutionary walls centuries abandoned  
tallow wicks buttery through the wood wall slats,  
lighting promises of amber and honey.

- it's all backdrop, it's all setting

Oaks turned to sackcloth at dusk, soaking the stars in a fog;  
turbulent reminders of diamond candle lust-winks  
that sizzle out on a tongue for a moment of burn.

And her and I fell into our skin, folding bodies
like jackknives in a gash
like snow on a bare-back
like insects in a jar.

Dawn was a phantom of light and foot-prints
before the toe had tipped away totally
and dirt kissed ankles were seen in the grass
walking a path to a red roof through the trees.

The sunflowers were beheaded when she came back
and kissed my soaped hands. Lip-salt gloss
over marble blue ridges;
sitting on a star, dreaming of self-saviors
the way young lovers do.

Chapter IV

*Unchamber your heart! The blood*
*is only water for the world*
*to nourish its spirit*
*or, if your heart be even lovelier*

*break your eyes so the weeping fills a bowl*
*from which your brothers and sisters can live*
*without tomorrow's painted gallows.*

***

Will we remember where we put the stone and hid the leaf?

Once, a year or two after the barn turned black, I found a bottle
in its bones; a brand of gin my Opa drank from blue glass
the kind I'd steal and drink like a priest, always with reverence.
Her lily petals still choked its neck, printing oval labyrinths
where she last finger wrapped to kill the soldier, the general.

- Speak to me like you were still here
  like there's no such thing as fantasy

Such a love-haunt; salted flesh draped in shadow
bodiless bed sheets with the window open
and chimney wood-smoke on the air.

We must remember the floods, skies like bathwater
the boats on the road with Morton salt girls
because it was when the Oldham Man rose
and impregnated the world with his rot;
red eyes on the water
   - tschi, tschi, tschi

that we came to know ourselves
intimately, immediately recognizing desire
   as a soft votive burning beeswax beneath a beard
   as a tallow warming the chin of our mother and lover.

Last night,
   A boy's blue body was dredged from the pond
   and a shoe was found on the opposite bank
   size five Chucks', baby of the family,
   and She came to mind;
   lavender lips stuck with frost
telling stories without names
about the dead friends she left
back in a neon city of coffee and heroin,

of our child that was never conceived.

Chapter VI

Salt flowers mark the gate
where the babe is cleansed
and the dead are purified.

Do not spill the bowl.
Do not sew your eyes shut.
Do not forget the taste.

Burn it at your offering.
Rub your child with it.
Be at peace, amen.

* * *
The young don't stay young for long.

- all the old high school beauties are now heroin queens

Severance checks in the mail, condolence in a flower
my mother wanted me to be president
I don't think I'll be anything while I'm alive.

I write in a house where families have died,
they reside in the dust on the clock
they fill my poems
with light and softness
at the corner of any eye

breathing memory
and musk into the walls.

I used to dream of the son we never had
but always wanted to love

and how we could have slain windmills
of some Spanish-Dutch reality
if her tongue could have held a charge

but I stopped dreaming
when she told me about the visit
halogen white, backless robes
how my blood was dead
before it was born.

And this was before the sunflower lanterns
but after the salted cheek, the damp Eucharist
of some utopian machinery of muscle and lips.

She was in another city, another Denver.

She never promised me
anything worth remembering, other than
that she'd be back some summer month
dripping pear juice and sweat
and that I'd find her in the hayloft during a storm

but it's still winter, and the barn burned down a decade ago.
Sussex County Flood of 2001

The mud sings to me
songs composed of bones
and wet lovers’ teeth.

Where lakes choke themselves
on rivers and streams,
I watch waters rise

past the sycamores
and carry gospels
in its breath. I can’t

hear the crows anymore.
The blue jays are nasty
angels of agreement.

The Morton salt girls
sail away on umbrellas,
while a mouth worships

hands that cleave water
and part its face. Suddenly
I am bone-soaked

and cracked. My face
is waxed by a ghost
as I swim with limbs

of the wind-broke boughs.
I drink the fertile waters
and wait for the sun to break

through the mist. Praying
begging for a chance to walk
not swim; drowning in faces.
After June, Before August

All the dairy farms are washed away. Skeletal barns tremble in the strong wind; losing ourselves, gathering in the darkness.

Thighs honey between fingertip ash. We whisper passwords for love; The secret things when feeling for shadows.

Streams of starlight silver the hayloft-rooftop reveal awkward yearning; bodies at a loss for expression. Rivers run deep where the cows once pastured. The moon gathers in its drowse. Always treetop symphonies. In the summer, when we return from carnival bulb-lights and neon, roasted almonds and onions. We watch how the stars blur, shaken by the wind, wondering how they can be touched, how they can be moved.
Recanting of a character statement

My father
made my pills,
the beveled blues
I found in moonlight.

A disfigured mouth.
A cloud of caffeine
and nicotine, he’d
swallow old sketches
and light secrets
in my hands; identity
in the salt that soaks
the bed and the trees
while bones neon.
He’d hide on the road.

He’d arrive in blue fog.
A phantom trench coat.
A sleeve of hornets.
A glass soaked hand.

Spitting beer bottle
wisdom; a lie speaks
for itself. My closet
is home to old skin
I wear at funerals
and weddings. The skin
of my father. Votives
and gasoline ignite
images of the barn,
shadow wraiths at dawn.

How he found my arm
marbled like his. Fist flesh
clinging to cheekbone.
Where I ate the crisp halo
of a hayloft angel
and dropped the swollen pear.
A single spark spawned all fire. My heart knows I am the burned child without any scars.

That alcohol flame left my body cold.
Daddy’s 12 Gauge

We hold guns too big for our hands, scorching stars on empty milk crates

stacked as tall as a father. Sweet metal charcoal smell dusting jeans and white tees

yellow chest and arm pits. Trees keep stars hidden in their dresses. The backyard Ford is growing a rose bush in its engine block.

We know the night as well as the day.

We drink rain from the fingers of a willow. The child left to cry calls the quiet its mother.

Our mother is the dark ridge. Our mother is fog chewing on the porch light until it’s a peach shattering itself in a soft burst. We learn to talk by answering the coyote,

by listening for a mouth that can drip our names onto pillows and dinner plates.

When I speak, I scare myself. My throat is not my own. You chew on heather to soften your voice. You break the branch off a pine tree to scent your hands in sap.

You want to be the pine. You want to find home, a place where a body will be welcomed by the dirt. Something that doesn’t die in the cold. You kick your foot at the light. You pocket your arrowheads. This is how you leave me. I cradle the gun. It’s like holding your hand.
Why I Hide My Father’s Gun

Rain shimmers like skin, flash shot and shone white.

The furnace is talking again. The house has eyes at night. It stares at the dark pond. It makes the reeds shake.

My father is in the basement smoking cigarettes. My father is in the basement talking to the furnace.

Blowflies bang their blue eyes against the panes. The doors speak hinge-jawed warnings of firework window thunder in the mouth of the house.

I fear Amityville fathers and the basement. I fear beds without bodies dreaming at 3:15.

Wood-grain pump and stock gleaming by bedside lamp. Box of rounds in a drawer. Everything ends with rain.

Lightning creeps into rooms, the house flashes, smiles my father feeds it another log.
How to Die Daily

Drink honey at its source.
Burn salt flowers at the door, smile.

Imagine the way she looked when you entered. Light a votive.

Keep the tapers in the window. allow the smoke to clear.

Bring your mouth against a hot razor, smile.

Let the smell spread through. Let it eat away the walls and then taste an arm. Lie to her, tell her stories,

but don't use any names. Keep the moon up, smile.


Abase your holies. Marvel at the sound of applause.

Drip stars on her belly (a handful of sparks)
poured from a medicine bottle. Be kids, eat jelly beans,

forget about other veins. Drink honey at its source.

Light a spoon on the bed, smile.
Bad as Him

I’ve sewn a body together from the parts of my father. This is what I see in the mirror.

Terror is a moan behind walls of child bedroom night.

I’ve killed my father in my dreams before.

Amber bottles make wind chimes for a porch with a rose vine curled around the bench. The death stench of a body rotting for fifty years while the bones still make use of movement and motor.

The way we become ghosts while we still breath, moan.

My mother was fed to a machine, warning me

Change your name, it’s bad luck to keep hanging on to your father.

I drink & smoke his brands. His smell is my own. My end will linger like smoke.
I

I built myself an angel
in the black burned barn.

I’ve learned not to wave
when people walk by me
and I’ve hung a tire-
-swing from the pepper tree.

My neighbor whistles
a carnival tune
and receives a lot of mail
but has no friends.

He stands in the window
and smokes a cigar
when he watches me disappear
into the woods, the soft path.

There’s always some killing
that needs done around the farm.

A .22 keeps the coyotes away.
I drink stolen gin like a priest.

I soften stars between two fingers
and light a sunflower on fire.

We’re always waiting
for something to happen,
for a ghost to arrive
at dusk, gospel dripping
from its mouth. I heard
my neighbor raped a boy
but he has a daughter
that lives with him,
the girl I built in the barn.
Whispers terrify the night.

II

Our bodies were buried
in some other Ohio,

where the cottonwoods
snow in silver ripples.

We can never know
each other beyond lilac

skin and teeth. Horse hair
burning in the fire

of a decade old summer.
That old life never left

me alone. It’s breath
is wet in my ear,

like the smell of sulfur
and vinegar, alcohol

after a clean shave.
The rust never leaves

it just sets in deeper
it eats the angel’s wings

and leaves a back clean,
capable of bleeding.
When a Tree isn’t a Tree

On New Jersey Transit from Dover to Penn Station
leaning against window, clack of cars over track
as lullaby to this early morning ride, on my way
to help someone move from Manhattan to Astoria.
I see stories in faces. Scenery scatters by a window.
There’s a barn, a pine tree. There’s a barn, a pine tree.
My mother was a barn, my father, a pine tree.
Sometimes there’s nothing left to do but burn.
The night my Opa died and my father was on the deck
I saw the sap in his eyes, and in a dream of this,
my mother cries like a barn, wind through red slats,
and the stars are kept in molasses, a coil half-sprung.
and we will trade our teeth to the crow for passage

When the silence
between us
crawls over the wolf
spider, and dresses you
in cobwebs
remember to keep
your mouth in mine.

This is how
we'll breathe
when the flood rises
beyond our chins.
We can spread
ourselves like stars
across a belly moon

and wait
for the rats
to cave crawl and float
on the water’s face.

When our teeth fallout
it does not mean death
wants us, it means life
is ready to give
us back to the waters.

If you find
my swollen body
hide me
under our mattress.

Keep your pockets full
of fingernails
and horsehair.
Climb
into the hollow reed.

Keep watching.
Expect a crow.
Mirror Sermon

Do you remember
when people in alleys would beg

for your arms? You, with your handful
of penny-nails, pocket of rust,

where did you hide your body?
Where did you discover God?

In your drawer-full of black spoons.
In the sweating meat of another.

You wonder. You imagine time
as a breath that ends before lips break.

You imagine we can never go home
once we salt our mothers & fathers.

Close your eyes, let me instruct you.
There is no candle and high. Write

about roots and roses. Tomorrow,
find your face amongst the cornfields.

Forget. Forget everything as it is.
Forget the mouth and become an angel

of death with pig-iron in your hands
and a step so heavy and clean.

All simple moving parts.
Nothing new, nothing ruinous.

You can only walk the slate so far.
You can only offer yourself

to the waters so many times
before you blue your body

against its bed. Stay with your heart.
Breathe heavy while still breathing.
PART II
Séance

There is a muted terror behind any steps taken against forgetting.

- Anthony Cudahy
Procrastinated Burial

Beneath the sycamore, I dig out a mouth
big enough to swallow a boy, and in it
I bury the body I used to wear

as a child. I don’t have to dig deep,
it should be shallow enough to hide
the neighbor’s doll or a table leg.
I bury the Bible with it.
I once thought I could smear the stars and soften
their edges so the sky was a blur of light.

I kept the child in the tool shed’s rust.
I had to wait until I could carry
its weight through the birches and reach the tree

near the pond’s shimmer of skin.
The Ghostbuster bed sheets and duct tape
were loose around the bird boned body,
it was breaking. I hold it like a light
bulb. I have to cradle it like a newborn.
I whisper to it what I thought a father

or mother says at dawn when the child cries.
The owl moans its eulogy. I lay the boy
to rest in its crib of earth and pray

for the silence that was my father, mother.
And now I’m too old to die young. Amen.
A handful of dirt reanimates
the bed sheet boy to a twitch of life,
trying to breathe again after forgetting
how the air tasted when it rained.

I reveal his face. His mouth, the cross-stitch,
the rotten yarn’s tail. His eyes open
so I close them. Everything belongs to the dirt.

I return to it what it had loaned me
and the rain froze. The snow fatly fell.
I leave a hummingbird’s sugared skeleton
and turn the sycamore into a sentry.
My Opa told me that when the world ends
the dead will rise and kiss their bloodlines.
I don’t know what to believe anymore.
The wind carries a tongue in its song.
I pull my knit cap tight and walk home.
The Land Where They Let The Children Cry

You try to find your way home at night through the woods.

The darkness keeps shifting into vampiric gradients.

Vision can’t adjust to the quiet changes of charcoal fog.

You’re not sure if you’re walking or crawling across the leaves.

The sound of crying is muffled by the distant oaks. You walk towards it.

But it never gets louder. This is the only sound the world knows.

And you feel like a ghost, but know you’re not. The wind still bites your cheek.

Your hands still grope at the old rain. The tree branches dangle rope. 

And even though you’re here, moving through the silence, your body isn’t yours.

Your body belongs to the whisper. You wish you’d have read your bible before bed.

The masks you would wear when you spoke, have melted in your pocket.

Now you can’t speak. You’ve hung your tongue around your neck so no one asks.

Your mother left you a basket on the porch. Your father kept your pills in the truck.

But you’ll never get there. There’s a maniac in the bell tower; the brass always rings.

The sun lost its way home. The moon has died and brought its stars with it.

No one left the porch-light on. They’re not waiting for a prodigal son. Life goes on.

So you sit down and hold yourself in the turbulent violet night.

You wait for grass to swallow. You wait for the taste of earth.
Blood Branch

with soles caked
in mud and grass
i walk to the willow
and break myself
in its hair

when i was younger
    i tugged at girls' skirts
    saying i love you
    no more

violet lips: a cut of meat
violet lips: mouthing a breeze

and when i was older
    they whispered steam
    promising tomorrow
    and a certain salvation

a shadow of rain
on a hillside dissolves
into a scatter of crows
and the wind
eats my cheek

as i drain away from myself
Séance

I

Chalk marks the name of the dirt we buried our friends in. The black vinyl spits its song into the candle.

I sing along to the crackle and cradle my soaped arms. I speak to the fire. I blacken my body in the cold ember.

On oak floors I praise the cornfields, the dairy farms bluing in winter fog. My haunted heart exhales smoke of the ghost breeding in my bones. Legends spread from one mouth to another. The shadows that drip into the carpet. I look for him, he who walks behind the rows. Myths of the Oldham man stealing children who walked on water. The wind slams a door. The voice of a boy I never knew seeps from the needle. His voice freezes the air. It snows in my room. Stories from the mouth of my mother, father bloom from the song of the never known boy. His breath, rose petals and honey, warms my ear. His cold voice drips salt.

II

I was the pinball boy of American neon. I lived in the polished bar tops & mugs as my mother and father blew smoke.

I’d beg for quarters so I could live again. The clown on my shelf whispered death. The monsters of the mountain bled themselves outside my window at night.
In the morning, I’d sharpen my sticks and scout the revolutionary trails
lined with stonewalls and arrowheads.
Everyday, I lost my parents in a maze.
At purple dusk they’d be at the table.

I had a brother. I never had a brother.
He’d be the blonde boy in the basement.
He’d be the first name in my parent’s mouth. I’d be the knower of silence,
the one who knows the quiet better than his own voice. But I did have

a brother. I had learned not to speak even if I were drowning. I mouthed
the sound of weeping. I would sleep

in the refrigerator’s bleached light.
I’d wake to a mouth on the wall.

III

His story is one I’ve heard before
when I’d lay asleep at night in the glow
of a television’s dream. You know truth
when your bones tremble at the word.
You know it when it swaddles a mouth
into telling. What becomes of the boy

who settles into his ribcaged bedroom?
Bone-faced, black-eyed sitting empty
in a well. How a body swells in water.

How the skin will purple and burst
by a grazing finger. It’s like being alone.
Silence fills lungs like water. We choke

out our words. Tongue for a noose.
But if a mouth can be unhinged
like a door, if the quiet can be broken

like a window, then there is no closing
the opening. Everything goes with it. The moth I cupped in my hand still lives in the candle wax starbursting on wood floors. The arm and needle pull out of the vinyl’s groove and resets to start.

I blow off the snow, flip it to the B-side. It rolls out again in a burned whisper.

I V

And I became the smell in the attic. The silent mumble from inside a wall. I’d fall into the forest and set fire to pine needles. Sap soaked hands pulled at my hair. I’d leave my teeth wrapped in flannel and sawdust.

The stars melted into the tree tops. The robin’s egg was warm in my hand, it pulsed to the tremble of the moon.

Spiders gathered in my mouth. I sang to the pollen and the firs what the house said to me at night.

And my voice became the leaves scraping across the wind’s trail. It became the quiet only darkness knows. I learned how hollow a mouth of promise can be. A porch light eventually fades behind a long walked distance. I discovered how my salt tasted when I bathed in the stream and dried my body on the shore. The coyotes licked my whispers. Becoming feral requires little.
The needle thumps its scratch.
There is no need to listen again.
What we all want to know, learn
is already buried in our bodies.
The snow has become fine sand
swallowing my palmed-up hands.

The boy has become my mouth.
He coppers a half-sung song
from my tongue. The crawlspace
door rattles its iron. My wine is gone.
Grief is the ghost of our shadows,
so we live with the gray of tomorrow.

I write down the boy’s incantations,
fingering letters in the rising sand.
Words reveal a body that knows
how to hold itself and only itself
against the stars’ turbulent blur.
A cotton mask milks empty eyes.

The sheet concaves against a mouth
swallowing a silent scream. Fingers pale
against a back’s chain. If I had my lungs
I’d blow sand off the phantom body,
I’d find the hand I held in the darkness
of a lost bedroom for the quiet orphan.
Return of Boy

Ghosts live in the fog that drips from holes in the sky. They scratch at my window at night, their touch marking the glass by morning. The boy I left under the sycamore is gone. The hole is empty. I wait for him to arrive in smoke rings. I wait for the water to bring him back to my home. A sheeted body will float, toe-drooped, through oak and call me from my bedroom. I wait for this like I wait for night. And I hear him in the blue air opening his throat of nightcrawlers to empty the dirt that has gathered. We built our homes on cemeteries. And now my haunted body sheds itself of shadows and wax, of the quiet eating at the cobwebs. And now I eat my cigarettes for dinner, breathing on the window to bring back his face frosting glass haze, me as memory.
He got up. He was a little stiff, but walking would cure that too as it would the cold, and soon there would be the sun. He went on down the hill, toward the dark woods within which the liquid silver voices of the birds called unceasing—the rapid and urgent beating of the urgent and quiring heart of the late spring night. He did not look back.

--William Faulkner
The Origin Story

You used to hold your sweatshirts together with safety pins.

I’d get into fights that I knew I’d lose just so I could get hit and finally feel something. You smelled of peroxide and cigarettes.

You stomped out glitter and kept razors hidden in your cheek, vodka disguised in bottles of Evian. In study hall we’d chew on caffeine pills.

You came from a family of brandy snifters and stone cut lake homes. I lived in a tool shed and slept in flannel and waited for my father.

Even before you knew me, I’d take off your clothes in my poems.

You were the girl parties stopped for. You were the girl breaking medicine cabinets apart when the music got too loud to dance to.

I lived in the quiet of your stare and prayed for your mouth to name me.

You touched me more than you spoke to me. Your hands knew my body better than my ears knew your voice and this was okay, it was soft.

You spread rumors about yourself. You fingered my waist in History where you sat behind me and traced prophecies under my t-shirt.

You had trouble leaving places. You’d forget your jacket, earrings, anything that could bring you back and I’d watch you return laughing.

And that night, at the Anything But Clothes party, you came back for me, wrapped in an American flag. And that night, you had me drive you to the 7-11 in town for cigarettes. And that night, I watched, through the glass, as you pushed a revolver against the cashier’s nose. You walked out in the calm knowing and threw a pack of Parliaments on the dashboard. And you told me to drive. So I drove. And that night we got on the road and never got off.
Exit 34 - 80 West

Before the Pontiac and the Buick
there was the Triumph and the Harley.

We’d eat the valleys and peel thunder
off the road in chromed moans. Somewhere

in Nebraska, where we sold truckers speed
that was really old aspirin, how you

laughed like the rain out of a gutter,
fire eating wet wood, as I listened

to you sing your song for the burning crickets:
*Tomorrow is a promise that someday breaks.*

We fingered our mouths beneath 24-hour diesel.
You said the sky was a well stirred martini,

the olive moon, the iced stars. I said
it was a bottle thrown from an overpass.

We counted the boys’ faces left on fliers
at truck stops. How long do you wait

to forget about yesterday?
You pointed at the ones that looked like me,

the boy I’m still looking for in the night.
At the Ramada, October ’13

We went to a motel
where she left a bible
in my mouth. Her words

written blue on pages
of onionskin and twine
told me everything

I needed to know:
Wine lips mouthed forever,
a tongue swept promise

that keeps love’s ashes
resting in yellowed skulls.
We get our future

when we soap the past
from our hands. When I
was a boy, the moon dripped

wax on my back; the wings
of yellow-jacket husks
piled in the window.

Shadows ate the world.
Sycamores swallowed crows.
Werewolves would moan at night,

moon or no moon. She was right
about terror that lived
in the walls. Bourbon stained
dreams gathered in the eaves.
My yesterday was cold
and now stale urine skin

clings to my bones like dust
on a picture frame.
I’ve never found tomorrow.
Words lose their bodies.
Dismembered memories
float above me, heavy

like heaven caught ghosts.
And she was right, all we need
is to learn to swallow.
Exit 229: 80 West

We bathed the Buick in gasoline
and stuffed your panties in a bottle
of bottom-shelf vodka. You loved
the smell of a fresh-lit match, the burn
it leaves in your nose. We had to purify
the metal of its rust bone. We thought
fire could eat away the stains, the gun
we left in the glove-compartment.
How hot does a flame need to be
so it can consume steel-skeleton & skin,
so it can blacken the memory of what was?
You said we needed a bigger car,
one that we could sleep in at night,
but we couldn’t trade in the Buick.
So we switched from gas stations
to pharmacies on a movie’s advice.
I told you how my father hitchhiked
down to Florida with a back-full
of heroin, that by the time he got back
to Jersey, he kept his teeth in his pocket
and his mother forgot what he looked like.

But we went along, stopping off of 80
to sex under the vesper, selling our stock
under streetlights in old factory towns.

Even after the Buick, you couldn’t stop.
You forgot what the inside of a church
looked like. You had me drop you off
at the Catholic doors. I smoked a cigarette
and waited for your confession. You came
running, laughing in the drizzled fog,
the offertory cradled in your wet hands.
*We are the angels more deserving*, you said
pouring the collection into your lap.
Plate-Glass Observation

When the city is lacquered
in rain, and the cabs doze by,
my head finds itself in hands
that it doesn’t belong to.

I’m led into cold caffeine.
I’m fed scrambled blue pills.

My breath reveals secrets
left by those that came before;
lingering finger sketches
willing a prophesy’s kiss.

I listen to a story
where my name is used-up
like a cigarette’s burnt filter.

Walkers, wet-faced men
and umbrelled women,
shatter puddles and carry
the world in their shoes.

Those places that hold focus;
witch-hazeled linoleum
blackened coffee urns.

This is where yesterday
catches up with tomorrow.
Alias

Getting lost let us name ourselves. You flaunted golden Hollywood titles at every bar and motel:

Audrey,
Marilyn,
Ingrid,
Greta.

You never had a last name to hang your head on.

Some days, I didn’t know what to call you. I had to guess by how you crossed your legs, what panties you pulled on in the morning.

You said things like; 

I’ve got a bad case of the reds...
Is this the way to Europe, France?...
I have been an intermezzo in your life... 
cI just want to be alone...

It was easier to be someone else. Every night in bed I was with a different girl and you made me play the same game.

I became 80’s B-movie personas, faces you’ve seen before but characters you never watched:

Jack Burton,
James Dalton,
Vincent Lauria,
Otto Maddox.

I’d spit these names into beer bottles. The plots became my history.

If we believe it, anyone will. All we need to do is lie to ourselves and everything is possible. I laid down my quotes like scripture across the green felt of a pool table; If someone asks you if you paid your dues, remember what Jack Burton told you, ‘Did I pay my dues? Yeah, the check is in the mail.’

Pain? Pain don’t hurt.
I think the money is what’s throwing you off here today.
Stick with me. I’ll make you a repo wife.

Everything’s always out of context. We forgot who we were after awhile. My driver’s license contained a ghost. Our cellphones were cemeteries the glowing names of the ones we left behind, electric praying. We couldn’t answer because we weren’t there. Our bodies belonged to someone else. We swallowed the myth of the road.
We became a myth on the road. We smoked our bag of high-jacked Marlboros and kept our pockets soaked with pharmaceuticals. You once told me you had to be numb in order to find the pain and root it out, you compared it to getting a tooth-pulled; *it’s barbaric to yank it without numbing the gum first.* So that’s what we did, we made ourselves cold in summer and let the wind break our skin.

When we ran out of names, we reused the ones we had. We always said we were from a different state than the one we were in. But my accent gave me away. My Jersey tongue cracked vowels. I could never be from Nebraska or Oklahoma or Indiana. It was always easier you to be someone other than yourself. It was natural to forget your mouth.

It’s why I can’t find you now. I don’t know who to look for. When I’m cutting the shoulder off a road, I look for you through the windshields of cars passing by. Every girl in thick sunglasses is you *Audrey, Marilyn, Ingrid, Greta.* Every girl bent over the bar, skirts and stockings, is you.

Your death conversations still drip from my ear. How you imagined you’d find your body in an alley or wrapped in a motel bathrobe or doused in feathers and corn-syrup. I’d listen but never say anything. The thought of it was like imagining God; too painful to visualize the maybe. You said you wanted all your names to be carved into the grass-grown stone.

Though I won’t be there when it happens, and you’ll have forgotten the sound of my cigarettes, and my name won’t hold meaning I’ve always known your last words would be, *hold my whiskey watch this.*
Eucharist

Count the rosaries
binding your wrists.

A mouth, containing
the feathered song,
accepts a halo,
the melting wafer.

I know you have knelt
beneath the wood, iron,
body dripping wine.
That your knees know
divinity’s weight
when it’s dissolved,
swallowed. You confess
to the damp whisper

of the church organ’s
dusty breath, stained glass.

Begging is praying.
Salt washes you clean.

Lips petal a bloom.
A razor parts spit

in strings of silk
neoning from me

to you and I move
through you, the sound

you make, like an angel
getting its wings

cut-off. The echo sings
from the hanging cross.
Mercury Sable

Your body is in the garage
under the canvas drop-cloth.

Your engine is hung from chain
hooks like a ceiling chandelier

aching over its hollow chassis.
I kept you overnight. I wanted
to wash my hands in your oil,
so I drained the block in a bucket

and slept with my prayer-cupped
hands in its thickness. I drank

the fingertip drippings. Your quiet
rose through the floor. In the morning

I drove to work and could smell
your thigh in my cigarette smoke.

You were still there, sheeted steel,
when I got home. Your black stained
the white. I drank my scotch and sat
in my father’s chair, waiting

for my chest to fill with burn
so I could start the work that is you.

But you know how I get when I drink.
My intentions become divided by want

versus need, as in, I wanted to touch
the rustless gleam curve of your door

with gloved hands, but I needed to clean
your engine until it matched your body.

Memory deposits in the deepest hole,
it’s impossible to finger out the sludge.

Tonight, I decide to not even try. I decide
to just sit in the concrete room and watch
how diluted acid can make gunmetal shine, how it can reveal / restore purity.
Lake Mohawk, Morning After Home

We drank screwdrivers
hidden away in coffee cups

while we watched the wind
shatter the lake like glass.

The old women were melted
 candles without the wick.

Children dunked their heads
and screamed at the cold.

I smoked down to the filter.
I watched how your socks

bloomed a pair of thighs
that scissored the air

as you spoke about tomorrow.
When did I get so young?

How did I not notice
the way salt stains cotton?

All I can do is watch
your eyes, how they hide

when they meet the sun.
I’m thinking of a scotch

in a short thick glass.
I’m thinking of the blue

pill in my pocket.
Maybe if I don’t move

I won’t be here at all.