A biannual collection of poetry, prose, and visual art created by the students of Middlebury College.
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LABYRINTHINE

Sunrise, sunset, skeletons stalk tunnels
and at night the walls devour themselves.
          No roosters crow beneath the earth.
Once he wandered then found himself lost,
no choice, no chance, chained to a throne of bones.
          Horns that spiral down to wooly chest,
          hunger shrieking in his four stomachs,
he swallows himself to sleep on darkness.
Daedalus chiseled a tomb for maidens
but feathers melted like candle wax
          and the ocean opened her mouth wide.
Gold thread spiders through blackness, starlight on olive groves
sandals crunch on femur, ulna, pelvic crest.
          Mossy, murky, the bricks leak tears -
he weeps too for necks crushed between teeth.

A BIRTHDAY WISH FOR YOU

May hornets lay little white eggs
in the gray matter of your brain
and the larvae drill through your skull.

May you be trapped in an hourglass
as sand slithers inexorably down
to plug your lungs and ears.

May a small brown mouse
burrow into your intestines
and nibble through the lining of your stomach.

May you stumble through tidal caves
as the ocean roars by rocks
swallowing you and spitting you out.

May you grow fat and furry
like a silkworm so gray threads
burst through the tips of your fingers.

May plump oozing leeches
suckle on your breasts
drinking milk and blood.

May ivy twine down your throat
and root itself at the base of your tongue
so you suffocate on your own thoughts.
FAIRY TALES IN THE OLIVE GROVE

Once upon a time
she wobbled on tightropes
strung between stars, astounded
at the brilliance of her white-hot heart.

Blind lizards opened green eyes in blackness.

Clouds were kittens,
mewling and tussling and purring
topsy-turvy, upside-down
a heavenly tangle of whiskers and tails
napping forever in the sky.

Blood tasted of pomegranate seeds and sapphires.

Jigsaw puzzles were never solved,
mysteries painted on cardboard,
shattered tiger ears and shorn lilacs
strewn about the coffee table.

The ticktock of clocks whispered lies.

Now she cries for hopscotch and jump rope
on honeyed afternoons.
She weaves a cape of butterflies
and carves a gravestone for the moon.
BOOKS OF THE BIBLE (EXCERPT)

CHARACTERS:
John Haslam—an attractive 20-year-old football player for a pretentious southern high school.
Presbyterian. White.


AT RISE: Leeann stands downstage center dressed in church attire. Her hair is pulled back away from her face and she has very little makeup on. A recording of a congregation speaking the Apostles’ Creed plays. Leeann states the creed as the recording plays.

LEEANN
"I believe in God, the Father Almighty, 
the Creator of heaven and earth, 
And in Jesus Christ, His only Son, our Lord, 
who was conceived of the Holy Spirit, 
born of the Virgin Mary, 
suffered under Pontius Pilate, 
was crucified, died, and was buried. 
He descended into hell. 
The third day He arose again from the dead. 
He ascended into heaven 
and sitteth at the right hand of God the Father Almighty, 
from whence He shall come to judge the living and the dead. 
I believe in the Holy Spirit, 
the holy Catholic Church, 
the communion of saints, 
the forgiveness of sins, 
the resurrection of the body, 
and life everlasting."

(The recording stops.)

Amen.

Dinah Walker wasn’t in church this morning. Everybody noticed. Everybody knew exactly why. Everybody in the young adult Sunday school group, that is. Last night her and her boyfriend, John Haslam, went downtown to the new karaoke bar and got drunk off their asses. She was supposed to come home to her Mama and Daddy’s, but instead she went back home with John. To his dorm room. Dinah Walker didn’t want to do nothing, and she definitely didn’t want to sleep there, but in that moment, John was just so damn funny that she forgot about everything. She forgot about church in the morning.

(The stage area behind Leeann becomes dimly lit. A small dorm-sized bed is seen. Dinah Walker and John Haslam walk on stage. They are disheveled and loud and drunk. They each stumble. John tells a joke, or the end of a joke, and Dinah laughs a loud, feminine laugh. John joins in. The couple laughs
the whole way to the bed. On the bed, they stop laughing suddenly. They look at each other for a moment, and then kiss. A long kiss. When they finish, they look at each other again, and then freeze in such a gaze.)

I apologize. Y’all probably don’t care... I mean you don’t even know these people. We do that, you should know. We talk about people like everybody knows exactly who we are talkin’ about. It’s a culture thing, that’s all. Gets worse in the summertime.

(She looks back behind her Dinah Walker and John Haslam. She looks back to the audience and smirks.)

These two aren’t important right this very minute, though they will be. But we’ll leave them alone for now. Let them get back to their... activities.

(At this moment, Dinah Walker and John Haslam continue to make out. The intensity increases. They get under the covers. They do not stop.)

I’m just trying to give some perspective. Help explain where we come from. Trying to ease y’all into this place before the shit hits the fan. Here, let me try again. This place is not just religious—it’s religious to the point where we are unable to be self-aware. We do things like we always have—constantly fighting the inevitability of change. We do things like we always have, and we never stop to question what’s the goddamn point?

And it’s been like this for as long as I’ve known it. Like in third grade, Ms. Durham made each of us memorize all the books of the bible. In order. Both the Old and New Testament. We had to stand in front of the class, one by one, and list all 66 books. And each of us did it, by God. And not a single one of us ever stopped to question, what’s the goddamn point? I try to say them to myself sometimes, just to see if I can still do it. Like when I’m getting ready to go out or something.

(Leeann slowly takes off her church attire revealing more provocative attire, listing the books of the bible as she goes. Once she is done undressing, she should pull out lipstick and mascara from her cleavage, or a shoe, and begin to put on her makeup.)

Genesis.

(Dinah Walker laughs from under the covers of the bed.)

Exodus.

(Dinah Walker laughs again. A little louder. A little longer.)

Leviticus.

(Dinah Walker laughs again but this time she adds a seemingly playful phrase at the end. Something along the lines of “Stop it, John.”)

Numbers.

(Slightly less playfully, “Stop it, John. Come on. Stop it.”)
Deuteronomy.

(Even less playfully, “John. John.”)

Joshua

(Dinah Walker does not laugh this time. Instead, she makes a very small, yet audible noise. A noise of both pain and pleasure.)

Judges

(Dinah Walker makes the same noise a little louder.)

Ruth

(Dinah Walker makes the same noise VERY loud. Twice.)

1st and 2nd Samuel

(Dinah Walker makes the same noise over and over and over again VERY, VERY loudly. Then, the noises stop.)

1st and 2nd Kings. Okay you get it. I could go on and on all the way through Revelation. But why does it matter? But that’s just it, it doesn’t matter why. We learn them because Mrs. Durham has been teaching the third grade the books of the bible for thirty-eight years now, and she’ll keep teaching them until the day she dies. Or until Jesus Christ himself returns to earth to walk amongst us.

Which may come first because Mrs. Durham is a nasty, old witch who just may never die.

(A pause.)

JOHN HASLAM
Are you okay?

(Dinah Walker sits up but says nothing.)

Do you want me to take you home? Dinah, are you okay? Did you not want to do that? I thought we had talked about doing that? Dinah are you going to be—

DINAH WALKER
You shouldn’t tell anybody about tonight.

JOHN HASLAM
Okay.

DINAH WALKER
JOHN HASLAM
I wouldn’t tell them.

DINAH WALKER
You tell them everything else.

JOHN HASLAM
That’s not true.

DINAH WALKER
You’ve been telling them we been going downtown and drinking a bunch of beer.

JOHN HASLAM
They go out with us. They drink a bunch of beer with us.

DINAH WALKER
Well they don’t need to be talking about it! And you don’t either! You know how mad my Dad’s going be if he finds out we’ve been drinking a bunch of beer!

(John Haslam laughs a little.)

This is far from funny, John!

JOHN HASLAM
Dinah, we just slept together and you’re worried about your father finding out that you drink a bunch of beer?

DINAH WALKER
Well don’t talk about that neither!

(John Haslam laughs again.)

JOHN HASLAM
Okay fine. Oh course not.

(John Haslam and Dinah Walker reposition. Dinah on his shoulder.)

Your Dad has to know your sister drinks beer.

DINAH WALKER
Yeah, but he don’t admit it.

JOHN HASLAM
Because wants the point?

DINAH WALKER
There isn’t one. Ain’t no stopping Leanne.
LEEANN
Now, who’s Leeann? See, there they go again talking about people y’all don’t know. I’ll tell you who Leeann is— That’d be me. Leeann Walker. And that’s my sister. The one having a panic attack in the bed. Strange huh? We aren’t really that much alike. But when you give it some real thought it makes more sense. Because there are two types of Preacher’s daughters in this world: the one who goes looking for sin, and the other that can’t escape from it.

Now I’ll just let y’all guess which one am I.

(Blackout.)

(Lights up on desk. Pastor Walker sits one side, John Haslam Sr. on the other.)

PASTOR WALKER
Thanks, John, for coming to talk with me just a little bit.

JOHN SENIOR
Yes, of course. Nice job this morning, as always.

PASTOR WALKER
Thank you. Thank you.

JOHN SENIOR
All though I will say there was a part that made me a little nervous.

PASTOR WALKER
Yeah, which part was that?

JOHN SENIOR
That part about the Camel and the needle...

PASTOR WALKER
Ah, “It is easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle, than for a rich man to enter the Kingdom of God.”

JOHN SENIOR
Yeah, that’s it.

PASTOR WALKER
I wouldn’t think about it literally. It’s just encouraging you to share. Which you do plenty off. Thank you again, by the way, for your gift.

JOHN SENIOR
Please, don’t mention it. It would be embarrassing for all those boys and girls to be confirmed without getting their own bible. That’s how it’s always been done. That’s how we’ll always do it.

PASTOR WALKER
Well, thank you.
JOHN SENIOR
Happy to do it again, but enough of that. What did you want to talk about? We need to repaint the something?

PASTOR WALKER
No, no, nothing like that. Listen, it’s not the end of the world, but Dinah wasn’t in church this morning—

JOHN SENIOR
Ah—

PASTOR WALKER
And I know she was with John and his football buddies last night. So if you could just speak to him—

JOHN SENIOR
Sure I can say something—

PASTOR WALKER
Because I’m not totally sure what happened, but it’s just not like Dinah to miss church. She almost never does. I mean, I could expect something like that out of Leeann, she’s come to about half the Sunday school lesson this year so far. But not Dinah. And this cannot become a habit—

JOHN SENIOR
It was only one Sunday—

PASTOR WALKER
I know. I know. It’s just that she has been spending an awful lot of time with John lately—

JOHN SENIOR
Spit it out, Walker—

PASTOR WALKER
I just want to make sure your son is being the right kind of influence on my daughter. Since they’re getting so close. I’m the father of a teenage daughter, it’s hard to know—

JOHN SENIOR
Yeah, I get that. I’ll talk to him.

PASTOR WALKER
I just can’t have her missing church—

JOHN SENIOR
I get it. I’ll talk to him, but you have nothing to worry about. John is a good boy.

PASTOR WALKER
Oh I don’t doubt it.

JOHN SENIOR
Hard working. Team Captain. She couldn’t have picked someone better.
PASTOR WALKER
Right, I just want you to check in on your end. See if you can make sure he gets her home in time to be up for church.

JOHN SENIOR
Yeah, I'll try, but you know boys will be boys.

PASTOR WALKER
Well I don't really know. I don't have any boys.

JOHN SENIOR
Yes, Walker you were once a boy were you not?

PASTOR WALKER
Yes, but I was a little different.

JOHN SENIOR
How so?

PASTOR WALKER
I chose to become a pastor.

(Lights down.)

(Lights up on Leeann painting her nails red. Dinah enters goes to a table to start school work.)

LEEANN
Hi, trouble maker.

DINAH
Hi.

LEEAN
Where you coming back from?

DINAH
Night group.

LEEANN
Oh, feeling guilty for this morning's absence are we?

DINAH
Please don't. You should have come.

LEEANN
I went this morning.

DINAH
You can go twice. It's not just a box you check off.
LEEANN
Of course it is. That's how everyone else treats it. Except Dad. Where is Dad?

DINAH
Sorting the bibles for the confirmation class.

LEEANN
When is confirmation?

DINAH
Next Sunday.

LEEANN
You going to show up for that?

DINAH
Stop, okay? I feel bad enough. Dad couldn't even look at me.

LEEANN
Just be like me. He'll expect less of you.

DINAH
I'm speaking.

LEEANN
I hear you.

DINAH
No, at confirmation.

LEEANN
So you really can't be late.

DINAH
I know.

LEEANN
No staying over at Mr. Haslam's for you then next weekend.

DINAH
(Furious)
WHO TOLD YOU?

LEEANN
Calm down. No one.

DINAH
Who told you, Leeann! Tell me now!
LEEANN
Nobody!

DINAH
I’m gonna call him right now! I can’t believe John is going around telling people. I asked him not to!

LEEANN
John didn’t tell anyone! I just put two and two together, I swear to God.
(Pastor Walker enters, tired and with a bunch of stuff in his hands.)

PASTOR WALKER
We don’t swear to God. Leeann go upstairs.

LEEANN
My nails are wet.

PASTOR WALKER
Go. Now.

(Leeann leaves the room sharing a look with her sister that signifies “Good luck.”)
INTERTWINED

my right on your left

my meaning in your words
your words in my mouth

my words tucked away
in the folds of philosophy.

dream-soaked sheets
hang from your body like water,

wet and warm with secrets,
as you walk to the silver blue

light that climbs in the window
like a lover and i pretend to sleep

wrapped in shadows and claustrophobia
and silky memories of this night

when we kissed like friction
with rug burn heartache.

hearts, too close to pretend
we are not touching

eyes, too closed to pretend
we are not blind.

salty addiction already clings to our skin.
UNTITLED

i dreamt that the moon broke last night.  
it spun blue rubble into  
the earth  
and i held to gravity like  
flame holds to wood-chip.  
i dreamt that nuclear snowflakes scorched  
skin and settled  
on the ground  
where i watched them grow into glaciers.  
i built tarp walls  
and hid under my conviction  
that this wasn't happening  
and looked out only to see  
refugees  
that needed more tarps and  
more walls and  
more fire and  
more wood-chip and  
more gravity.  
they were crushed on the glaciers  
like exoskeleton.  
i dreamt that monsters grew up  
from under my tarps  
and looked like machines  
in the glaciers  
and spread from the ice  
like infected veins.  
i fought them because we were  
all hanging from what little  
gravity we had  
and i didn’t want to fall away.  
i killed because i didn’t want to die  
and not wanting to die  
is scarier than death.  
i dreamt that i wanted to be okay  
but wasn’t and  
wanting to be okay  
cut like scalpel  
into my bones.  
i dreamt that all i could do was  
hope that i was dreaming.
INSOMNIACS

i call him insomnia and glasses and trace the
turn of his chest along
breath lines
and listen to the slide of his heartbeat
and his eyes leak the almost
in his mouth
so i call him insomnia and movie wine
and hope he has words for me
but they’re silent
i call him insomnia and hands and skin
and we touch like almost
which is the rub of salt and fruit and
empty-tongue silence and
unsmooth sandpaper truth
and sleep is time and time
is rugburn-red on skin and
i call him insomnia because it is smooth
and almost looks like
hourglass sand forgetting
undeciding which way to fall
falling like sleep into insomnia
and i call him insomnia
and we can sleep only when
two things are true at the same time
and we know lies are uncontradicted by truth
because we will run out of time
and we will not
and both are true
in the cut of the salt in heartbreath
and insomnia and the uneven
tick of breath-seconds
that fall out of our mouths in
almost imperfect syncopated time
MY LIPS ARE A CAGE

Overlooking the water, at the uneven edges of the downtown, is a factory. We walk there through the snow around sunset. It is late March and there are birds above us flying towards an island with strange looking buildings on it. She tells me that they were designed by McGill students, but they don’t really look very real to me. Above us hangs a fluffy pink sky, the sunset fading through the thin bright white that surrounds us.

A giant billboard with the broken glass remnants of neon lights says that the factory once produced flour. It is written in both French and English in order to respect the divided culture of the city. We walk past your usual set of ‘no trespassing’ signs and climb through an ironing board-sized hole in the dirty looking mesh metal fence. The factory looms high above us with its brutalist rusting walls and dusty cracked windows. It is a great sheet of edifice not unlike how I’d imagine an Egyptian pyramid might look up close and personal, just with snow and abandoned logistical paperwork instead of sand and mummies.

There is a small railway track half-buried in the snow, its metal rails sticking out here and there like the ribs of long-forgotten mammals. Before we reach the walls there is another fence, this time without any convenient holes. I climb over it first and then look back to see if she wants any help climbing over. She avoids making eye contact and she knows I’m too shy to offer any help out loud. So she tries by herself, rising admirably above me, her head eclipsing the fading sun. She rises, and then she falls, cutting that part of your hand between your thumb and your fingers that seems to have more skin than is necessary. A little bit of blood and she doesn’t really know what to do so she sucks it. I give her the tissue that I always keep in my back pocket. It is the first time that it has actually been useful. The ground ahead of us is almost entirely made of ice, with only the slightest sheet of snow resting upon it. We hold hands in order to not slip. It’s exciting and we laugh a lot. Despite all our efforts in getting here, we cannot find any not-too-insane ways inside the building. The big door in front of us has a big fat metal chain linking it to the rest of the wall. It hasn’t been opened for so long and is so dirty that I can’t make out where the door ends and the wall begins. We walk around to the other side and stand at the water’s edge, stop and look upwards together. We can hear the odd pop or plummet from behind the walls. Her thumb rubs the inside of my palm.

We are back uptown, the sun has set and we are having dinner at a fusion food place. I don’t know what it means, and nor does she, so we laugh again and again at the very thought of it. She orders a chicken satay burrito and I point at the strawberry pizza. We stare and struggle to make conversation. She is too beautiful for small talk and I am too self-conscious to be funny. She begins to tell me about how her sister wants piercings. My fingers tatter about in circles on the napkin in front of me, drawing invisible rings around invisible points. After the strange food, we slip into the night through the chiming, poster-strewn glass door.

Outside, it is chilly, and I wrap my scarf around my face. I can feel moisture from my lips in the cotton. I reach to hold her hand and ask her if she wants to go to the cinema the following evening. After a moment’s hesitance, she looks at me with disgust and steps backwards.
“Why would you just ask me that? You are just revolting.”

She pushes me and I fall, slipping on the harsh wet concrete, my hands and knees caked in dirty black ice. Streetlights illuminate curtains of snow falling onto the dark winter pavement. Closed shops, short buildings and streetlights surround. I wonder if I did say what she said I said and not what I thought I said. I wonder if there is ever any way to know. I thought the words and then heard the words. But she did not react in the same way. So maybe I said other words. A sharp wind tears into my ears and eyelids. I hold my hands to my face and stand outside listening to her footsteps as they grow ever quieter. Snowflakes land on my fingers, a soft conciliatory caress.

An elderly man in uniform passes, I ask him for the time.

“I don’t live with her anymore, I don’t think that is how you raise a child.”

He moves on and the wind whistles ever louder, the ice melting against my wrists. The words I thought were no longer the words I used.

I feel something heavy fall on the back of my neck and I turn around, my hands lifted from my face but still suspended rather comically in mid-air. A tall brunette white woman in a scarlet overcoat with pursed lips stands in front of me. I can’t make out her features because of the glare of the streetlights. She begins to walk down the street and I assume that I am supposed to follow. I do so.

She leads me two blocks to a car park. Above the stationary vehicles are the looming white eyes of a giant graffiti rat. She unlocks a small blue Volkswagen and I get into its passenger seat. I feel like a child again being driven home from bowling by my parents; sad but also looking forward to the potential of something exciting like that one time they took me to get nachos at 10 p.m. She drives and I sit assuming it unwise to even try to speak, seeing that my tongue has turned against me tonight. I hope that she understands, somehow understands that I’m not being rude, or maybe she likes me because of my quietude, maybe it gives me a certain air of mystery. I look at her but she focuses on the road, impressionist splashes of light from the outside, traffic signals and election posters all blurred by the speed of the journey on tiring eyes. She switches on the radio, a French music channel, it is on a little too low to make out the lyrics, but loud enough to get a feel.

We stop somewhere non-descript and she gets out, taking off her coat and shutting the door behind her. I move to open mine but I notice that it is locked. I lean over to her side in order to unlock it but I can’t figure out how to do it. I am trapped. But I don’t really mind, it is warm here and the one person I want to be with escapes me.

In the morning I realize I must have fallen asleep before resolving my situation. I remember that I was not and still am not in a position to do so. If I damage her car there is nothing I could really say for myself. I am in no present danger. I have no desperate desire to be out in the cold milling around in a city that I have long since stopped caring for. Indeed, inside this car I am never misunderstood. In here, I will not suffer for the wrongs of my words.
It is day so there is enough light for me to find the button that allows me to unlock doors. I push it but it does not open any doors. The scarlet coat is still on the seat next to me, the keys are still on the dashboard. I could do anything. I could wear the scarlet coat and lure people into the car. I could drive to Toronto and marry Drake. Indeed, I figure the coat would make me irresistible.

I reach out to it but instead of yielding its velvety fabric to my touch, it recoils like a wild animal. As it moves I feel a wet splash come from it. What was once so clearly, by the unfair lights of night, an overcoat, appears to me now, so disgustingly, by the brutal clarity of day, as a giant, quivering, tongue.
PREPARE

In 1949
my grandmother’s curls flapped under her tucked cap,
heels clicking against the cement.
She and her buttoned, suited cohorts would
giggle against the roar of propellers,
lipstick grinning to the wind.

Upon boarding, she ran her French manicure
down the leathered aisles,
clinking champagne with a pearly white sheen.
She and four others glided across the carpet,
China and cutlery gleaming in the early sun.

The rumble of take off and the thunder of landing
were thrills, spills
of hors d’oeuvres merely napkin ed off,
swept away with the gloss of
Concord skies.

“Paris, New York, Frankfurt—”
Her eyes melted as the cities rolled off her tongue.
Time difference was a flirtatious surprise:
sleep could wait as long as there was time for
curling, powdering, and slipping into stockings.

My grandmother’s heels rest peacefully
in the cavern of her closet,
snuggled between A-line skirts and travel brochures.
Only age had forced her touchdown.
Her varicose veins were swelled from cabin pressure
but streaked red with excitement.

* * *

2010 marked five years
since I had first met the plane.
Up at 35,000 feet I remember
clinking my orange juice with their Diet Cokes,
feasting upon my well-earned portion of
pasta shells.

I had run my dry hands over the worn grid of the 757.
Snapping and heaving,
puke bags pouring out of my sides,
my heels merely muffled by the ragged aisles.
I itched for real land.
Upon arrival, I squinted at the fluorescent beams lining the airport streams. Days began to chug in clumps like baggage thumps, groaning on the squeaky claim.

I pushed myself to no longer succumb to moving walkways and actually use my muscles. I would capture my hygiene in 50 millilitres, packing eyes-closed, sleeping six hours ahead of normalcy.

Only when it was just me and the hum of the hotel mini-fridge could I call him, sound pleased at his amazement: “Really, Taiwan?” What did it matter if I had barely left customs?

I was floating in anti-space: land that countries claim but still is tethered to nature. Once, after locating the nearest emergency exits, I remember sinking into my knobbly seat and just breathing. I could trust the intelligence that propelled us into the skies, physics was merely a thrust. But I flinched when I realised that I measured home in terms of thousands of miles away, time differences, and whether or not I needed a visa. His voice crackled over overpriced calls could not fill the ten hours of food, wait, food, hate at the customers that summoned us like dolls. “Anything to declare?” Just my existence. Here, you can have all the free pens and air miles you want.

I am not getting back on that plane. That’s what I had told him On our anniversary and my divorce of the skies.

“Drive me, drive me far away from the sprawl of baggage claims And 3 a.m. naps,” I pleaded.
Screw statistics, I'm ready for proper travel.

And so we drove, moved, drove some more until the day when we received a call that she was not feeling well. And we had to be there in two days. Across the country, only reachable by plane. I winced. But he pushed me and we turned around, barrelled for passports and early check-ins.

During takeoff, I remember sinking into the grumble of engines, of all the years I spent parading these aisles and realised who we were going to see: the woman who convinced me that the sky is a place of openness suspended amongst the clouds. She would tell me of the days she could not wait to get back to peering out the boxy windows over a land anew. Untouchable, but still a part of the world.

"Isn't that what travel is all about?" She asked, gently rocking as her wrinkled fingers grazed over the black and white cabin crew photograph. Even now at her bedside the horizon sun still beams in her eyes. Curls loose yet lightly tousled, red feathered lips from 95 years and 30,000 miles.

We were both ready to soar.
ISABELLE STILLMAN

RAYMOND’S COPY SHOP

It was last Tuesday, in the afternoon. There hadn’t been many people in that day, and the staplers were empty so Carol had me refilling them. I was standing at the main desk in the middle of the room, with all these logs of staples in a pile and a bunch of staplers opened with their metal guts all exposed, and I was pinching them so the sides would fit and making red lines in my fingertips.

I’d gotten myself in one of the springs and was flailing my hand in the air like a cartoon when this girl walked across the front window so her face was lit up sort of pink from the glow of the “OPEN” sign. She paused at the door and leaned toward the glass, looking at the white “Hours” stickers with her eyebrows all pulled together, then she stood back and opened the door and walked right through. She was wearing this long skirt, all these flowers all over it, kind of tie-dye or rainbow. And this white shirt with no sleeves so her breasts peeked right out of the top. In front of her stomach her forearms were crossed over a green folder, one of those shiny ones that if you spill water on it it turns right into droplets.

Before the door closed she was standing at the counter in front of me, staring right at my face like she had no idea she was the only interesting person to walk in here in weeks, not to mention the only customer born in this century.

“Where can I make a copy,” just like that, no question mark or anything.
“A copy?” I was getting kind of flustered. This was a really out of the ordinary customer for Raymond’s, I mean really distractingly different.
“A lot of copies, actually.” She was looking at me with these pancake-sized eyes, beer bottle glass dark, and her head tilted to the side a little like a dog waiting for someone to throw a tennis ball. Her cheeks really could have been made of strawberry frosting, with her nose smack in the middle like the hard sugary flowers that come on cakes. I mean she really was a really good-looking girl.

“Um.” I crossed my arms over my chest. The day before I had lost a bet to Martin, something about hitting a light post with a soda can tab, so I had one of those stick-on tattoos on my forearm. This blue and purple dragon was breathing fire onto the crease of my elbow and when I straightened my arm the fire got bigger. So I had my arms crossed over my chest and was probably starting to sweat in my armpits and she was just standing there chewing on the inside of her lip. “Yeah,” I said after about five minutes. “You can use machine number three.”

“Terrific,” she said and turned from the counter, her folder squeezed tight against her stomach, and walked away, her hips bopping side to side with every step and her legs swishing her skirt around in a feathery sort of sound. Really sort of beautiful, but not like an advertisement kind you’d take out of a magazine to stick on your wall.

She got to the machine and tapped her finger on the screen like she was playing piano keys, and when the thing started flashing green she straightened up her shoulders and ran her thumbs under her skinny shirt straps, looking ready for something, about as if she were going to spring into some fancy dive into a pool.

I still had all these staplers sticking their tongues up at me and loads of stapler sticks in my hands but I was just watching her, and then I heard myself say “Did you get it?” but my voice got a little tangled so the “idyou” sounded fizzy and I don’t think she heard me.

She reached into her waistband and dragged her fingers along her hip for a second and out came a credit card, which she slid into the machine like she was icing a goddam cake, so smooth you could hardly hear it, not like the old fogies who come in and hack away at the thing trying to figure out which side to face up.

I guess I was just standing there sort of watching her not paying much attention until Carol yelled, “Caleb!” from the office way in the back of the store and her Q-tip head came careening around the door, her reading glasses just about flying off her cotton ball hair. “The te-le-phone!”

Really I hadn’t noticed it was even ringing until she said that and I answered so fast I just about
burst my eardrum slamming the thing against my head.

“Hello, Raymond’s Copy Shop, how can I help you?”

“How much will it cost me to print twenty color copies?”

“Two and a half cents for black and white, nine cents for color, ma’am.” I was tapping my fingers against the keyboard to make a little noise.

“So how much will it cost me for twenty color copies?”

“That’ll be twenty sheets multiplied by nine cents, ma’am.”

“So about how much for twenty color copies?”

I cleared my throat. “That’ll be about one hundred and eighty cents, ma’am.”

“Hm. Thank you,” and the line went dead. It occurred to me that it might have been a man.

I cleared my throat and set the receiver’s face down in its little bed and swiveled the cord, which swiveled right up back when I let go. Then I noticed I’d typed about a novel’s worth of home row onto the computer screen, asdfghjkl asdfghjkl asdfghjkl, so I held down the delete key and stood back from the computer and looked up into the shop, standing up on my toes.

She was standing at the table next to the machine, the green folder lying open on one corner of the pencil-colored tabletop, licking her thumb and separating about a thousand pieces of paper into different stacks across the whole surface, making this whole big checkerboard on the table. When all the papers had their own place, she reached back to each one with her palm and laid the flat of her hand exactly in the middle of each piece, crooking it a little right or a little left so it lined up perfectly parallel with the one next to it. She stood up high on her toes so the bottom of her shirt came above the edge of the table, and bent over so her shiny hair slipped all the way past her shoulder and swung in the air just a little before she tossed it back to her shoulder blade. When she’d made her way left to right and down every row, straightening the papers into perfect lines, she stood back and her face turned from one side to the other, her fingers tapping on the edge of the table, counting in her head, I figured. Then she started taking one paper at a time and crossing from the table to the copier like she was trying to learn to dance some step. She’d slide it through the machine, sucking it in and spitting it out, and take the new papers from the copier and hold them in two hands and tap their ends against the table and put a smart little slick of a staple in the top left corner. Then she’d put them back in their places in the checkerboard. Then she’d move to the next stack—step, suck, spit, stack, staple.

I opened the drawer under the keyboard and took out a plastic bag of rubber bands and put it next to the scanner.

This old man walked in the doors and wiped his little slipper shoes with fuzz around the ankles on the mat, even though it wasn’t raining or anything. He took off his baseball cap, which looked like it was made of jean material, and smoothed the hair over his ears with his fingers. He was a little hunched over, but not all that old, pretty healthy and strong-looking if you ask me, at least for a guy with no hair on top of his head. He gave me a nod and started walking toward the shelves next to the front window.

A bunch of red and blue and green spiral notebooks took up most of the main shelf next to the door, some of them with unicorns or leprechauns or whatnot on the front, and the man picked up a couple and looked inside the covers. He must have seen the girl, I mean she was the only other one in the shop at that point, and making a good deal of noise stacking her papers and stapling things all over the place. For a while he kept picking up notebooks and opening them and putting them back, then he moved over to the pencils and pens rack, and that’s when I knew he’d seen her because he started looking in her direction every time he picked up a plastic package and put it back on the rack. I slid the last of the staple sticks into the staplers and closed them up, snagging myself a couple times.

Sheets of paper were still flying out of her machine, the whole thing just coughing up piece after piece in a great rhythm and she moved back and forth from the table to the machine, her skirt making this tent shaped swishy thing, almost as big as the fluffy wedding dresses in the bride shop next door. Her hair webbed on top of her shoulders and she clicked her tongue with this little snapping noise every
time she tapped a stack of papers against the tabletop to line up the edges.

The man was standing with his hands at his sides still looking at the pencils. He cracked his knuckles into his palms and fingered a package of plastic pencils for a minute, then let it go and cracked his knuckles again. He looked to his left, down the aisle, and his eyes settled on the girl, walking from the copy machine to the table, licking her thumb and flipping through the thick stack of paper in her hands. I didn’t much like the way he looked at her, all sideways, with this little no-lipped smile.

For a second I put down the new staples, which I’d just been holding onto so they were sweat sticky. I wiped my hand across my blue Raymond’s collared shirt and I sort of wanted to go see if she was getting all her copies straightened out, or if she needed more paper clips or something. But she just kept watching all these papers come flying out of the machine, watching them like each one was a real live circus act or something, and carrying them in two hands from the machine to the table, like you’d carry a baby you didn’t want.

The man dropped the package of pencils and walked toward the calendar rack, which was in the center of the shop, the last rack of the merchandise section, closer to the girl’s table. He reached his knobby fingers up to the crazy white metal rotating rack and gave it a spin, his hand moving in the way you’d slap someone’s face. After a minute he walked to the copy side of the room and went up to the machine next to the girl’s. She was still arranging the papers and stacking and stapling and he just stood with his body facing the other machine but his head looking right at her, just right directly at her.

“You’ve kidnapped just about all the staples in this place,” he said to her with a smirkish sort of smile and she swung her head up and looked at him, like she was kind of shocked he was standing there.

She laughed a little and said, “I’m sure they have a lot more up at the front.”

“Yeah, yeah, they probably do.” He turned from the table next to her and started taking little steps over to her table, on the opposite side from where she was standing, smoothing his little hair sprouts with his fingers again, balancing his baseball cap on his fist so I thought he might all the sudden fling the hat away and out would come some goddamn beautiful dove. She kept looking down at her papers, sorting and ordering and stacking them.

He was resting his fingers on the edge of her table watching her hands then her face then her breasts then her hands and he said, “Got a lot of papers there, huh?”

She didn’t stop stacking and shuffling, but she smiled a little and said, “They’re just for my boss.”

He nodded and watched her butt as she walked back to the copy machine to grab more papers.

“Very nice, that’s very nice of you,” he said.

The stacks weren’t in perfect lines any more and she wasn’t trying to adjust them with her palms to make them spaced right. Her fingers looked sort of shaky when she licked her thumb and I was going to go ask her if she needed help or anything when he took a step back from the table and walked over to the calendar rack again, looking back over his shoulder and nodding every few steps.

She looked up a couple times, making sure he still wasn’t there anymore, and started to put some of the stapled paper stacks into her green folder.

I was just standing at the front counter the whole time probably looking pretty useless so I walked around to the other side and started to straighten the display racks next to the credit card swiper. Most of the postcards and bookmarks in them were pretty orderly already, so I went over to the first machine, machine number one, and wiped down the screen and opened and closed the lid to make sure it was still working right. I kind of kept glancing over at her every once in a while but I didn’t want to be too obvious about it so I kept my back turned to her for about as long as I could stand it and when I turned around finally the man was standing on the other side of her table again, holding his baseball cap against his chest like someone was about to sing the national anthem. He just stood there and looked at her. It was really getting to be kind of terrible.
Then he said, “Can I just stand over here for a minute with you?” and put his hat on top of one of her paper stacks and his palms against the edge of the table, leaning his hips into the back of his hands. “You’ve got everything so nice and organized.”

She looked down at the papers that were left and started to grab them in order, left to right, with two hands. She laughed a little. “I’m actually leaving in just a minute. I’m almost done.” She looked frantic almost, just about dropping all her nice stacks all over the floor.

Then he said, “Well, you’re very pretty.” His hands were all the way on the table and his hips were smashed up against the edge. She was shoving papers into the folder and it was getting so fat it couldn’t close and I started to walk toward them. I didn’t really know what I was going to do, but he just kept looking at her with these horrible little black eyes just about glued to her face and then he said again, “Very, very pretty.”

She looked at me right when I was just about at the table and I opened my mouth to say something but she turned back to the papers, smashing the last of them into her folder and grabbing her credit card between two fingers. Her forehead was starting to sweat.

“You don’t need to leave yet,” he said, putting his cap flat on the table, his lips sticking together with this awful dry spit sound. He was bending practically halfway over the goddamn table with all his old man arm skin bunching like old bed sheets by his crusty elbows and his chin sticking out so his neck skin looked like it might split right off his throat.

“I’m running late already,” she said from the copy machine, trying to press the right buttons to turn it off. He took a step toward the corner of the table.

“Sir,” I said all the sudden. I hadn’t known that I was going to say it. All at once she hit the right off button and the electronic voice said “goodbye” and she looked up at me with these huge eyes, like she was about to get smacked in the face, so beautiful and scared and sweating a little, and the man kept his eyes on her and I looked back and forth between them and then she turned and was gone out the door.

I felt sort of like the television had broken right before the movie ended.

“Can I help you find something?” I asked.

The man looked at me and put his hand to his hair tufts again. He shook his head a little and turned back to the calendar rack. The door chimes were still jangling. I watched her walk across the window again, with smaller steps than the first time. Then I went to the door and opened it and stepped onto the sidewalk and thought maybe I would try to yell for her. Or at least give her a smile if she turned around.

But she was gone. I was standing there in the sun, wiping my palms on my blue collared shirt. All these cars were sitting in the parking lot, heating up from the sun, and these birds were flying and landing on the roof of the store, and then I had the feeling that someone was sitting up on top of the telephone pole laughing at me.
PROCTOR CRUSHED

When I see you
I become very aware of my toes
straining against the fibers of my socks,
And just how much space in my mouth
My tongue takes up.

I observe deeply, intimately
The small rash developing
in the nook of my elbow,
And how I close my eyes when I smile.
It always looks terrible in pictures.

I subconsciously stroke my stomach,
Where my six-pack abs would be
if oatmeal cookies weren’t so chewy.

And the heaving beat of my breath fills the dining hall,
And you’re at the juice machine
And I’M going to the juice machine,
And for a fiery minute it seems our crossing stars will collide
And-

I drop my knife.
You’re gone by the time I recover.

Thank God.
I would have written my paper over break.

But Chinua Achebe died
And I had to read Things Fall Apart and
Leave tiny, reverent notes in the margins.
Crayon scribbles next to the Mona Lisa.

And then the girl I love called me
And I had to unleash a primal howl of anguish at the trees
Shivering crows out of the tortured branches
Before giving her thoughtful advice on
How to deftly navigate her long distance relationship.

And then there was a little girl crying
Outside the coffee shop where
I went to write the paper.
She’d fallen off her bike and lost her doll
In the same day.

And SHIT man, life is just hard sometimes.
Hi my name is Mike, and I am an alcoholic. I am 12 years old, born forty minutes north of Baltimore. Not far from the Hereford area. I’ve been living in the same coop ever since I pecked my way out of my cozy egg. My sweet little home for those twenty-eight glorious days. I’ve always kind of been a homebody. Anyway, I had the usual chickhood. Ate a lot of feed, drank a lot of water, ran around with my brothers and sisters. Nothing too unusual or exciting.

Four cows used to live in the barn next door. Now, it’s just a bunch of horses. Horses are such pretentious assholes. I don’t really hang around the barn much anymore. When I was young though, I used to mozy my way over there all the time. I’d listen to the cows gossip. Betsy had a mouth on her. She always had something to fucking say, absolutely non-stop. Those girls treated me well.

The farm dogs hung out in the barn a lot too. A great group through and through, loved dope too. Spot was the first animal I ever smoked weed with. He was something else, a real piece of work. He would bark at every vehicle that pulled onto the farm. Got ran over by the milkman five years ago. At least he died doing what he loved.

I started drinking when I was four. I’ll never forget the day. I watched the fox murder Lenny that day. Lenny was my second cousin, on my mom’s side, and my best friend. Poor Lenny never saw the fox coming. His blood and golden feathers were scattered across the yard for several days. We used to nestle in the mulch of the flower beds and talk for hours. He was a huge classic rock fan, like myself. CCR, the Stones, Buffalo Springfield, Cream, you name it.

Zeppelin was his favorite. He adored Jimmy Page, knew every word of every song by heart. Had a good voice too. A really good voice. During our flower bed sessions, he would belt out Black Dog, temporarily possessed by the spirit of Robert Plant. Happy as a goddamn stoned farm dog. The night Lenny died, I made my way over to the field where the goat’s hung out. They were all drinking. You want to see a group of living, breathing full-blown idiots? Go hang around some goats on a Wednesday night. I don’t really remember how or why I ended up there, just sort of drifted that way I guess. Regardless, they were getting hammered. Bryson was the ring leader. He was good looking, for a goat at least, and an unusually good athlete, natural leader of the herd. He tossed me a beer.

“Bad day. Drink up,” he said in his stupid goat voice as if that’s all there was too Lenny’s death. Goats really don’t give a fuck about anything or anyone. The one beer became many more, and to be honest it did help. I started hanging out with goats more and more at night. I’d sneak out of the coop late and come back still drunk early the next morning. Bryson and his crew boozed every night and were always game to share their beer. That’s how it all started, how my drinking problem started: drinking with the fucking goats the night after Lenny died.

I don’t drink with them anymore. Now I drink alone. I think I’m the only introverted chicken in the world. I can’t stand to be in the coop these days. Usually I walk down to the creek that winds through the south side of the farm. I take a twelve pack and my portable radio. I’ll listen to 100.7 or 102.7. I’ve been out of work for a few months now. It’s not like my life is out of hand or anything, but I’m sick of having to drink to go to bed. I’m sick of slumming around by the creek every night. The horses call me drunk Mike. They can all go to hell.

I’m here because I want to get married and have chicks. I’m in love with a brown hen named Sara, and I want her to take me seriously. She’s got luscious, blinding feathers and a hell of a body, nicest tail feathers on the farm. She gets me, or at least used to. We dated for a long time, but eventually she said she couldn’t take me coming back to the coop drunk anymore. She loves classic rock too and is a great dancer. If I can stop drinking, I know I can get her back. Classic bullshit story, I know, but whatever. Thank you. Again, I’m Mike, and I’m an alcoholic.
He washes hair with Head & Shoulders thick and full. Strange now smelling it at the bar while his coworkers roll a blunt. Them in their pizza-cooking clothes have mostly worked doubles – turned over too many tables today.

Underneath the bar we’re touching knees, and my hair’s got full of smoke. I’m rubbing fingers on dark wood.

They ash in plastic salad dressing containers, swallow free beers – Ananda tonight. They nod sweaty heads to Mac Demarco and in the kitchen towel down that flour, refill trays of grated cheese shakers, thumb sticky through tips.

I watch these oven burns on his arms, count them sprout up and fill red. Soon I will drive us home, I will put him in the shower and play Anastasia on the front room tv.

I hope at home those breadsticks from Sunday aren’t stale – I swallow my dry hops and spread elbows.

He reminds me of hiking boots, of that song Dramamine, of elephants who are good luck, who bury their dead and grow thin hair along skin-ridges he reminds me of the moon (where is someplace I’d like to make love) and teeth like ploughs that get dirt and things to widen up and deep.

I want to take us to the moon, who slips of craters and powder, who’d carry air enough for us at least once to be clocks to each other there, I know.

And then one heavier hand on my leg, but anyway I can feel him at the ends of my hair like always – and he asks for us a couple more beers, flicks his last cigarette from the filtered end, sticks it dry to bottom lip. I feel him concave, jut jaw, pulling on all that smoke – in Memphis, cigarettes make careful clocks.
SOUTH

Him ponytail, all that black hair pulled and ridges
in his collarbones – everything south.
And my legs pale with desk lamp, like fish in the bed.

He sleeps grinding teeth,
but they are sunk in good roots, webbed and tunnels, soft gum.
I push on the hard of his jaw – slides like sweat in my bendbones.

Most of me wants to call my mother, ask about the salt
in my head – see if it’s just come from rubbing walls like he says.
But I am getting heavy, and feel so much grit in my brain – am begun
to find trails where I never.

I want to ask if there is always lint like this – and if she ever watched
the small of any knees asleep, knew ribbed skin like a tire-swing.
I want did she ever find fish in the bed.

But I am growing like hoarding, having headaches biting bit-o-honey’s,
and digged bowls of body, somewhere for the spoon of my neck.
I want am I an all right kind of age.

I want to ask about everything south –
if humans make good nesting dolls, and yes can I home him underground,
and yes can I paint simple all the skin of our topsoil. Put thick mouths.

I only really want to know,
can fingers get stuck on anybody’s jaw,
or here can I have found a different kind of south.
PRELUDE TO THE END

I want to go fiercely,
chased by rolling white hooves
born underneath the starred night sky,
miles of empty land unfolding before me.
I want to live as though this may never end,
my breath melting into the air, permanent.
I want to feel my bones break
and break under the weight of aching,
irrevocable love,
I want to listen to the wind brushing the tree leaves
and hold that sound in my fingertips
until the moment still, gentle, it sieves
through my hands:
then do time’s talons tug under my skin
as the white hooves roll faster.
I may never be a mother, soon neither
will my own;
I must go fiercely—
far off in the empty land a dust storm
gathers the sands in great
gusts of wind, and here, now,
I must touch time with an aching heart
and say that I will be ready to depart sooner
than two days before yesterday,
but long after tonight.
The last starlight flickers
but I continue to seek a viciousness
I did not know I could be;
I push the sands high above my head
and tenderness, released, I attach
to the pieces of my life flying
up into the backdrop
of the sky—
THE WEB

   The spider streaks her silver mesh between the
wheelbarrow’s edge and the abutilon’s
soiled jar sitting on the
table’s left side,
a window whittled into the night sky;
   The potted plants below shiver as the sliver of the moon
becomes a blur amidst purple and blue,
   the spider stitching as she moves.
   Eight needles spinning through the dusky greenhouse
until she settles onto a back petal to sleep,
   her tangled portrait casting shadows onto the stars—
   A dragon-fly gently falls through the bends of nature’s art,
   its wings pulling back in the needlework.
It does not know it will be dead
   by dawn.
When I saw you in the bathroom,
wearing all black,
all you could say was
they didn’t find his body for three days.
And there’s nothing more,
than you and I meeting eyes
in the mirror above the sink,
nothing more than the wall
between your room and his.
The mirror should be fogging up,
with everything hanging in the air around us.
I want to take your hand
hold it against my heart,
to remind you what life feels like,
wrap your fingers in mine
to remind you that you can be held,
trace the lines on your palms
like when we were little
to promise you that the whole world
stretches out ahead of you.

I want to show you
where my skin has cracked
my hands dry and calloused
to remind you of the red and the flesh.
We are not fragile creatures.
We find life in mountains,
in driving fast,
in eyes in the mirror,
in stories about the ocean,
in holding hands, hard.

WILL

you kissed me on the roof last night
when you ran out of things to say
about God and the bridge that fell in Peru
two hundred years ago.
i had my hand on your leg
and we drank from the same bottle, long glass neck,
the street dark beneath us.
we leaned against each other
and i wanted to say
your hair looks dumb
so long like that.
and i wanted to say i'm sorry
because i don't want to hurt anyone
but i'd forgotten what it's like
to be on the brink of something like love
and it makes me nervous when
you swing your legs like that off the edge.
us, so high above the street.
for a moment
i thought the stars were falling.
the sky isn't usually so clear in january.
i wanted to say
i am a liar and i love to break and you will not save me.
but i am drunk from your shoulder
against mine.
to become numb,
to laugh when I pass you outside the library
and you avoid my eyes,
laughing when you kiss my neck
because laughing is easier than letting
out a sigh or letting
myself be touched
or letting you know how scared I am of the ocean
and the way that i can see it in your eyes.
I turn the lights out instead,
so I cannot see color,
just the curve of your shoulder, your jaw.
Easy, skin warm, dry,
hands intertwined like poison.
I didn't want everything to settle,
wanting crying in the car and slippery skin,
soap in your eyes and staying up late
to run into the sea,
bare midnight,
blisters and rain.
The darkness is uncomplicated,
touching thighs, touching backs,
no apologies, just bodies.
You will not notice the freckles on my collarbones,
I will try to forget the color of your eyes.
NOTEBOOK OF A RETURN TO THE NATIVE LAND (EXCERPT)

CHARACTERS:
1—Reminiscing Poet.
2—Dreaming Poet.
MAN—He had a family. He might still. Probably not.
WOMAN—The Man's therapist and/or ex-wife


SETTING: 3 Rooms. 1 in an empty room with a stool, a microphone stand, and a side table with two water bottles on it. 2 in an empty room with a podium. MAN and WOMAN in the living room/therapist office.

AT RISE: 1 puts the microphone in its place on the microphone stand and sits on the stool. Man stands next to couch. Woman sits in chair. 2 stands behind podium preparing a speech.

*note: words written in italics should be read aloud

1 Creep in the night. Shiftry Pokémon slide in the pocket.

MAN
In fourth grade, I stole a Pokémon card from this kid who lived across the street named Nick. I didn’t really care about the card. I just didn’t want him to have it, maybe?

1 Creep in the night. The raisins of her eyes bark back as her back bends. Arches.

MAN
Senior year of high school, I had sex with this girl who had these hateful, beady eyes, who hated me, and hated that she wanted to have sex with me, and hated that I wasn’t interested in the sex, but then had it anyway.

1 Creep in the night. Ripped fence, blasphemous pink ball hits the cross. Hits the crosses the street to see what I haven’t seen in months. He says there was debt.

MAN
Well, this is a lot to unpack.
(MAN gets settled on the couch)
There was this beaten-down church behind my friend’s boarded-up apartment. We’d slip past barbed wire and throw Spalding bouncy-balls at the cross. The building was converted into condominiums years later. Once a girlfriend told me she loved me, I ran into the middle of the street, right into on-coming traffic; I thought I saw somebody I knew on the other side. My uncle, well my mother’s brother’s wife’s sister’s husband... which I think still qualifies someone as an uncle, blew his head off with a shotgun when he was in debt to the New Jersey mafia.
(Beat)
Family, huh.
Creep in the night. Two kids google shower and giggle at naked girls in bathrooms.

MAN
I feel like that one is pretty self-explanatory.

Stool tips, head splits on corner of the wall. Creep in the night. Sixteen stitches.
Creep in the night. Spit on a Maserati. Maserati man makes me wait while others split. Head split.
They split after I spit on the car. I don’t know my address.

MAN
We’ve all made mistakes.

Take me home. Take closed casket because his head split too. But his head split in two. Two barrel. Twelve gauge. Split in two. Two daughters. Twelve and fourteen. New home because of a twelve gauge. And debt. He says there was debt. I was kidding when I said his head was two heads. I was kidding, I swear. Late-night. Stand up. I should be on late-night because these jokes are on point. His head rolls. Not with laughter. Dead-weight in the coffin. Separate component for his skull? Or did they pack it in with his fat husk. There was debt.

(Brief pause)

MAN
On the car ride home from the funeral—and I swear to god this is true—I made a joke to my family that he had probably committed suicide by blowing his head off or they would’ve had an open casket. My grandma started crying and said that was what had happened and that the “heart attack” was a lie. Sometimes when you know, you know.

Toss bread in the Swan Lake. Flimsy scented papers. The intake is a new make. New model.
Creep in the night. Slurred steps catch cracks in the sidewalk. Cool cats bop to the philharmonic.
Bottles of gin & tonic, first spliff of chronic. This summer carries. The tune is not just caught up in the fervor of BROOKLYN, but in the blissful crunch of the Nutcracker. Or the faithful pop of a gum-smacker.

MAN
Who hasn’t smoked weed to classical music? Have you?

WOMAN
I can’t say that I have. What else did you see?

In a chimney sweeps’ home, someone is dead
tired. His wife is dead
tired. Her baby is dead.
real dead, not dead tired.
I am on my last legs. My
last breath
of fresh air before descending into the ash
of a chimney. It is too much.
I must go home to my wife
before she is dead like the baby.
I hope she’s made roasted meat—
something heavy with ash, with
soot, like me or my baby in the vase.

MAN
I wasn’t sure what it meant.

1
My friends have never miscarried. Never miscarried me or a promise. I am not friends with
He bought it now. Blazer’s Pub. He has a wife now. Blazers’ Pub. No more time. Pub. No more

MAN
There was this terrible burger restaurant on the way back from pumpkin picking with my first son.
And my wife—who was carrying our second child—would play this stupid, tabletop, air hockey,
bowling game--I don’t even know how to describe it for you.

(Beat)

1
Heaven has not patience for the lost.

WOMAN
What went wrong?
(Beat)
Did she know what you are?

MAN
On the way to the supermarket, my car hit a stag. An eight-point buck. A stallion beast of the
wild... I know nothing of deer or animals, so don’t take this part as gospel. My Maggie—yes, still
goes by Maggie—was clocked in the face by the airbag. It’s not like I knew the deer/stag/?/buck?
was coming. It just sort of appeared, I guess... I didn’t mention this earlier, but I was stopping by
the grocery store near Maggie’s parents’ new country house because we were staying with them
for the weekend and wanted to stock up on meats and frozen waffles and other shit you need
to keep old people happy. And I look at the deer’s face. Let’s just call it a deer from now on...
It’s perfectly intact. OK, so I don’t know much about animals—or forest animals—but this one is
majestic. It has horns, twisting, with points. And the tongue, draping from the mouth, flat on frozen
asphalt road.
(Beat)
I need this deer. I try to pick it up. Maggie is conscious again at this point. She’s carrying on,
screaming from the car about blood and concussions and divorce. But the deer is patient with my
tired legs. I whisper that I am weak. In my trunk is a saw. My father-in-Law promised we’d cut down a
tree, told me to buy a bow saw. I’m happy I got to use it. The neck was thick, and the bone was hard...
to get through. Maggie was crying the whole time, said I went off the deep end going after this deer
head. She didn’t have the foresight I did. This deer would be the perfect gift. I didn’t get on well with her
parents. The head would change everything.

2
Just remember the simple human picture before you. This.