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The poems collected here follow the implications of death, fears of failure and the hard cliff of existential doubt using the backdrop of relationships and nature.
WATER, LEAVE ME AS SALT

by

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APPROVAL PAGE

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WHETHER I WOULD TURN AROUND

Day-worn, half-drunk,
Paddleboating into Alligator Harbor,
Torn fiberglass itches my left arm.
The tide works against
Me no matter which way I turn.
I make for the exact center

Of the harbor, legs groaning
The pedals, fat slick metal
Swirling the racket in water.
I try to wear myself out.
Returning home
I turn to see how far I’ve come,

Flashes of light agitate the water,
Bioluminescence throbbing with
The low pump of the paddlewheel.
Rich blue thrumming
Then sinking, sudden
For its silence. I am reminded

Of galaxies colliding lightyears away
Filtered and enhanced through telescopes,
Like rare glass breaking.

The light is jigsaw, beyond the water
Sounds are far off, the tide slows down.
I cannot mark the violence between body and dark

Where one heat rubs another,
Or how far the tide would drag me,
How heavy is its deepening,
Whether it would let me go
And head homeward,
Or whether I would turn around the boat.
AUTUMN READYING IN FIVE PARTS

I.

Wet wood finally burns down,
Smoke, aromatic now, sifts
To the dimming tree tops. I hope
To see a bat or a late bird
Tire across the aluminum sky,
Observe a small fire oranging
As a returning hawk would—
The bowl of bushes around my clearing,
The warning blare in the updraft
That bellies up, as if danger and destruction
Were my only fixation.
Here warmth has an interior and
Altitude has only effort.
II.

DIRTY FISH POND I DISCOVERED IN MY BACKYARD

Spiderwork of a discarded trampoline frame
Half submerged I pull it leg by leg out
Clearing steel from the aperture
While up from ambiguous green
A bright orange goldfish, then two, then more blimp,
The pond small, urgent.
III.

AFTER DISCOVERING A NEW SECTION OF MY YARD

To smoke out the termites
I find in the forgotten woodpile
I set to quick burn the wood,
Smoke a buzz then a swell.
The termites in their pulp
Shuffle through warming
Cards of woodgrain,
Huffing cells reeking
Of cold nights while,
Wet popping, the fire slowly grows.
I count the logs left
Letting the fire dwindle down.
IV.

TO WHAT MAY HAVE ONCE BEEN A POSSUM ON THE WAY HOME

A brown sleight of fur
Looking like a plastered mob of
Finding a way to a warm den,
Or softening tufts
Of red shock and oily rest.
So dependent this obtuse roll of curb,
This dubious edge of grass safe green
Gibe all earthly sweet,
Like roots gone wrong
Into a sewer, or the base
Stink of efforts to cross the circus.
Bone and meal swamping
This idiot adrenaline dwindling, oxygen
Dense in the corners and burping
A blue dome above.
V.

MY FIRST NORTH CAROLINA AUTUMN STORM

The dogs air-raid the rainy night
Then fungal their movements slow when I call
Into the dark. I cannot tell if it is their return
I hear or animal-breath wind wheedling
Top down from the trees.
Voice is violence
And the rain baits the trees.
I wonder if the storm were not to return
If I became feral out here,
Who would be the roar in the hunter’s blood?
THE IMPOSSIBLE

There was a merry-go-round in the neighborhood park
Where my mother grew up, Johnson City, New York,
   The park was bigger then,

The field not so far from the playground
To the pavilion, the number of trees was greater then
   But the carousel was grand,

The deep rows all a horde of wood,
Brass a rich lacquer waiting for warmth,
   Pine and oak too bold to be glib.

The boom each wood horse made in circuit
So heavy I wanted to fill it with myself, wanted to carry it
   Lagging around the interior of the pavilion with indigo thrum.

It was late, time for only one ride, so I had better make it good.
They were all horses, I know, but I walked halfway around
   Until I had found the correct horse.

The whole edifice cranked with the start of the motor
While there was a pause before the horses began to move.
   That horse could have gone faster, could have built more strength,

But I clung to the brass, not trusting its smoothness.
The horse strumming so low it could have thrown me,
   Somewhere I had learned to tighten my knees,

Squeeze into a knot with my whole body,
Even if the spinning was firm at the center
   I had not yet the ache to fly apart,

Then I did not think of needing grease
Where the machine seemed slowest, of the stories imported to
   Fix the well-handled lumber or growing beyond the need to choose.
It did not do to look too close at the art,
Revitalized color of a later repainting
    Like practiced words learned in an older mouth,
    Like my riding of it then was small.
WHEN SLEEP COMES SLOW

I remain outside our house counting
The dark flanks of clouds bellying across
The sky like horses in the nighttime pasture
I spent camping with friends.
I went beyond the horse pasture fence once,
Stood where the sky seemed biggest,
Waited for a presence larger than mine to huddle in,
Horses, un-nickering, with their hot-breath arrival.
I pushed against that firm horseflesh,
Moved them not with my strength
Until the whole herd turned and,
As if one motion, disappeared.
HAVING TAKEN ALL DAY REACHING THE SUMMIT I CONSIDER THE WAYS DOWN

I thieve in these brown needles
On the bulb of granite cliff-face
Stomached up from the gun of the long valley
I walked up; this late summer day
Is thickening like old turpentine.
I feel the boiled sediments in my muscles,
Can smell the purpling esters that woods
Release as answer in dark soil:
I am drunk in the body-gully,
The pines have brewed their alcohol in me,
I am no longer salient,
All the green I can speak
Turns useless at the end of the day:
The violet rush will disperse
Electric and invariable.
The mosaic schism that makes a day
Has begun collecting, lagging—
The cartridge of the land rolls sourceward
While I taste of spent metal,
Search-rough and instable,
The somewhere deepening delta
Cuts through my barrel-jut return.
Beyond the further ridge are
Dim pines and stones enough,
Below me is the path back,
The body-valley haste through the low ground.
Sometime before the east a cooking fire burns.
SEVEN MONTHS AFTERWARD, THE WEEK BEFORE I MOVED

The backyard has become too hot,
To the side of the house the figs ripen,
Flaked terracotta scent wets the ultraviolet;
This Florida day has become one prolonged temper.
I wait for the afternoon storm to come, to pass,
While just beneath the lead-banked bellow
Of a Gulf cloud a seagull shrills further
Inland, a tree frog croaks a late warning
Of bodies seeking the end of their heat,
The first cool breeze loosens
A pine branch, crackles down through the trees;
So still I can sense the thunder even before it passes.
I should have found more ways to not fail you.
I’VE TRIED EVERYTHING BUT THE DRUGS WON’T PUT ME TO SLEEP

The drunken ones uncage.
   Spines cut into turnstiles the in and out in and out wear of
   Animal and human laws echoing circadian hollow have become boring.
The strategy escape of crow-wing mornings,

   The tar needs of motives has lost its easy pleasure,
I need to stop with the late-night conversations;
   I’m filled enough with wanting
Like the feathers flowing out of the gutter pipe

   From the dead bird I could not reach
With the rake from the ladder,
   Its unfinished smell venting into the bedroom because
The roof was not the hard-heart horizon because

   The sky would only make itself known
As phosphine in the eye
   While the ceiling sheetrock dusts the bedcovers,
Sinks in post-coital retrograde.

   I wish I could say there was more to memory,
More than bodies shoving for more than a time
   Behind the oyster dive bar on a pile of shells before they are made chalk
Or a too cold too dry couch, a discussion

   Where were we when or some dumb why gone too
Long, how to summer through it all,
   That any day now,
That the AC is an argument,
Inconsequential as the dent I beat in my car door on

Some point I cannot remember,
   The sober spring of clearing a yard or recovering from the beach,
*Don’t settle, don’t settle.*

Addition is a soft cloth, almost, without a hole

Without filling up clever or necessary
   When I needed a walk to the park
To sober enough for the drive home, to lessen enough

For the next logical step in this conversation for

What we can say for answers
   In the uncut grass that seems to end every night
And every goddamn momentum

Oh shut up about the parties missed,

Should have talked, should have said more than could,
   Frankly split open the beer can tab need of street-corner
Stopping like a murder of fluttering organs

All clamoring next in hot saunter:

2 a.m.: Garbled like an east of trammed crows.
   Tomorrow will be no different,
Thief for the pleasure and the practice,

The taste of too late beer,

After-thirst quitting outbound like gut projectile,
   Like I will give for being.
Hope was a noun before it ever became a verb.
PLAYING TAG IN THE FIELD BEHIND THE HOUSE IN WHICH I GREW UP

Staccato with insect dare,
Angles shrill to sudden game those muggy
Mosquito-swatting, soggy-ankle nights,
We were all carapace,
A crisis aimed past each other.
We knew each split-boned sound

No shadow stretched longer,
Ribbed in the magnetics of our oh-so-then.
We were fireproof,
In our late-rain grass-blade volume.
All hot limbs roundabout and cinematic.
Too soon we played to win,

Exposed in that parliament of neighborhood
Clued by fences we didn’t own,
Ours against the suburban expiration,
All lead in the blood and the brain
We, through sheer will, kept from logging.
It was a time when consensus was an emergency.
No parting should be without meaning.
Raccoons

When, in early night, while the dogs are out
I am sure they hear or smell a raccoon,
Probably a band of them, because
Both dogs stop and look out into the
Trees behind the house, their silhouettes long
Between the smooth-lit grass and feral trees.
I detect mushroom growth underneath the deck.

I follow the dogs inside, leaving behind the raccoons
For raccoons have too much of damnation.
They remind me of the odor of pent rain,
How they begin in low, dark corners,
As trundling clouds do, ponderous at night,
Clouds like a pregnant bitch seeking
To whelp in low bushes then abscond

Bumping and dragging her pups behind her,
Leaving bloody membranes
With ragged tallies of milk
On which the raccoons will cast as if
Those pink strikes were accounts of the stars
Pinpricking in the bloat of their eyes.
I have heard their voices: moist

Vowels a dull trowel in mud,
Teeth snipping consonants off damp tree bark,
The woody ritual of lumpy snarls,
Their whinnies are the pale coal of galaxies,
They purr like stray cats,
A sound cinched and without compunction.
But they remain.

In the soft palette hours before dawn
I will wake up with a dog on the bed
Whining and barking in his sleep.
I will stand naked before the window
Staring down the street, yellow light on one side,
Trees on the other,
Looking out beyond
The smudged glow of the electric drag
I will know there is no close,
No stitch holding salvation in
That we are stuck in our fine-grained orbits
And that the hanging dark-sides of the earth
Will never recover from the horizon.
We cannot return.

The raccoons will come up beneath my window
And see me, nothing in common with the trees
That hold the sky away from them.
They’ll watch until the dogs wake and shoo them away.
The raccoons will depart
To the muzzle of the predawn—

And when they die the dogs will seek them
Out under their trees, drag them out
To roll the falling fur off
And come panting triumphant
With stocky bravado to wait, bearded in vaticide,
For their bath.
I would see you there, calm complexion,
Like the morning when we walked
The still-cold beach.
You strode into the water,
The pink light cut the dark
Creases of your wet dress
And, as if to surpass the ritual,
You bent to scoop the sun into a shell,
Polished the light in the shallows
While the ocean broke and settled,
Sinking your feet into the sand below the waterline.
There was a time I could wash ache
Out of my hair like sea salt.

Some nights I stand alone outside weighing down
The constellations by naming them,
Counting beyond my ability,
And if I could I would unbelieve God,
Crack the reliquary of the stars
To release us both from the weight of our gumption.
You will come out and find me then,
Lead me back indoors and undress me
Before falling asleep.
And in the quiet I sink low and clatter.

If only I could capture your yearning, bottle gravity
The way children catch insects
When late sunsets drop like sweat onto lips,
If only all days could end in silence and fire.
WHAT A HAWK IS TO THE GROUND

In the neighbor’s little-used batting cage
A red-tailed hawk struggles in the netting,
Lichen-celled hunker all wings and weltering fear

Only not fear but a determined grouching.
I walk to the fence, watch its wings batter
Tighter and tighter in nylon

Each cycle of muscle stretches the net
Almost to breaking. The hawk
Knows I am here, though far,

Resting only to more frantically resume.
The neighbors are gone, though only for a short time,
And the night animals will eat the hawk

So I climb the fence,
Make the long way around
To determine if it needs my help.

Before it realizes my approach
I can tell its leg is caught,
Not a vital body part perhaps though

The leg has no interest in being left.
Standing feet away I realize
The only way the hawk will

Be freed is if I do it.
But I do not want to.

It stands at an improbable angle,
Feathers smoothing down,
Net limp while it watches me at my creeping.
I stop, telling myself that to scare it will
Break its bones, hand over to me claws and beak
To seek my taming.

But its eyes, its neck and back are paused:
I cannot tell where its wings and posture meet,
I cannot tell which of us is idle.

I tell it what I must do but it has no
Fury, no urgent concern, not even a glance—
To acknowledge me would be to become itself tamed

A change comes over it all at once, as if the decision
Had only to be waited on.
It flies off, I watch its feathers turn into old iron in the sky

But the net is limp and tangled behind it.
I walk to the net, there is an object dangling,
As inessential as my presence there:
The hawk’s leg hanging.
WISHING I HAD A SHORTER REFRACTORY PERIOD

Turning. Bed creaked.
I blued. She closed. Kept.
Interior averted. Letting.
Pick up speed. Blow
Sound. Pace upends.
Her mound. Mine. Spending
Verbs for a time. Peace tightens. Our tongues
Curling. Squeezed and bent.
Resulting same. Name the quit. Hers. Mine.
Quiet sin.
Room uncoloring.
Worn touch sweat. Her back. Absent.
We won’t. We bait. Waiting
Insaned out. Motion made solid. Carved peaks.
Voices coppering.
Fan on high. Light turned urgent.
Door hinge other.
Croaking open.
Speech through a snail’s shell.
Cornering within within within.
We’re sleepless. Again
Without liquid contact to fit the lowered spaces.
All those positions cut irregular.
We sprawl.
Contours open.
Space pooling. Now cooling.
I REMEMBER THAT OWL

I.

Brown and gray rush,
Cool in the dark hunkering
Before a wider curve
Took her low beyond the high grass.
I could smell her hunting.
Then, I did not need to turn
My head to see the owl’s trajectory,
The way she landed louder than she flew,
I did not need to know whether
She caught her prey
To perceive the between-ness
Of summer and autumn,
Even if I remember the angle and
How withdrawing from the wet grass
Was more than seeking
A place to dry my feet.
Later I would stay inside during
Thunderstorms, in awe of the height
The trees had above my house
And when the fold of dirty clothes worn
Days on end, the bareness of arms and excuses
To spend outside, was life patterned
And a borrowed mob.
I remember the owl’s appearance,
Impossible as it flared away.
II.

She sounds like the rainfall,
She moves like the rainfall,
Like so much taste in chill,
Like the day after the first snow melts.

I want to be smoothed
By the flow, bullied open
By its long care,
Like all the seasons rupturing
At once to their edges.
I wish I could still feel the cramps
From being static or the hot-backed flutter
Of lightning coming from the south.

III.

That was when witness turned predator:
The monochrome explosion of feathers over time and
The patterns of entering or leaving a mudroom
Slick with soil, like the screeching close of the backdoor.
And all the ways back inside.
I recall the many night birds I’ve heard,
Or how little time was spent accounting for
Hungover hours.
The storm-fact summer-limbed momentum
Of the wrong owl
Was more like wings spilling over, too much
Action in the short shallow bowl of myself—
That is the difference in what I’ve become.
How silent was that first owl then in that field,
How its passage made
The field less flat, less bunched.
I THOUGHT I’D ASK

The sun will set soon
And the whipped pig clouds
Run toward their dark barn.

It is comfortable here by the ocean
Where the coming crabs
Will soon eat the last of the light,

So why not stay here in this pocket of sand
By the gut squeeze of the sea litter?
It is warm, and full

And somewhat obscene
But I assure you that time here will
Retain its wet claw grit.

Shall we uncork
All this nonsense
Of sounds and suns and waves,

Admit wine cannot fill the stomach
Even at dusk? That we are all salt affixed?
Forget the glass arithmetic that led us here,

It will soon look as ordinary as ocean.
I think we are meant to trust
The artistry of it all,

To give ourselves to crystal and gloating.
But I cannot trust the series.
Watch the gull, it goes home

Out toward the whaling horizon,
The water is its own low ground.
Pretend there are names here,
Pretend you and I survive the debt intact,
That beyond the edge there is never madness
Nor the need to release

From life undiminished,
Somewhere past all of this
The birds, the sea and the sand all

Oblige a single point. But
You and I are stuck with
The remaining indulgence, stranded with

This weird and stretched beauty,
And remember that, too often,
Escaped heat does not settle back

Into the place it came from,
That an instance of light does not always
Hold at its origin.
Having made the choice
Between absence and the bowl of oranges
On the kitchen table I swear I am doing fine,
Sitting around the built-in seats
Discussing responsibilities
Without theft between the oddly exactly set dining set

And what I can move on from this table
With the need to get out the door
With something of the intact tools of conversation.
Looking out the window here is not
The pause we look for, the dining set clanks
Too familiarly and the chairs never set flush with the table.

In the backwards nature of memory I can recall being
Somewhat slower to cool,
Having chosen the long way because it was scenic
But going fast through it because
I am continue to pass the signage for home-going
In the detour of the empirical hereafter.

I recall being long and fat with the happy end,
With the scripted clowder of urges that we had so anatomical,
The loose hammock between the trees or in the field
Where we tried to fuck in the sloe-eyed circle-pressed grass,
That bodies persists now in bed
Excepting, of course,

Sleep into the husky back of her head
Is not easier.
All I remember is her green friction voice,
The sticky concourse between the two easiest
Portions of language and sexy monosyllables,
I have learned to vary the bone structure while standing motionless.
Having made myself a man, as much as I can,
Having separated self from that akimbo jungle
The waterlogged serrations that soften and graft
The buttered meats.
I guess I can say I am fine with
The frying coitus of our sparking ends

Deadening a few hours
Or that arguments low to stillness in their own water,
That I in some way in somehow
Without arcing,
For having such unintended plateau,
Have gotten lost.
WHAT IT TAKES TO DRIVE HOME THROUGH A FLORIDA SUMMER STORM

She points out a dolphin to me,
Says she wants to be reborn as a dolphin,
I say, “I don’t believe in reincarnation,
Or at least don’t want to believe in it.”
I can tell that she sees my being a killjoy to be tiring—
That home should be a water resting and a pressure
And every day should be a sunset over the ocean.
But every act is in progress in the retelling.
Surely as storm we end,
Must make ourselves so much more
Than a moment caught over runny meat.
“Looks like we may have to drive through that,”
She decides like a sound coming long over marshes.
The sun’s radiation is soaking into the water
Lighting the silt in angles of brown and yellow,
Like fire through thick glass.
Fish explode below, nipping at our dead skin.
Every so often what I think is thunder interjects
Our chitchat just enough to give us pause,
The ocean does not quite fill the horizon.
I have started to think of the length of the drive home,
How storms never come back out to sea
But stay inland and grow weak over us,
How I, too, will return to salt.
FEWER DAYS BEFORE SUMMER WINES

That her skin, that her hips, that her breasts
Were overflow over everything:
She is the milk that made the world—
I want her milk into my skin.
If I could eat sunshine off her,
Wash in her glistening,
If only I could claim her inside,
But I am all outsides—
The friction heat of fleshiness and
Ecstasy of mud and stones that time against the wall.
If only only were all I needed,
Once, if only, to womb in we and contain.
I expect any day now but I want neither of us to siphon:
Give me, give me, oh just give me:
She is honey before the bee.
She is the round in the growing.
She is the bottom of a bearing rich to turn, its harmony, its bellow.
She is the opened dark in the hill, the glow that offers,
The collision of colors’ fluid rioting life,
The interior that makes the seed wet.
I want a hut on a long-washed shore.
The hibernating rocks,
The sand squelching under cramped feet.
I’ll take some place on an old ocean edge
Or like seaweed caught in a fjord’s teeth,
In a place grated by a seabed’s sneeze.
I want a place before noise,
Before passion,
Before witness snuck out with solitude.
I want to wash in an iceberg’s skim,
To live by tidal trophies
Bound up on silt-sucked banks.
I wish to pause in a calendar of rough-faced stone
Where there are no seabirds except offshore,
Their cries arriving
On the breakers between the rain.
I will choose a home
With a roof stuck in a sea-cliff mouth,
I want some place on a turned-ankle peninsula
Where hours will come in like dogs sniffing at dead things,
Where moments will clatter out of
Crab holes deep in sea mines,
But not in mind,
A place where amnesia draws in
With asthma in its return.
Give me haven where coast comes on itself,
And idylls spring in pockmarked coquina.
Give me a place beyond the mercy of an end,
Beyond the redemption of a beginning,
Where sand will comb my hair,
Where salt shall wash my feet.
BEING THAT CREEP IN THE FIELD

Was eerie, waiting like wanting to be in a meadow
When in fact it was in an unclaimed yard behind a tennis court
Where any passing witness could see it was sex,
Or the desire for sex or the desire for sex and humid iron rolling around inside.
Of thinking a place in a time is alone, is a strength and an isolation,
That waiting until it was dark and free was nothing like
Being globed and vital, only
A curmudgeon between the enterprises of trees
And tall grass and mud or soon to be mud.
Come here like a newness recently roughed up,
Like being damp from the knees down kept me lower, secure
Before all the shitty decisions to get drunk here or stay sober with them,
Should have said, “Bodies are the first source of absence,”
Should have mentioned, “I do not do well in the presence of others,”
Or, “There is no conclusion in waging a self,”
Should have said something when you saw me.
Just like staying in place, walking away should not have been easy.
THE FINAL TIME WE DRANK TOGETHER

We are here together now,
Pour some more so we can start
A new area of discussion
Or similar to new.

Let us give thanks, my friend,
Here, with our drinks
We can recite the differences
Of what I have chosen
And what you chose,
Commune what is swollen

And what is emptied,
In hubbub and intimacy,
In hanging around a useless fireplace,
And broken glass in trees
And broken drywall that
Dusts like a trailing conversation,
The towing conversion
Into something we want to be.

Another glass, my friend, another glass.
Let us wool over the ringing in our ears,
I cannot stand the ringing,
The red iron gush
Like standing too quickly
Or not reacting soon enough,
Shaking head to nag violently out the
Sobering stones we hear together.

While we’re at it
We can dip our hair in our drinks
And with cranial jerk
Shake our images against the splatter-hued walls.
Open another bottle, another bottle,
I wish my fill, to be overtop and scammed,
There’s no time for the empty ones.

Another hour with me, here together now,
For sleep will come to us later
Later than the later for one of us.
Change the conversation now that we can.
Tell the time again, tell it with no handsomeness,
No ugliness while there remains
Chill in our bottles, easy heat we can still discuss.
We still can.
Pass around without being
The sick at the end of dizzy.
Together we are here without organs,
Without the wet heavy inside.

My friend, a toast or two,
Before the dawn
A shot, my friend, a shot for tomorrow
And one again when it is here,
Here we are, my friend,

To finish the fridge,
One for me and one for you, one more
There must be at least one more—
It is too soon to be finished,
My friend, too soon to be only here.

My friend, let us piss outside,
We’ll get some air,
We’ll pee our names on the trees,
Side by side, we’ll make them ours,
My friend, we must make something ours.
We don’t have to go back inside,
Let’s not go back inside,
Let us talk a bit longer
My friend, just a point to make or two,
My friend, not yet,
It is not yet time for you to go.
My friend, I know you must
But until then, until it is too late
Let us lie here together in the grass,
Pretend we can see the Milky Way,
Pretend endless galaxies will exactly pinpoint
This small spot until a hard stop colds us done,
And wait it all out, my friend,
And wait it all out.
AFTER ALMOST CHOOSING THE SCENIC ROUTE

Dark highway to Greensboro
Buzzing apocryphal, orange-blip salvo
Pylons, concrete barricades droning
Neat, the busy radio-drag
Soft-shouldered and sentential. Home
Short circuits in the road,
This onward scrolling has turned
Pelvic between the hills,
The redshifted dispute voices
Up through the chassis.
A dialogue careens out
Taillight quick, the oncoming
Blaze incandescent and asphalt flat.
WHEN I THINK OF ALL THE HORROR IT WOULD BE TO BE AN ASTRONOMER, THE EARLIER ONES

Who wrote arcs of stories and names like nearly flattened iron or the tin and copper of hips and war tools and gods and men made gods and the sophomore weary of being not the earliest generation of stargazers and knowing that stars do not follow monogamous paths, knowing that they are prickly, if not quiet, mentors because they all have the rabid inclusion of death and hot blood, their passage being as bright as metal breaking without quite knowing yet that that shocking kerfuffle is where metal and being solid on a place with air to breathe is from.

It must be awful, having the first language to describe that stars are only bland light above, only a light like a broken ladder with one leg and a few rungs falling through the dark hole the earth must have fallen through. Mystery was always an easy way out and then there were whole kingdoms of those who relied on it, and paid the bills on it and would make me govern them (in the gentlest way) by it while I knew that to do this I’d have to stare breakingly at the lens of the night sky until words like “beauty” and “the heavens” became an indistinguishable dull mass. I would want to climb into the cool orbit of the light and the dark, to grind down my origin in all that veteran passage in all that silver myth.

Maybe after years of remaining awake all night and finding light at the edges, like a tongue-rolling patina that no matter how much I spit out will not keep fussing its way back in, I would come to
believe that I am touching a continuum as real as I am on earth, that each star’s explosion is motion connected, the framework of the trip-trapping world. Perhaps, like patchwork irregularly

stitched, the changing sky is a pocket open on one side and somewhere in the white moron sky of the day is something either all light or all dark, or maybe not either all light or all dark but

something exactly center to every delineation that could be called the “Deep Center,” and I am a measure to it.

But to have been an astronomer that early it would have occurred to me that if the patterns decay and stars fail, even if beautifully, and that if epiphany comes around with irregular witness that will

Be later than others and later options. The problem is I would never know how “early” I was to those who would be after, that looking into something beyond the limits of focus is the meaning of being stuck in the

orphanage of the middle of nothing meaningful. Maybe the night’s sky is supposed to connect and become solid, stars are meant to die, not alone but simultaneously and the only thing keeping them apart is the tricky grease of our ignorance.

Being one of those earlier astronomers would have been terrible, being enough past the tip of mystery but without the concrete of certainty to weigh me safe. To be there during then when the

astonishing was only a perception smaller, to know, as if by vague foregrounding like a shadow of a mountain (but not an actual mountain) that Will and Force were doomed to lose their

constellation, a curse that the true line that light takes is never quite perpendicular to the point I stand and all the means to reach and absorb all the history of heat and isolation were equidistant to the deep center.
CONCERNING DAYBREAK AND OTHER DESIRES

The morning smells like a cold nail,
Walking through the drying fog
The air tastes like old bedside water.
Away from the campsite

I could almost say I am alone.
Bracken crumbles as I move through the undergrowth,
The grass between the trees is a fluid of green.
A red-tailed hawk interrupts the sky,

A woodpecker echoes wide and final.
The squirrels will play in violence
But now their movements are serious, all in angles.
It is fresh clay making this morning cooler,

That makes me walk with an awake indifference.
The pauses of the natural rhythms
Alternates my walking as loud and normal.
Maybe it is a little early for me

Or it is the pale sharpness of morning light
But the light is a drawn circle on the ground,
A cleanness a sawblade could carefully
Key its teeth through. I cannot see the sky from this spot

But I could almost think this circle
Is the castoff of a large body lumbering through a larger hub,
If I didn’t know better I would see dimension to the light,
Would believe I had found the place where walking ends,

A plug in the earth’s mantle—
An invitation to fall through—
A chance to drain out of the world—
As someone with an entirety—
To turn my body into velocity
To want to start everyday with promise.
I need to hear a voice recalling me
Before the perfect shape turns real.

When the sun rises above the trees
And the earth has only its chalk
That’s when I’ll know,
My return echoing down the forest
In yellow glow.
I WILL NOT LET YOU BE A CURSE

When my son asks
I will tell him nothing about
The cold metallic heavy,
The hard slug iron of the cranial seed
And the blood-spoken burst.

I will not tell him
Of absent caskets and cleaning crews,
The letter I will never read,
The insomniac debate that won’t settle
Or why you should now be red and I still love green.

He will not know of how I held him
When I learned.
I will not let him know of how rarely
You and I shared a sober moment that last year
Or of all that unloaded indifference
In the steel-barreled nights that carved and wasted us.
I cannot tell him when it all grew silent.

When my son asks
I will not say that you taught me this.
I will only tell him your name,
About those early discussions
Well into the night
And that reversing words isn’t a beginning.
When he asks I will tell him
About how drab death is now,
How absent it is,
How full of error.
NOVEMBER, LATE AFTERNOON

I hear hinge-creaking North Carolina winter
In the trees as I walk home,
The softening bark of my palms,
Sting in my nose,
Old-tool sunlight slanting,
I taste wood-fire,
I want to turn my lungs outside my body.

Told to rake leaves as a boy
I would try for neat lines
And one perfect mound,
Comb over the ground
Until the rake could not
Scrape out the last leaves,
And in that mass I could
Calendar precisely my
Burning muscles, smell the
Careful heat gathering bodily in
The leaf mound even after I’d finished with it.

There was a fire to the pile, a smoke in the labor,
A need to build around the nucleus,
To stop when only half-torn out
Grass surrounds the mass.
Even after I had finished I wanted to
Know the center leaf, the mute
Tine jamming the heap.
I was energy between those leaves,
And would have had the gumption to undo
All that came afterward
If only my tools were the right ones.
I should have kept that pile intact forever.
Coming across such a mound today
I stop quietly at its edge,
Pick up a leaf,
Place it in my mouth,
Crunch it three slow times,
And swallow.
I, TOO, FOLLOW THE WAY OUT TO SEA

Skin is its own estuary,
Flattening, compounded.

The curve of your upper arm
Is the belly of a canoe.

Course by course,
River by river,

Lead me out to sea,
Leave me as salt

Dropping out of solution,
The heavier of two waters

Caught below the denser boundary.
There to be less than bounty,

Less than the kinder, inventive soils
Beneath the bellying ache.