

A MAN'S FACE IN THE SKY INSTEAD OF THE SUN

By

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ABSTRACT

This is Daniel Rolf's thesis. It consists of short, interrelated fictions that work together as a whole.

Just lie back, God. Let me do this.

To my real son,

This is a book. Books are long, or at least several put together can be. I do not know what this one will be, but it's for you. It's about me. It has to be or it wouldn't be true. I do not know you. Not that I feel I do not know you. You are what you are to me. You have flesh and clothes when I think of you. I watched you grow. It feels true. But the lie of it always has an arm over my shoulders in fellowship.

When I was a child I heard an uncle tell my third dad in a moving pickup he wished he had done some things different. My dad said: "Yeah". That is what I feel when I think of you. I feel the agreement of two good men being strangled earnestly in time with an engine and tires over gravel. The world is a powerful place. It overpowers. You can't turn it back. It can be so mean.

It can be so mean, but it hasn't been to me. Each moment for me is better than the last. The land is wide, rivers run with pop, clouds boil in the distance. When each moment ends I feel a sad pain, but also a hope that lifts my chin.

When I can't fight sleep any longer I feel such loss and fall backward into a cylinder made of voices screaming my name. When the voices cease you are always there sitting on a good hill feeling the totality of the wide view around you. I would take an ax into a school to be there with you, you raining hate on me for the ways I had to raise you right.

The sky is always right when in a wide view, no matter the animals and faces you see up there.

Sometimes I wish just once I could take a fist. But I am always too quick. Then I always punch in the worst places and never stop until I insert a forefinger and thumb into an eye-socket to pull out the ball for keeps. But I have never been at fault. How about you?

Me, me, my, mine. I keep my body clean. I am always good for a hello when I see someone silent. My mom didn't bring me up alone much, but when she did she fed me strips meat, taught me how to hold a metal bat and grab a crotch full of nuts in defiance. She told me if I pulled out someone's eye they would never forget me.

But there were so many others saying so many other things: a white sycamore, a dark sky, a black babysitter, grandparents until, a Murder She Wrote, a gay roommate on TV, all types of breaths from

mouths, men, men in our house, new dads, rat fuckers, bleak bitches, solid ones, real tender on the inside.

I tried to keep my mom and me alone, but my mom needed what we all need and she never stopped reaching out for certain hands that never stopped reaching out. There were some bad hands, so I tore them apart, separated the digits so that the bones hung in bags of skin. But, God, there were some good hands. I tore at the good hands, did what I could, until I was watching one grip a football, a butter knife, my hand with love. They wore the scars I gave them. These hands were always gentle with me. It was the mouths that went swinging for my shins. They all had these teeth. These mouths were almost real dads to me. They formed the mouth I have now.

My mouth is so beautiful and what comes from it. So many mouths are in it. It fills men with brotherly fear. It makes ladies scream. I never took an eye from those dads, but there is one of their eyes I have always wanted to see between a forefinger and thumb, but that dad is dead. But I want all wants met everywhere. I used to pray. I would bury a bird alive if it meant I didn't have to sleep.

Clouds

God sprays saltines from His mouth to make white clouds. Our lives are projected on the spray and we say we are free. We can always put a foot into God's chest. We can always stomp down and He wouldn't be real. But we want Him to spray more crackers from His mouth. We want white clouds.

Face on a Cloud

You need eyes. Guided tours need to be seen, babies, TVs, poisonous weeds. Of course I was born, lived, went to college, went back, went back home, married again and again, built a practice, now claim the city to which my hometown is attached. I am big optometrist. I have loved so many eyes. There are only a few I have seen between my forefinger and thumb then rolling around in my palm. Certain eyes still I would like to see like that sometime. I want all wants met inside the borders of this nation is what I should say someday.

I speak for days in glass towers in cities in rooms of varied size, solid and accordion walls. Each room has an historical name, a man's name, or pastoral, floral, faunal, all of them tethered to regional themes.

Each room is full of faces above stackable chairs with cushioned seats. I say things to the faces. I can say anything, so I do and the seat cushions get wet, twenty floors and more of hotel holding it all down.

I never talk about optometry anymore. I barely know it anymore. What is it really? My offices are staffed with East Indian-Oklahomans that live for dreams. I move them north and they do it all for me.

I am a man, a house, a street, a land, repeated roofs through fields. I give thanks, try to have sex with my wife and fly away on planes to speak.

Growing tall behind podiums within towers I talk about massage. I talk about God. I talk about a son. I talk about light, what the light is like, what it is, what it is like to be me in the white center of a nation, to have arms like sprinter's legs and hot stone hands. I touch my mouth to a mic and let an inhalation be graphic. I keep my wives in nice homes.

I Touch My Mouth to a Mic and Let an Inhalation Be Graphic:

WHITE KNIGHT BALLROOM - C

Hello. It's me. Your hometown optometrist. Not "yours". This is New York City. For all you know I have never been to New York City. But I have. The first time I came to New York City I arrived in New York City at the same time I had left Helsinki. There was something about my being thrown repeatedly against a doorknob. I was a big baby. It was a bad time for me. But I didn't die and I never will.

I have been to New York City each year of my life for all you know. But I haven't. Often when I think of New York City I think of "get a rope" and some beards and a campfire. I am an enormous Kansan. Have you ever wondered what being me is really like? I am just like you. I am just like you!

Just like you I was born in Kanorado, Kansas, grew up in Topeka, Kansas (Chunganunga watershed), and then Olathe, Kansas (Indian Creek). I was All-State, killed snakes, smoked the dope, watched the clouds. I was always glad I never wished to crouch near bathrooms wishing hard to hear splash sounds. It was always nice not to be certain things and it is still. I don't wish to be tickled with silk during sex. I don't love frozen blood. I don't think of those things. I am a clean thing of decent skin and even hair. I

ran track. I went to optometry school in northeastern Oklahoma. I am just like you.

Just like you I was married in high school. A pyramid of cheerleaders fell over me and

one attached. Freshman-Sophomore: I had a daughter and then a son. Look at me.

Junior year: I had another daughter and another son at the same time. You should have

seen me. My children all seemed to be the same age in my non-traditional Senior

picture, my wife and I with our tanning bed burns, Class of '94, a sudden family of six.

Perhaps I've not embodied my wife with enough words. She had quite a body, a

compact perfect thing nearly always just before a jump. She snapped back quickly into

perfection after each child, dreamed of living in Iowa. We didn't love each other. We

had to. And then one day on the Interstate she died. My children couldn't take it. So

they died too. They didn't really need me. It was quite a plot of fresh graves that

summer after graduation, the class of '94 under a numb cloud, my wife and children laid

out in some design, the braggarts.

My town took pity, said I'd seen enough. The city council put me up in an apartment

complex beside a pond filled with foam. Don't work, the town kept saying, just live.

And living has never been hard for me. I was given fishing poles, envelopes of cash,

credit cards. I became this long striding thing with a Suzuki Samurai on one foot and a

Kawasaki Ninja on the other. It was national news. Girls in jog bras sprinted through

wood fences screaming for rides wanting to be news too. But mostly I just wanted a swim. So I would have one. The shaved chests around my apartment complex pool massaged their own shoulders when I approached for dive. They wanted to be me, but they couldn't stop telling everyone they met: "We're dicks." I didn't do that type of thing. I am just like you.

There are words I think of that tell me about my life. I used to live by the dripping clump of my heart so full of being me I would often hear my name called out when alone. But really, there was something about being me, the widower, the balled up shoulders, the long and gorgeous purchased items. If one were to take me for what I thought I was worth one might tear up a little bit, moisten to a music they would hear in their head. I loved America more purely in those days. Me with my swinging arms and fun gestures.

I can never really sit down and I couldn't then. I learned the road atlas by doing, staking routes with my finger then rolling, making my presence known in towns big enough for major chains, a focus on the Gulf Coast. Me, me, my: Japanese feet, six wheels, briefs stuffed with a sausage of bills.

It's hard to understand what I was when I was leaping from cranes in the days of bungee jumps, filling deep holes with my length. Neon over neon, my tanks, my hats, my hair,

my dead family nowhere between the ears. But how could it be? Could you keep that with you? Would you keep it? That was your wife in a closed-casket, your first love though that's not what it was but it was something. Those were your children, your high school years. Could you see your tiny children in tiny coffins? Do you know their faces won't look at all like their faces all sewn shut? They were babies. The best babies ever to breath. Do you know that's what it's like? Would you keep that behind your eyes? How could you? How could I?

Corpus Christi

Padre

Hooters party

FOUNDING FATHERS BANQUET ROOM - A

I'm sorry. To have brought a pallor to this nice event. This group already looks like hospital sheets crisp on those bendable beds. Almost featureless in your whiteness, though with a residue of gentleness from the brown women that stretched you over those bent mattresses we call life. I have one of those things called Life. Life is where I where I get swollen and huge. Life is where I make my shakes and change my body like you, caliper fingers, running the streets in a foil suit, as if we would ever want to see the sweat that brings forth what might be under our good clothes. But I'm here to tell the truth. And you're here to listen. I might have a life of heartache in the pouring rain. So eat this supper I'm serving, Detroit, this "Renaissance" autopart. I might be due.

Let's get to know these boneless chicken wings. Let's eat together. Let's be honest. I am not like you. That is as plain as all you. Look at your name tags, the fun your parents had in their youth. Me, me, my, mine. I have real sounding name, German, mean, like nuts in your mouth. I am everything I said and will say for the rest of time. Check me out. There is a fine electronic trail. But really, my credibility in your eyes is in no mind of mine. I just realized this will all be in an email to my real son, a history of his real dad, maybe in bound volumes, leather spines, gold leaf, ancient dust. Maybe I'll give myself a ponytail, a gut. I might as well. I might as well have not seen you. I am not like you. You could never be me. But still, I am white too, like you, only tan. You aren't sick.

You are pale. You are lean. How lean is a healthy lean? Everyone wants to know. How lean can you be?

SOUTHERN RIGHTS ALOVE

For all you know I never remarried. I had seen enough, wouldn't bear that ragged path again. I did remarry. I remarried and I remarried. I did it to different songs at slightly different body weights and muscling, but always okay. I remarried again and again.

If this were my hometown I couldn't take you home. There is always someone there. That is my wife. If she were here you would notice a freckle in this white room. She is very beautiful, younger than all of you, a prize of a person. She cannot understand English. You would not want to speak to her. She giggles while riding on my back around our house, biting at my ears, sucking my hair into a little wet tail, running her finger around the inside of my waistband. She knows I am a man of wishes. How does that sound? How does this? She has many degrees and drinks beer on her back black as a bow-tie in the sun without burning. I met her in a place I think of as Japan, stranded, and we somehow pawed each other into this. If she were here I would tell you that if you talked to her head would fall off her shoulders and roll under your chair. You would not want to speak to her, Jacksonville. Just know she hates you all.

Waiting to Move Through Horse Weed

Cranes are high and backhoes are eating out ditches. Ranges of mounds and blanked land spread out like a bank commercial with a face bleeding through the clouds. This place, semi-attached to a city heeling in the center of a continent, its origins are not obscure. I know how it came into existence because I watched and watch it spread. It was home. It's home now. It's on the rise.

Every animal, no matter the weight, is drawn in the sky when you are sitting in the soft lap of a dirt mound, a nimbus of flying insects in front of your face, waiting until it is time to move east through horse weed and to a house.

I know the house. I've drawn pictures of it on my fourth wife's skin. It's ours. We found it stuck into a hill and I knew it was the right one. It had a basket of bread hanging between two garage doors. My new wife and I each took bites from a wheat loaf and passed the pieces between our mouths.

My fourth wife is a white figure of health when walking through a snow drift. She is not one to put

framed photos and figurines on glass shelves in the corner of the living room levitating for company. She stretches her legs and sketches plans for machines in thick pads then builds them, makes them move.

My wife is a true believer, but not in machines. She looks into the sky and sees a man. When I come home to the house the front door is always locked. I go through the front door and hear her running up the stairs, shutting the master bath door, turning on the bath water.

The house is a proud guy, chest out, buckteeth, a bush. The walkout basement is where I sit and look at my life for you. I have a desk so long it broke through a superficial wall when I shoved it in. My life is a real dream. I had always dreamed people would write books about me. I had always wanted to be the first. I had always thought about a desk that would put me looking into bare concrete. Now I have it. I really like thinking about my life. But sometimes I bob my head and draw the bad dreams of others: death hugs, a rope unwound, a discoloring of snow, a paint can split open and wrapped over a face.

The basement has a wall of sliding-glass doors toward the backyard. Looking at the backyard through the glass is like looking up through an esophagus toward an open mouth. Outside in the yard I let the sun peel up my skin. Under the sky I have the snake of my life by the neck and a snake is all neck. Creeks sing down my back. Deer rush down my sides.

When in the basement I can hear my fourth wife building machines then them walking over me. The

desk puts me into bare concrete. I see topography, craters formed by popped bubbles, seam ridges, busted landscapes, bearded faces, racist beliefs. I try not to see a woman's hair catching the lamplight at the corner of my eye. But it is always there. It shouldn't be. Somethings are hard to see and somethings are always there. My second wife is always in the basement when I try to see my life for you.

I don't notice my knee anymore. It doesn't hurt it bothers. My second wife put her foot into it to collapse my leg and then moved away with another white man to another white town attached to mine. I used to watch her walk with her new husband on paved trails around the softball park in their town. They had deep tans and two small children that put shadows over the land like raptors. Now I see her in my basement when I look into bare concrete trying to see my life for you.

I do not bring her. I do not call her over. She is not segmented in barrels of lye. She is this tiny thing that sits on stacked pads on my desk. She throws her hair and catches the light. She wears little shorts. She kicks the air so cute with tiny running shoes. She is always there sitting in that one way that can hold my face with her legs. Sometimes I find myself staring at her and she rolls her eyes in style, my fourth wife dropping tools on the floor above, building machines, turning them on.

This place, this land, my home is without complexity with a preemptive advance of wide streets that have a smooth dome appearance when looking over them belly down, cheek pressed into the porous black surfaces. I grew up screaming at my body through these houseless streets and once houseless streets on night runs not noticing the thickness of diving bats or falling ice. But now this place has

become unrecognizable, filled out, but still larval. Where did Evan Newbanks live, Travis Millard, Brock Batten, Dustin Johnson, Bradley McCollum, the nameless teen on the mini bike perpetually stuck in creek mud? What happened to the creek? Is this some new image?

Life now is mostly the same. I speak. I get on a plane, fly back to the city I have claimed. I sit in the dirt mounds before I go home to the house to my wife.

This place, my home, comes down as a towel laid on the land. I descend dirt mounds on little avalanches. I go to my house, through the front door. My fourth wife locks the master bath door and steam vents from under it. I go into the basement and look into bare concrete and see what I see. I crawl into a warm bed next to my fourth wife, get up to get on a plane.

What is this place really? It is a place. That much is an embarrassment to question. It's on the map, a circle, lines, the creek buried, a low density shade of yellow. People inhabit, spring forth, a bedroom town, plastic wrap, cable, national news, a murder suicide in 1989, everyone goes to college sometime.

College

I had no home. I had no clothes. I had no friends. I had no mom. I had no money. I had my car. I awoke up alone in my car.

A grid of high puff clouds moved quickly across the sky lit by a dim little moon then there were only stars, layers of them, nets, bags, apart from humanity. Then a shooting star happened. It did. I'm sorry, it did. They always do, maybe you know.

I awoke again in my car. The sky was purple and orange. Birds were happy somewhere. I took to the road. I found the highway. I went to college. I was a runner. I had my real dad's legs.

The Athletics Pavilion was a shed with a brick appendage. Inside a mezzanine stretched above a wooden desk. A girl behind the desk leaned into her elbows and gave me her face framed with chlorine hair. She said, "Anything you need. I know who you are."

The girl pulled my hand and had me follow. She took me down hall long with short carpet between white walls. She jumped up and poked an acoustic ceiling tile and said she had always wondered what was up there. She pulled me into a dark room and pulled herself into me. She smelled

like that one spot on the neck of a woman that seems like her thighs. I lifted one of her cheeks and she breathed up into my mouth for while. She pulled me back out into the hall.

She took me to the wrong office. I told her I was a runner. She said that she knew I was, but that I wasn't anymore, and she left me there alone. I knew then she would be my second wife, I hoped she would never die, but she crossed a street wrong, so she did, so she never was.

Dropping from the ceiling the static hum of hanging fluorescent bulbs behind translucent planes of repeated pyramids fell. There was Coach, big and tall and white. He purred "earn" as though it were love. He took me into a deeper room.

Tall men were smiling over eggs scrambled with meats at a long table as a team. There was speed in their forks, intricate spins, faces collapsing and lengthening, fitting into conversations about thankfulness, dance moves, swallowing blood. None of them looked at me as I sat down at a plate. Coach sat across from me like he was wearing a mascot dog head. He said if he saw all this food on a TV he would eat the TV. He urged the team to give more thanks. The team put down their forks. I put down my fork.

Coach held up a tissue yellow with his infection mucus. "Why eat that?" Coyote Face said. "I want to become cultured," Coach said, "show you what an old dog from the hills can do." "Try food," Reagan said. "God," Coyote Face said. "America," Reagan said. "Jesus," Coyote Face said. "Army," Reagan said. "Hell no, I ain't going to worm that dirt," Coach said, "This is a life lesson."

Coach looked at me like a Bluetick and began to chew the tissue. He said something else muffled by the tissue. I couldn't make it out so I began to laugh. Coach said something else. Huge hands came from behind me and dropped on my shoulders for a slow massage. "I said, 'words have no

meaning,” Coach said, “I’m trying to sound conceited.” He shook his hound head and left the room.

The massage became an arm around my neck, good men in a nice room, special friends to find in there. I had never put on a uniform and danced on a bad grenade to save a team, but could do anything. I had felt camaraderie, blankets of it, but was always quick to feel a slight. But in there it smelled like something. There were special friends in there, connections, juices, juice, real animals.

Coyote Face and Reagan moved on me, lifted me by the legs and dropped me to the floor. The team circled around and began a rhythm clap. My perfect smile spread up into their faces. Reagan moved into my space. The circle compressed. The team put on my perfect smile. Reagan said, “You are perfect in every way,” and made up a new dance. The others began to chant his words as they felt their way into the dance. The floor doubled up. I knew I was the floor. I could see myself from above. A circle of carpet was shrinking under hanging lights and exposed ductwork, refusing flow into another moment, on full display, space filling with a chant-rumble that rose as the gallery steadily multiplied, more teams, all teams, lady teams, fluorescent stars bouncing off the circling hulls of everyone, doors locked somewhere, sometime, tokens inserted, tanning bulbs ignited, ski ball times remembered, guns fired into the sky, I belched, it reminded me of milk, liquid bird shit in a tall glass, a friend's smiling mom. There was a circle. There was a straight line. It is always that a certain line provides the shortest distance between a floor and a ceiling, you and the sun, or a man's face in the sky in place of the sun. It isn't a choice you make. It is real.

It was college: chartered jets, yellow cheese in the shape of my head, hard trunked girls, long and lithe, athletes, gobs, witches, flocks, anything we wanted, Coyote Face, Reagan, juices, juice, bong hits, water spills, carpet, tile, Hawaii hot tub, GHB for fun, to cry into sleep with a girlfriend used as an

alarm clock, wake up, drive through the snow, A.M. throw-up camp, push a towel-wrapped two-by-four back-and-forth across a floor, then dance, dance, dance.

We all wanted a storybook ending, even for Coach. God, apparently, did not, if want was even possible for Him. But we didn't know, back then, dancing, up in it, screaming, everyone screaming, for us, for me, for a win, for tradition, even in church, up in the whole thing, under the sky, everyone in the streets, for us, for me, for me. Back then I could not have told you the end. I saw none. But there was an end.

The locker room shower chamber had the familiar look and smell. All of us inside were various heights above average with water from spigots shooting into our wide shoulders and chests. Coach was 7'1" and made of melting white cheese. I followed his wet mass and took a towel.

Coyote Face and I dried and dressed, applied deodorant and Drakkar Noir. We met Reagan in the snowfield outside. We rolled snowballs and took position behind evergreen landscaping.

Coach exited the athletics building in his giant parka and snowflake stocking cap, clouds spilling from his big face. Coyote Face, Reagan and I counted backwards from three and opened fire. Coach reeled into the wall and moaned as snowballs shattered on his coat and face. We gathered armfuls of snowballs and continued to throw on the run. Coach dove onto the snowfield into a somersault and lumbered toward us scooping and lobbing snow with his shovel hands. We split up. Coach came to an indecisive stop. We converged. He made a confused groan and a clumsy pivot. I kicked his big snow boot into the opposite leg. Reagan put a knee into Coach's upper back and Coyote Face stuffed his boots with snow. I put my foot into his ribs and cartilage cracked.

Coyote Face, Reagan and I had chicken wings delivered to our apartment. We took Doan's and

discussed the meaning of existence in front of the TV streaming with sports highlights and President Clinton's red, cancerous nose.

Reagan said he had been taking the United States for granted. He called it America. He said he wanted to make a contribution. I looked out the window. The American and Kansas flags were cracking in the parking lot. My reflected face was on the window glass. My nose was symmetrical with tight pores, my cheekbones planes. I smiled. My teeth were straight. I smiled a lot. Coach, when he would introduce me to a rich alumnus, would say, "Look at that smile. Ole Dan could light up a dark night with that sucker."

Reagan materialized on the window glass, then Coyote Face. They smiled with teeth. We smiled with teeth. And flags cracked.

We drifted motorless below a stories-high dam on a Corps of Engineers lake. The American and Kansas flags were illuminated high above, limp on poles against an expanse of stars. Night fisherman in little aluminum dinghies were invisible but somewhere, we could hear water slapping metal and reels spitting line. The lake was black glass, satellites slid faintly through the sky.

Reagan rummaged in a storage compartment and pulled out a mini flagpole, jabbed it into a socket at the rear of the boat, gave it a twist and a little bulb ignited on its tip. The stiff nylon American flag attached to it slowly unfolded and went limp. We were shirtless and lean. Reagan saluted the little flag and knocked his bare heels together. A fish jumped or was pulled from the water by a fisherman. There was no wind. A fisherman coughed and one sneezed. We sucked on cans of beer and watched satellites. Invisible lines were cast around us. Fishermen were silent.

Reagan lit us all cigarettes, grabbed the throttle and we sped over the black water weaving

through night fisherman like racing buoys. Reagan manned the wheel, Coyote Face screamed and I scanned the lake surface for night fisherman with the pistol-gripped spotlight. “Look alive,” Reagan said. I made air raid siren sounds when a fisherman was spotted and the boat threw wake. Night fishermen were everywhere, the boat was athletic.

Coyote Face screamed. The spotlight hit a row of pit toilet outhouses and a picnic shelter. I made air raid siren sounds. Reagan put his hands over his head like on a roller coaster, and then jacked the wheel with his knee. We skipped over the shallows near shore, threaded between two night fishermen and lunged back into deep water. Coyote Face celebrated our agility with clinched fists. I hit his smile with the spotlight. He crossed his arms. I closed my eyes, turned the spotlight onto my own smile and there was heat. Reagan made sounds. I sprayed the spotlight over him. He stood up on the captain’s chair and took control of the wheel with one foot. It was all sky and glowing Reagan, the spotlight washing out his details.

Circles formed, collapsed and released. You will swim a great distance when you can see dark land when water raises you up.

This is About the Land

This is about the land. I was on my own again, well piss. There were so many places I could go. There was a sky. My face was the sun. I had my car that said: MY OTHER CAR IS A DRUG.

There were all these empty roads. Fair weather cumuli hung over the land. There didn't need to be lightning. It would have been coming from me. This was not a new me. I never needed anything.

I found my mom. I called. She cried. She had started over. She had a man, small children and a dog. She said it was time for me to finally see.

Time is one of those tall bears with the huge paws and teeth in museums. Have you ever entered an echoey space to see a stuffed horse, a shriveled baby's head, a tiny village, a diamond necklace fucked off a queen, an explosion apart from time?

Small balloons were rising over my mom's town.

My mom's town was my hometown, my town now. She had moved away, found men, came back, found more men. The town was stretched with my mom inside, tripping as she ran, planting young trees where she fell. We used to walk the creek at night screaming at leeches on our legs looking

for a dad for me. But the creek is gone now, moved, buried, so it wasn't real.

My mom's house had a basket of bread between two garage doors, two eyes, buck teeth, its chest out. My mom wasn't home. She had left a drawing of a sporting goods store on the front door. I didn't wait. I drove around.

There were gas pumps under those canopies. I took my shirt off near a pump I wanted. I had to push someone's dad's head that wanted it too. He fell over with little sound to elbows and knees. What a bad day he had. He didn't know I am always me.

The roads were new and made a special sound. Streetlights embraced as the roads bent. It makes for a good aerial scene: new curving roads, sliding cloud shadows, rectangles, rougher shapes, people moving in a fun festival of small balloons, me getting out of my car, casting my shadow, food wrappers flowing, balloons rising, children chasing, circular fountains spraying. But pull the view down, put its duck in the dirt: my shoes are mud-caked two-by-fours with loose straps, I am beautiful, each step is real.

This was not an inland sea. People were moving as a mass over a designed place, a former grain field, eating, holding balloons on strings. People never stop moving when you watch them. They swing arms and sacks, heads at different heights eating meat on foot, trying not to stink.

When people move in my hometown I feel the want to kill and be big. My hometown borders other towns, attached by the same numbered streets that continue from the same city's grid. It is all so close. You arrive in one town at the same time you had left the other, but that's not how it feels. I hold a love for everything I have ever seen so close to me it is a set of affectionate tits trying to breathe. Some things cannot be fiction because some things are real.

When there are two women wanting to feel how you feel inside one will have a forehead that you want to press your forehead into, then pass over it with your mouth. The other woman will be watching you look into the bent chrome tube of a chair, the reflection not holding a clear image, just a certain kind of light. When there are two women wanting to feel how you feel inside each one will touch you, pull on you to get you inside. You will look up and hope it's the sky, because you want everything to be outside.

There was a tall man that looked like a forest beast that decided to live as a human holding a balloon: his body shaved in the proper places to make a face, eyebrows, a beard, a god, his outfit too obvious with a sports colored phone holster hanging from a braided belt. So I followed him.

The back of this beast's head was not real. It was at a height too tall for a real man. Beside it was a balloon and wide air, swing a metal bat through it, please. But at the bend of the beast's elbow was another back of a head, small, too predictably a wife's. The back of her was head real.

As I followed I said things into the backs of their heads. I feel real bad today. I feel like a real sack. I want some meat. I want six more pounds of lean muscle. I want some woman. I want a new god, a good cream lotion, in a line, a line in the sky, a line wrapping around a cone. I want a new home, a Dad Dad Dad Dad Dad Dad.

I didn't really feel those things. I never really did. I had a big enough body, could run up a tree and go to sleep. I enjoyed wanting things. And my mom had given me a temporary room in her house, a place to be near her and her babies. She could need me. She said my new dad couldn't get out of his room at night. She put him a harness and threw him food.

The wife talked up to the beast as it ate a chicken sandwich on a belt of light. Her profile was a

stripped threaded cylinder. I thought maybe she was just one of those people without a smiley face, but inside there was a clock paused on a laugh she laughed as a child. She was not something just spit up. I wanted to champion her but she was down with the beast, so soiled.

This was all real. There were only certain things I could know. But I knew I did not worry about the wife beside all those big clothes. The beast beside her sweated a benevolence, a fun festival of balloons.

Sometimes still now I want to roll up my sleeves on a hill and show the world my big arms. All hail the beast! Send up eagles fucking in flight trailed by flames. Spray more clouds from your face. Bitch, please. I am here to have fun.

I said many things into the beast and his wife's heads, but I could have been on a phone. I could have had the black end of a banana in my ear. They didn't know. They didn't know I had left my phone at the wrong woman's.

When there are two women wanting to feel how you feel inside you will hold one of their sick heads in your lap waiting for her to go to sleep. The other one's forehead will be pressed into a window screen and you will see.

When there are two women wanting to feel how you feel inside one woman will call the other with your phone. The two will talk for a while about how you are always you. One woman will tell you she can't believe she isn't number one. The other one won't know how to reach you once you drive away.

I wanted to be on the beast's phone, calling his contacts, telling everyone they'd been duped by a dear gentle beast, the last of his kind, just needed a woman, a subtler terror than nature, give him a chance, he's going to church, learning the right way, let's feel what he feels:

People do not sound like trees. Even when not moving. Even when resting on bench, a fountain spraying behind them, frozen in a civic crest. There has never been a civic crest with a beast dressed as a human sitting on a bench in front of a fountain holding a meat sandwich pierced with an arrow. People never stop talking. They say they have no stuff. Nothing. They say a fire happened and a bunch of screaming. I feel it is really happening, somewhere at least, if not just behind my head. I just want to quit. I just breathe. I just have to. This is what I thought I was looking for, or about. Like I thought I knew it would all be alright. I mean okay. The idea of it was like all I had for a time, me looking up into a canopy of trees. Now to know it is just like something I had always known. I want this all to be TV. I want to change it, it to all be technology, like a log brought down on a marmot spine, hands tearing open the belly to pull off the hide. Dinners just arrive. It is good. Not good. I have to have a job. There was a riot I saw on TV. It was one of those nights I understood was pulsing and wild, but it was on TV. I look at that night, how I buckled myself into it within all kinds of clothes. I can never find any real trees to lie within anymore. People never stop moving. They make white stripes in the sky I cannot read.

The beast and his wife passed through people and balloons. The sun lowered bringing an orange sky. Children punched their parents' legs and ran away together in loose groups. Balloons were rising. Parents fell into laughing with other parents as all their children disappeared.

The beast and his wife kept moving, his dear head shoving through the darkening sky. It was all

like a really good family movie that was coming to a close until the sun went away. Nighthawks moved into circle clusters of light. Balloons were releasing from hands. People were trying to find their children because they couldn't be found. The sky was black. The clusters of light above showed there were no children anywhere below. Parents were beginning to cry. Parents were on their hands and knees looking for abandoned wells, running, cutting, dropping waste, waving knives.

People never stop moving even when lying face down in mulch, or tired from sex, or hanging from a tree. The beast and his wife kept moving. The wife had so much to say. Her expression did not change. Her head rotated but was always in profile. They moved steady through the people. It was like the people would never end but they did.

The beast and his wife moved over mowed grass until it ended at a group of trees. A dark bus was within the trees. The bus was dark because of the dark matte finish and the low hanging limbs and the black sky. It was an older model, a bus that was once not dark, hadn't liked hills, was defeated at a stoplights on slight grades, a team weighing it down, a team that never won a game, just went passive in the grass behind facemasks, molded rubber between teeth compacting until failing, tearing open, teeth getting to know one another again, good friends all of them, teeth of young men, no way out, nighthawks above taking moths from clusters of light. But there were only certain things I could know. The dark bus did not like or dislike hills. It was real. It did not have character. Whatever it once was, it had been repainted. The beast and his wife stood looking into the bus's sealed doors. The windows were black. The bus was still. The wife unlocked the bus and the two of them boarded. The doors folded behind them.

When the doors sealed it was if a zoo contained within the bus was startled awake by the worst

noise. Subtle terror is felt inside as a spring buck moving around, getting all sensual, sprouting fuzzy antlers to be used as pry-bars, smashing with hooves small mammals to be used later as bedding.

There has never once been a zoo contained within a bus. Busses are for people despite any sound. The dark bus moved over the wheels breathing without rolling. Somethings cannot be fiction, because somethings are real, and somethings cannot be characters. A bus cannot be a character. No bus has ever breathed. No one can really feel a bus inside. Nothing living has holes that big. The bus, above the windshield, said: WE LOVE KIDS. But the bus was not a believer. No bus has ever believed a word. The windshield popped out and the bus vomited from the hole.

I am a natural runner. My stride is inside an eagle's chest in a trophy case. I was a utility sprinter. I run hills still. Show me a stride longer and I will lengthen my legs. Start a watch. I have a coach inside of me so real you can suck on it. I will go until I throw up foam. How about you?

My car looked sad because it was alone except for all the rising balloons and moving people crying like dying and police dogs hunting over the ground on their noses. But my car has never cried. It has never caught fire and exploded. It just waits for me, just floating. It has a driver's seat that puts balls in the air.

I took a bite of bread from between my mom's two garage doors.

The drawing was gone. No one came to the front door. It was unlocked.

My mom's house was neat guy, pheasants were flushed from corn stalks on the wallpaper.

Nothing was dusty. A wooden cross hung over a mirror. Claw-hammers were all over the floors reflecting canister lights. A TV was sounding in the basement.

My mom was on a couch in front of the TV. She was watching a self-propelled doll walk across the coffee table. Before it reached an edge she turned it and watched it walk the other way. It was wearing the same clothes as her. It had the same hair.

My mom looked the same. She looked like she could have been me. She always had. Back when I prayed my friends all wanted to get inside her so deep it wore out their jeans. They often felt my fingers inserting into their eye-sockets to pull out the balls in their dreams. At least that's what they told me.

My mom's basement was a walkout. One wall was sliding glass doors. The backyard was floodlit. The greens were very green. The yard sloped up to retaining walls, tiers, gazeboes, black towers of sky. My mom's children were playing with a man and a dog and a ball. My mom's children were agile bald babies, like I used to be. They kept the ball from the dog, climbed the man and kned him in the face.

My mom took the doll from the table and threw it against a wall when she heard me breathe. She jumped and rushed me, took my chin between her fingers for a while and gave me the best angle of her face. She said she sometimes still couldn't believe she wasn't really me. She said I had a new dad. She said I had brothers. She said she had so many new things, but that the day I was born was the best day of her life still.

My life has never been a shame for anyone. Not that I haven't felt shame. I feel it every day. I feel it for what I am essentially. I have always been a win for everyone who knows me. Why me? Why am I not one of the ones on TV with flies eating my eyes next to a dead dog? It can be a real weight to slide.

But not really. Nothing is really heavy for me. I just like to try to feel real pain with a hip sled face, pectoral bar dip, upright row chin, Christian dorsal release, plyometric box leap. I carry love on my limbs like a bee in flight. I wish just once I would fall from the sky. But I am always me. I am Number One.

My mom pulled me into a hallway. Drawings of babies, dogs, Michael Jackson and me were on the walls. She opened a door. The room was dark. She took a football from somewhere I could not see. She pointed to a dim line of tape on the floor, kicked my toes to it. She said the harness was attached to a length of cable. She said my new dad wouldn't be seen. She said he would keep saying that he is right behind me, but that he couldn't be.

My mom threw the football into the dark and there was all this sound and then there was none. She said to just breathe. She put her feet behind my heels to keep my toes at the line. She braced her forearms into my back to keep me in the room.

"I'm right behind you, bud, I'm right behind you," my new dad was saying, but he wasn't. My mom was. I wanted to find this dad's fingers in the dark and twist them to pop, but mine were in my mouth.

My mom led me to the bathroom. I blew it up with a maniacal curling brown that was too tall for the water. I am always me. I could see my mom's face when I looked into the mirror. I washed my hands until red. My mom was waiting outside the door. She went into the bathroom into my smell.

I looked through my face reflected on one of the sliding glass doors into the yard. My mom's children had the man on the grass. They jumped on his spine. He had the ball in his mouth. He became a U. The dog was tearing at his hamstrings. The greens were very green. My mom came beside

me. She said, "Who is that man?" and then she screamed like a woman. My mom's children jumped off the man and ran to her as she shoved open a glass door. The man kicked off the dog and scaled the tiers of the yard and went into the black sky.

The dog was reflected on one of the sliding-glass doors. It kept eyes on the yard. My mom's children ate yogurt at the coffee table like I used to do. Globes of it smeared on their fat little cheeks. My mom's children wouldn't look at me. My mom said they thought I was another one of her. They began to cry. They said they wanted to watch something fucked up on TV. They said they wanted me to leave. They cried until my mom made me.

^ Back When I Prayed I Always Thanked a Cowboy Jesus That My Mom was My Mom

^ and Michael Jackson was My Dog Because I Couldn't Imagine Anything So Perfect

I found a pencil drawing of me as a child with an X over each eye tacked to my mom's vacated house door. I looked through the window and saw the walls were bare. The house had always been full of my mom's drawings. Most of them were portraits of me she had done from school pictures, or action scenes of my dog Michael Jackson and me battling assorted monsters and men. Many were of Jesus in Western wear, and there were quite a few of men on beaches with shirts off, or on picnic blankets in sweaters. As I looked at the defaced drawing tacked to the door I knew she was done with me. I had gone too far. I used to sit amazed watching her create those drawings. I couldn't wait for my school pictures to come so I could watch her hands move over paper. She would ask me what Michael Jackson and I had been doing all day in the creek behind the house, I would tell her and she would make us into well-muscled heroes.

I pulled the drawing off the door and the wind grabbed it out of my hand. It was gone. My friends were doing tackling drills on the driveway. They were always around, grunting and laughing, calling me Dave. I was overcome with the urge to take an eye from each of them. They opened my forehead with a landscaping stone and threw me into a yucca. As I picked sores on my skin they decided we should find a Highway 69, if one existed, and steal signs for their bedroom walls. One existed. We found it and took it south, but at some point had left it and found ourselves in a vast grid of water-filled strip mine pits near a highway with signs useless to them.

It had been a hard hot drive: east and south from our higher tan into a low, timbered green. I rolled out of my little car into a screaming bush of insects. The sun was high and hot. My friends were sweating in the backseat. I breathed the bush a while then smelled burning. My friends said, "Suck mouth on the teat, Dave." I wrapped a racing flag bandana around my split forehead. My name isn't Dave. I want you to cry my real name.

It took a few dead ends and picnic turnabouts to find our way back the highway. I was shocked at the thick of trees and brush. I would have mentioned to my friends that I had only seen real forests on TV, but had long ago learned they weren't interested in such, especially when they were shirtless. And as we slowly gained speed southward the identical tattoos of skulls wearing football helmets were growling on the white meat of their chests and their breath was clear. I was taken suddenly by the taste for grilled cheese and coffee.

I nearly took my mom's new man's whole face off when I slammed his head on the padlock of our garden shed and dropped him near Michael Jackson's grave. It was my birthday and his car was wet after a slow wash in the yard. I doubt I was actually trying to take his face off, because I usually just broke those men's fingers. I cannot be sure. My mom kept screaming that I wasn't a child anymore as her man tried to find his face. I always protected my mom from the endless show of men that slinked into our house, sweating through their clothes. I never wanted to take my eyes off those rat fuckers, sun burnt and smoking, peering from over their mustaches, smelling of petroleum, tracking in waffles of mud onto the linoleum, trying to avoid me, trying to eat everything in cupboards, parking their loud

cars too close the living room window, letting the engines run for hours, cussing, telling me to go to bed, never taking off their boots, cleaning their nails with lock blade knives, grunting at my mom to shut the fuck up, saying her drawings were shit, cracking their knuckles, kicking Michael Jackson, wiggling their loose teeth, and on and on until vomit burned inside my belly.

Michael Jackson and I used to hunt snakes in the choked creek behind the house. I named the snakes after my mom's men and we showed them no love. That was up until Michael Jackson found a badger in a hole and I grew frighteningly muscled. I started to name her men after snakes, and their fingers started breaking. They came and went. My mom always told me my real dad went away because he knew once I was big enough I would have torn off his hands and taken one of his eyes. I have always been proud to be me.

We were on the highway. My guts tossed. My friends were as they always were, in perfect symmetry, nearly touching, speaking in unison, giants. They erupted into one of their daily fistfights and busted each other's lips in the backseat with a Styrofoam cooler between them. We hit the ditch, but I kept us south. The shotgun seat was empty except for dubbed rap tapes, "arms, legs, heads, necks and throats."

My friends began yelling, "hungry." We stopped at an outpost gas station/ gift shop/ diner that was dressed up like an Old West trading post full of figurines, candy bars, rubber-skinned Indian drums and black t-shirts with coyotes howling in thunderstorms on them. I felt the texture of a coyote on one of the shirts when I was reminded of my mom's scent. A man in a stuffed bra and a wig went behind the particleboard counter.

My friends came up behind me giggling. The man with tits had told them there was a big storm to the south. They handed me a bottle of Robitussin then teetered rigidly making computer sounds. I squatted behind the t-shirt piles and, hey, Jesus. I took a shirt to the counter, bought it and pulled it on. I realized then that I didn't have a shirt on up to this point. My friends of course had known this and let me walk around bare-chested. It didn't matter to me. I could not be embarrassed. It wasn't possible anymore.

We went through a doorway decorated with the hacked off tops of antlered deer skulls and into the diner. It was a 50s replica with personal jukeboxes on each booth table. I sat down and felt my eyes loosen in the sockets. A cardboard Fonzi was kiss-facing at me near the counter. My friends were across from me laughing at my coyote in the storm shirt. Their chuckles stretched to the far corners of the room then snapped back into the center of my brain. They put a quarter into the little jukebox, selected *In the Jungle the Mighty Jungle* and did hand motions to it. The waitress said howdy then started in about a storm to the south. She touched my arm periodically. Her eyeballs were oily reflectors. I could see myself. It seemed like banjos and Jew's harps should be accompanying her. She gave me the coffee and grilled cheese for free after my friends left the table to steal. She said she liked me. I could hear my friends giggling in the gift shop. A dog was barking in the kitchen. I thought of Michael Jackson convulsing in the dry creek, our house nearly buried in dirt mounds in the distance. The waitress kept talking, something about cigarettes. After we buried Michael Jackson my mom told me to fill his food bowl one last time, then we sat down to minute steaks with some new dad. The diner became very quiet.

My friends were by my car playing burnout. Thunderheads towered behind them pulsing with lightning. I was overcome with the urge to take their eyes. They re-opened my forehead on the front fender of my car and we continued south.

My friends said something about busting a nut into a tornado then started poking at me. They rapped. The windows were down. The air was thick. My heart was in my neck. Thunderheads were black and blinking in front of us, but we crested the horizon and found the next. The road dipped down and away to where the storm had already been. My heart slid back into my chest. My friends rubbed my shoulders and assured me this would never end, that we would be buds forever. We descended into deep green. I thought about jungles. I nearly mentioned it, but they were shirtless with cans between their legs.

The highway was wet, the trees washed and shiny. Millions of birds were screaming from the trees dodging the car's nose. The road curved into a creek bottom. We crossed a small bridge and entered the swath the storm had taken through the timber. The air was cooler and less saturated. Giant hardwoods were leaning splintered into one another and completely bare of leaves. Debris covered the road. I slowed to an agile speed and swerved around the largest pieces. The timber was strewn about everything. Suck mouth on the teat, Dave. There were ruins ahead. Filthy old pickups parked at odd angles, and some upside down, sat amongst a few broken houses and two squat cinder block outbuildings.

We neared an overturned pickup that was blocking the highway. My friends were out of the back doors before we came to a stop. They took off toward a small crowd of people encircling a battered old tree that had something hanging in it. I pulled off the highway into an overgrown lawn, put a tire

into a stump and re-opened my forehead.

High and indecent in the tree was an old woman snagged like plastic bag. The hushed whispers of recent tragedy and of seeing a neighbor naked flitted through the air. They sounded like sad Confederate fiddles should be whining behind them. A toothless man in a Final Four hat said the winds had lifted the old woman's house from its foundation, sucked her out of her clothes and out of the window. Volunteers put a ladder up to a tree and took her down. A small girl in a knee-length Bobby Brown concert t-shirt held a paper seed sack that had been sliced at the top and sides to form a sort of poncho. The toothless man continued that she was a tough old coot, that he had seen her beat a crazy horse to death with a scoop shovel and that she would make it. His eyes looked blind deep in the sockets. The old woman was carried to the seed sack then to the bed of the pickup. Her mouth was uncomfortably motionless and slightly open. The volunteers stayed with her in the bed as the pickup crackled through the gravel onto the highway. They went south around a curve and out of sight.

Soon after we pulled onto the highway, my friends were shirtless and drinking, calling me Dave. The going was slow through the debris. It took us some time to even get out of sight of the people who still encircled the tree. My grip on the wheel was sensitive. Just around the curve an uprooted tree blocked the lane. Unlike most of the trees in the swath, this one still had its leaves. Its magnified scale and horizontal position hit me hard, but I decided against mentioning it.

Limbs scraped against the doors and leafy branches poked through the windows tickling my friends into a symmetric chuckling hysteria. We rounded the crown of the tree and saw the pickup,

volunteers, and old woman. Another leafy uprooted tree was blocking both lanes ahead. They had tried to go around through the ditch, but had gotten stuck. The back wheels were spinning sending slabs of red earth from the tires. Before we came to a stop my friends were lumbering toward the pickup. They plowed into the tailgate with such force the volunteers smashed into the back glass, cracking it. The old woman levitated for a moment, her seed sack poncho barely there. The pickup gained traction and ground, but worked its self into another soft spot.

My friends were yelling Dave as I stopped the car and took off running toward the pickup. Their mouths formed one long expectant smile. With each bounding step I took toward the pickup I honed more to the dirty F on the tailgate. That's all that was there. F. It was F F F growing larger with each step. F. Just before I reached it, the pickup jumped from the ditch, bounced onto the highway and sped south with the volunteers in back holding up their thumbs. I continued into the ditch. My friends broke into war dances and leaped into the downed tree. My mom could never draw this. I closed my eyes and opened them. The sky was smeared with birds.

The wind was nowhere. The birds were pissing and screaming. I thought of my mom and where she had gone. Maybe she was back at the house, putting the drawings back on the wall, but I knew she wasn't. I rolled over in the ditch. My mom and I used to recite *Now I Lay Me* while a horseback Jesus stood watch near the nightlight. She was my intensity, everything I knew. My friends roared and birds cried everywhere. She hadn't drawn a picture of me for years. I pressed my face against the eroded bank of the ditch and let the skin move into the texture.

My friends were saying *Dave*. The sounds of them tearing through the tree had stopped. It was all crying birds. “Suck mouth on the teat, Dave.” I wanted to spin into the sky and incinerate on the edge of the atmosphere. My friends were holding the cooler. I knocked the lid off, grabbed two cans and sucked the insides dry. My friends chanted *Dave*. We stuffed our pockets with cans and walked south down the highway. They said we would be buds forever. My coyote in the storm t-shirt was coated in red mud. I took it off, looked at it for a moment and threw it into the ditch. This sent my friends into goofy gestures and chuckling. The racing flag bandana was gone. My friends said the wound looked like an un-wiped ass.

The highway curved out of sight ahead. I wondered if the pickup was miles down the highway or spinning in mud just around the curve. My friends broke into grunts and wrestling. I left them behind and watched my shoes, heavy with mud, come in and out of view. I wanted to fallback and backstroke into outer space, but instead walked to where highway disappeared. The sun was aching behind the piles of broken trunks and limbs. Birds were deafening, absolutely heartbroken. I stopped and unzipped. Urine hit the highway and puddled. I could see myself, and the sky wiping into drab shades above. My friends were throwing empty cans in the air so that they met high above the centerline then went arcing into opposite ditches. A little breeze whipped up and washed over my skin. Jesus was riding a bucking horse nearby. The breath left me and went to the sky. My friends were slapping high-tens and bumping chests. I wanted their eyes. Mud released from my shoes and cans flew from my pockets. Everything was wide and at all speeds. Birds blasted from the timber in loose groups, hovered a while, then plummeted. My friends couldn't believe anything. They were screaming my name. If only my mom could draw this for me. She could put Michael Jackson beside me, both of us in flight, lots of

muscle and teeth.

NORDIC LIGHT ROOM

I am Number One. Just because you are Number One doesn't mean you do not masturbate sometimes and cry deeply about your lot. I have shoved my own hooked fingers into my eyes, St. Paul. I have called my fingers mean worms. But I have never been lonely. It has never been a possibility.

I imagine the light is so soft when you are lonely. There are so many pencil drawings of gods reclined in the sky coming from the lonely, eagles over tsunamis, flag stripes, pony tails blowing on jet boats. The lonely look at one another in public spaces and hollow out their eyes: no one has ever been my greatest fan. Wet towels descend on them and they die each day in beds under ceilings under roofs under a sky that creams for me. If someone could just once be me looking at the light I see. Every life except mine is a lie.

When you are Number One at age fifteen you are pulled through your bedroom window and into a car. The car smells like fruit and is full of a Lady Falcons varsity team. The scene could be many things but is just one. The hair is high. The dashboard lights just pick up the dust on the surfaces framing the panel. The dome light is warm on the team's upper-halves and bare knees. The faces are painted up, a true team. The team wears school colors. The team wants to be teachers. But they see they can't be when you give them your face with all those straight teeth, when you touch their

mouths to raise sweat from their stomachs, when you show them that it is they that will be moved. They can't stand to fall back into the seat, but they do because they must, then they want to, because they grow weak in your smell. When you are Number One no one can believe what you are doing. They move around under you and say, I never feel frozen with you.

Number One

There is a certain song that reminds me of a certain time. I get choked up in the intercostal space between nostalgia and death when I hear it and it makes me happy to remember the exact bored sadness of that one moment in my childhood this certain song represents. But it's just a bunch of shit. I will never die. When I am not hearing the song I am busy with the best of my life.

I am Number One. I have loved everyone and just a few, but never just one. When you are Number One there are always people crouched in the business of your dreams. They want to get inside you and move you toward the smells of their lotions. They think the world is you. The world is creamy white and expressionless. The sun can poke out your eyes. Masses of people part around you. The sky is wide and clear over open varieties. Time is one long line without increments. You have to make your own dashes. Make a ladder and climb it. Draw a man's face in the sky and say it's the sun.

I have so much. I want everything. It comes so easily. It keeps coming.

Making It Come

I bought a condo in my hometown. I became more serious than most could achieve, but was also known as a giant riot. I cocked my way without resistance to the top tier of my profession, a bull's head with ruby eyes rising into a bolo tie. I dated on women for a while, from giants to gymnasts, sometimes the entire gamut arriving at my condo in a stack. I couldn't just make it with them though. We had to fall in love. It was hard. This was the decade when everyone was ugly, eyeglasses for attitude, white turtlenecks under button-down denim.

But lakes were shapes for wet fun. There were salad bars in poorly lit hallways. You expected a certain quality at higher end steakhouses. Some places delivered. Some didn't. When I could find the space I would masturbate. These were the early days of exercise tapes, bodysuits bucking with encouraging words at every exhale. I saw God in the light. I found a popular church.

The church was a steel shed with a steeple with carpeted walls. There was a woman with an active family. The woman and I pushed hard into one another finding every dark place in compressed time. We found a song. We tried food. We found every hole. The sky filled with stripes, people died in

car wrecks, suicidal hangings, teen mothers kicked repeatedly in the stomach. We married. Then our relatives and friends opened their mouths and hit us with bags of wheat screaming all kinds of things. We ran to a self-conscious rented American convertible and sped away across the wide land. The honey moon hit and there was nowhere for us to go.

My second wife wouldn't live in my condo among the stains of the other women. She longed to be unique. I blindfolded her and put her in my car. There we were, the three of us, on a freshly scraped prairie. We got ourselves into a new bi-level home, winterized like living inside a loaf bread alone, a heated garage.

Yellow bulb light turned a type of white on the kitchen counter. We adopted a longhaired dog. My wife sat us down and feathered our hair. I trained the dog with firm hugs and built him up with a reinforcement that made him confident and supreme.

I do not love my second wife more than the others. I have loved everything I have ever seen equally even if dreamed. We once lifted our shirts at the same time and said jinx. But we never danced in the insulation of our place. We never did those types of things. We began to laugh at things on TV as the dog chewed through bones in his room.

We fell into the competence of being on top of each other for a while. There were times when the winter wind was hard, when we were inside the insulation of our place, where we gained a smugness against the world outside, meat burps, pills, treadmill, rowing machine. The nights before I would fly away to speak she would go to the opposite side of the bedroom and do hard kicks into a mirror with her back to me.

My second wife's family were Fighting Falcons, loyalists. They chanted, “repel them, repel them,” Saturdays in the stands when the ball was not the Blue & Gold's. Their fingers became talons and were thrown toward the opposite sideline. My wife's mother ignited the chants with a falcon's voice and flapping arms.

Sundays the church was full of the in-laws. They often fell over into the aisles to tremble.

One Sunday my fingers ran over the stacked ends of hymnal pages as a guitar was noodled by a clean-cut kid near the pulpit. The pastor stretched his calves. My second wife went to her knees, leaned back and opened herself to the altar. Her abdomen was concave under her blouse. She wanted a big little miracle to love.

Her mother looked to her abdomen and then to me. Her head went back and forth. She often said trying wasn't trying unless you try all the time, and a man is a man, but some men are not. The pastor reminded me of gym class shuttle runs.

My wife's late father was immortalized in a chrome frame on a synthetic wood wall in the refreshment room. He was well-liked, tall in the congregation for years. When a Sunday hat or a paper plate was taken by the air conditioner winds his spirit was said to be present and playful. When I first met my second wife she said her dad would have loved me deep.

Aunts in the refreshment room glanced toward my wife's abdomen and to my crotch. The talk around me that morning was inaudible. One spiral of pasta from a giant pasta salad was dropped to the floor. The uncles passed coffee through their nostrils. The whole family was out of breath. Their eyes told me I was dead.

My second wife and I nosed through books in our bedroom then spread them open to illustrations against the headboard. Her ankles could go behind her head and you could see right through her. We turned our heads to the pages and bashed ourselves together until she prayed with woven arms and went to sleep with a furrowed brow clutching a heart-shaped pillow she called, Hearty.

Blankets tangled my legs.

I loved the dog like a son. He should have been my own. I sat him down when he was still a puppy inside an invisible car I had made with two dining chairs and showed him a photograph of a man with a steering wheel in a chest: This is what happens without a seat belt, my dad gave it to me, your dad is giving it to you, though not your real dad, a real dad would never do this: I gave him a real beer. He drank it. He would drink anything you gave him. He always wanted to be a part of things.

When the dog ran in a direction away from me there could have been a pen stabbed in my solar plexus. He would leave for days and come home beaten, mauled, gashed, blood sacked in the fur under his neck.

It was cold outside as I carried him inside the house and into his room. My second wife and I sat down together as one lap on his bed and I put a turkey baster into his crushed bleeding snout. One of his legs was broken in half, his neck torn open and pink. He looked up into my eyes as his breath slowed then stopped.

It was humid the next Memorial Weekend. The in-laws' boat was weighted down with family so that the pontoons were unseen. My knee was in a brace. It was night. The moon was there for a second. Cloudbanks closed, masked it, and pulled the light a ways over the lake into the bluffs.

My wife looked like a cherry teen in her two-piece and the aunts commented. The uncles put hamburgers onto a little grill and cheered when flames ignited the dripping meat juice.

My wife's mother led me to the rear of the boat into the gurgling of the outboard and asked me why God chose me for her only daughter.

The boat wake formed a gentle ridge that curved away into the nothing of the dark water. My

wife's mother went on speaking, her voice the same tone as the motor. I took off the knee brace and I leapt.

In the Sunday paper, a few months after my second wife was gone, a game system to plug into a TV was advertised. I drove to the store, pulled one from a pyramid of identical boxes and took it home. It felt like a step. My favorite game was the one where you circumnavigate the earth to save the princess. The Straights of Magellan were treacherous and unconquerable, but fuck it. I have never really wanted what isn't real.

During sunsets I reclined in the dirt mounds that surrounded my subdivision. The repeating wood shingle roofs looked like long piles of pennies in the orange light. My neighbors jogged the sidewalks in sharp colors as their children rode wheelies on freestyle bikes.

En route to my mailbox, or while I attached an oscillating sprinkler to a hose in my yard, a neighbor would ask if I was available for introduction to a friend or sister. They said that my nice house needed a nice wife again. They could see my house with the same monolithic garage doors as theirs. I took all that they gave me. I felt real love.

Abductions

My fourth wife is elated at everything moving over the floorboards as I try to see my life for you, building machines and kicking them to move. She never stops moving. She drives a red car and will until she is buried in one. Her skin turns pink in the winter as she sketches plans for machines that will someday carry us around our house. She is her own beautiful industry. She built a machine that did her hair. She built a machine that acted like a baby. She built a machine she said could bury the dead and no one would ever see. She built a machine that she thought could be like me. When we passed the bread between our mouths between the two garage doors it was like separating flesh. It tasted like meat. I didn't like that type of thing.

My mother once said my second wife had been pulled from a frieze. I know what that means now. She had been. She was brought down to give the world a specific reflected light. She was wet marble laid over our bed after a shower. Sometimes still I want to be licking her as I'm licking off the decals on my fourth wife's sex machines.

My fourth wife walks over the floors of our house so lightly. She has these long feet that never touch the floors with the heels. She makes machines that are always laughing. Sometimes I really want my second wife to see.

Sometimes the basement windows are so mean to me. When you are Number One you are a squirting stream. Outside I feel real. Outside the weather I see happens just as I see it. I see it and so it happens. The clouds build on both sides of my eyes. This means little to me in the whole scheme. I have to breathe and eat.

I had a place for the weather when I talked to my dads. I could move all their heads to the sky. They all raised me as their own, each had their mouths. But they have all died, or maybe they haven't. Maybe they all play pool together, a great council of fathers, tiny joking Republicans getting gay in the center. I stopped caring for them when I saw my mother dropped from a plane into a lake. It is the way everyone should see their mother die if they ever want to really feel. My mother broke her life so I could walk around and be free. She would have made a country ham from her own leg if there had been nothing for me to eat.

My mom called. My new dad was gone. It was just her and her new babies. But another man wanted to meet me. She wanted me to meet him.

The man was cutoff jeans and tanned backs of strong legs atop a ladder bending over my mom's driveway leaned between the eyes of her house. He slid down the ladder. He had a dripping cloth in his

mouth. The cloth dropped to the concrete. His mouth said, "I'm your new dad."

My new dad put my mom, her babies and me in a car. There was a fruity smell in the air. Clouds were drier sheets. There was a drawing of a man's face in the sky instead of the sun. We ascended an entry ramp to Interstate.

My new dad turned up the radio. He said he loved to dance wrapped in a feeling. My mom said to me, "can you believe this is happening, you're going to run again, I never really believe anything, because how can anyone, really?" I held five lit cigarettes between two fingers. The suburbs were sparkling leaves on trees. My new dad pulled my old track spikes out from under his seat. His face was a baking pie like he could have died and been fine with it.

Stadium lights rose over a line of trees. A bare wood sign was hung from a tractor chain between two limestone posts standing in an arrangement of Pampas grass and Japanese Barberry. The sign read, THE NEW ROLF, in hand-carved letters filled in with white. We drove through the trees into the car-packed plain of the parking lot.

The track was moving with wiry young men high-kneeing over the football field within the track foaming their shorts with nerves. I could have broken their careers if I had been my true self. They wouldn't have even been close enough to see me screaming across the line. They were all white, like me. It wouldn't have been good for them.

My mom went into the stands with her babies. So many people with good teeth grabbed my triceps and turned me. That is the way it has always been done. I didn't have a church then, but I had God's chest under a two-by-four shoe.

The stands were full of people bent over at the waist trying to snap their own necks. My old preparation music was on the PA. This was all for me, as everything has always been. Rivers of root beer, everyone I know is always pulling for me so hard.

I didn't run. I couldn't have. It didn't make sense. I had a big beard. I had on jeans. I didn't have my legs. I didn't have my lungs. I had my mind. The meet went on without me.

I walked beside the track like a parade float. My new dad walked beside me eating his bottom lip with my old track spikes tied together around his neck.

We went to the bathroom and pissed in a trough. "It's the saddest thing," my new dad began, but he didn't have time to finish. Footsteps moved into the room. We were blindfolded from behind. Everyone is always going so hard for me.

"Do you ever hold your heart so deep inside your chest it doesn't seem to beat?" my new dad said. We were blind in a big van. I watched amoebas float inside my eyes.

We were pulled from the van and thrown into a loud space, a famous barbeque place in the city. Everything was bathed in white light for a while. The place was packed with whites and blacks of all sizes. My new dad had tears in eyes. He didn't know this was what it is like to be me, just breathing as it comes, free, all on the house.

My mom wasn't there. She was still in the stands with her babies, waiting for me to warm up on the football field. This image of her waiting for nothing is sometimes all I really know now. I never saw my mom again. She was taken. Many people saw. Her babies tore at a man's legs as he put our mom into a minivan. She was dropped from a plane into a lake. There is shaky amateur footage of a distant object falling fast into grainy water. It could have been part of a movie.

I could have put on my spikes and run. I could have beaten those young boys to death and made their mothers dream. I'm well-rounded. I can do anything, but I didn't. My mom's babies went away to live with their dad in a town attached to another city. I love my mom so much I would make her babies into dead ones just to see her breathing again, even from a distance, even floating, just a little alive, about to fill with water and sink. But I wouldn't. I won't. That is not the me I know. I went to college. I went some more. I don't believe anything. I am your Hometown Optometrist. I am on the side of life.

RIGHT SOLVENTS GROUP ROOM

People are placed in front of you each place you turn, Fort Lauderdale. They all have these faces. They move their bodies. They each have their ways. The wind trims around each moment. The world is full of specifics.

We are given so much. We do what we can do and build what we can with what we are given. We line up in lines and look at the other faces and sniff smells and our tips get wet.

Breaths push from faces and put down a stakes in space. Lines cannot help but be drawn from face to stake. That is what we do. It is "what is done". We find shapes. We make pup tents like a dream.

But there are some faces that give breaths that will not make shapes. They push out, stake down, then fly up and stake down again. Lines cannot be drawn at that pace. The faces burn with specific light. We suck air. We take a knee. We see new gods in the shapelessness.

When you are finally alone at night you put your face in your hands and remember your day. All you can see are the lines that couldn't be made. You look for all the mistakes.

You are not alone in this. You are not alone at all. You feel the cheek of a stranger's face go into your chest and you watch it mash into your fabrics as it moves up to your neck to pass breath under your jaw. Who is it? Who knows? When you wake up the in the morning the breath smells terrible and the face goes all over you.

I have a new god now. Why not? It runs across the sky when it thunders. I've seen it. I've heard it speak. It tells us each day is a specific adorable bunny. When each day ends a hoof comes down and the bunny is killed.

Hotel Legs

I'd num on those for a little second. I like those legs. The legs look nice in the light of this atrium at night. I like this wine.

That big bent-over palm tree behind the legs is lonely under the atrium glass without a wing to hide its head under, poor thing. It has a light strapped low on the trunk shooting light up into the fronds.

The legs look right with the arc of the palm. The legs are short little hinged animal soft parts shifting a delicate load and rotating a face. I have loved so many faces. Faces have always been so kind to me. This face rotating above the legs rotates more slowly now. It pauses to show me kindness and turns away shy. I love faces. I love this face. This dim light does everything to it.

There are always atriums in these towers. There are always displaced trees. There are always legs and faces. I always move forward and the bodies pile around me. Loneliness must be a bad dream.

I have loved so many trees as friends and grandparents, but never ones stuck in atriums. They are weak people that can't go outside. This palm is maybe dead, but it is real. There is at least a potted palm attached to the top of a dead trunk. It is alive at least in part. Maybe a tree alone under atrium glass grows loneliness. Maybe loneliness rises from a rootball buried under the floor sending out tendrils to feel the movement of this place. I can't tell. I will dig someday. I have time.

People can't relax under their needs. They want to lie down on their stomachs with someone kneeling at the bottoms of their feet. Two thumb-tips placed together in the shape of an upward arrow put gently into a calf muscle and pulled downward through the Achilles tendon gives a body release. I have said this to thousands in rooms with so many names.

Faces have always shown me the things I need to see with smiles that last too long. I was once just one child in the white center of a nation. But that's not true. I have always been everything. I just have to show up.

There is a moth drowning in my glass of wine. A moth soaked in any liquid will never again be truly free, but I will help one try every time. Moth wing powder in a glass of wine can make a moist moment of friendship, an eagle and hawk facing one another with glacial lakes for eyes on a map on a maritime hotel wall.

A glass of wine with moth wing powder in it is a story to share. I like to cry in unison with certain faces

in disbelief of our mutual beauty while giving and receiving breaths. A moth soaked in liquid will never make it far, but will always try until it dies. A creature sacrifice not honored annihilates the life. Fuck to Hell anyone who wouldn't want to try.

I have killed so many animals during my life with bullets and poisoning and suffocation and bludgeoning. I was never at fault. I was learning how to do it. Being me honors what they were. I feel every life I have taken and take it within me. I use everything I see. I watch my hand move a pen over the skin of warm white women laid out willing as sheets.

ROOM 21022

When I see certain people I want to cry even if they are in my mind. There are faces I see with such asymmetry. They are one thing from one side and another from the other. They pull in light and throw it back. These faces I see throw a light no one else can see. They are so kind to me. They raise me from weakness. If I could eat them all I would and feel so bad. I can't, so I study one face until it is relieved to feel me breathing against it. I can always find a new life. I have a flag inside of me that cracks. It puts me in a spirit anyone can smell. Smell it.

There are few people I have ever really felt even if I was inside them. I can really only feel when I am outside under a sky. There have been times buried in blankets in a bedroom where space had no meaning. I don't see it as a crime to watch TV cuddled in blankets in a bed at night, but when you do there are often diseased children dying, detail frames of their bloated faces feeling such frustrated pain, but it is always a comedy. When anyone is cuddled naked with another under blankets after exploring all the good holes everything is funny. When under a sky, in tall grass, stretching necks and lifting arms, touching it all, all up into it—[Feeling is two smiles slitting across two faces at once to bump teeth once in disbelief that anything is real,]—there is nothing dying. Me, I love life.

Dunes and Forest in Black Ink on Six White Women's Warm Backs

I don't know what you think I am but we all make mistakes. I am not two breasted blondes camping nude with a cooler. I am alive and naked but not a screamer. I am a good tent, love the night, butcher my kills, let my balls hang. You are both going to have to take your hands off me, at least for a moment, back up.

I would never intentionally drive that yellow car you must have seen parked lonely at the lookout tower. It's a rental, wasn't a choice. I am not even from the state on the plates. I am from a state like your state, an almost rectangle. But it doesn't have all these trees. And its hills are made of old sea beds, not this sand. I might know a handgun. Look at me with my dick out with the sun down. I was checking for ticks when you two attacked. Those were my nudist movements when the sun was setting, what a state.

I don't know what I looked like through your four eyes, exactly, as you plotted. My bending must have shown some stuff to see, must have been backlit. I don't know what I look like to you now in this dim. Your four eyes move with such a trashing in the light of that little moon up there. You thought you had such a fun plan, a story to make. Now you can't settle on a focus. This nature lit diet

nut cluster somehow stopped you, for now, with words, until until. You don't know what to do with me, not sure what you could. You are both quite tall, have size, corn puffs, real men, big boys. But if I climb up your heights and tear the heads off your necks you will both be the same size as Rolf.

We all make mistakes and we can leave it at that. I am a big laughter. You can really never know the lengths I am willing to go for myself. But I am also willing to find some lengths for you here in your home state. I had planned on being out here alone. But I will sacrifice the quiet in these sand dunes for you, proud brothers. I don't run a traditional service.

I have a story to tell. You may have heard a certain version, but mine is about me and was on television. Come with me to my campfire. Let's do this for real. You stoke the fire a while, add a log. I will pinch this tricky shirt button into the hole, feel on my ribs, put on some pants. I want to really get involved in this. Let's get really involved in this.

I was a child. I had good friends. We planned a movement. A movement of movement, constant movement, athletics for athletics, without games or competition. We could have had campaigns, billboards, tan skin, radio spots: *There Is No Such Thing As A Winner Only Fun*. We could have rolled through store doors in a unified ball and taken over strip malls, always moving. But they all moved away.

Before I knew exactly what sex was I called it moving around. It was what I could glean from televisions. I thought a lot of entering a moving around competition with one my kindergarten classmates. She has the face of my second grade teacher when I think of her now, no name, mouth severe, a gun stuck under my chin.

My second grade teacher would leave the classroom to leave us hanging in an honor code of silence that would never last. The class would fall into a momentum of fun until she broke down the door to scream about what happens in prisons. That dumb room except for the windows. That low apex of a hill reclining in tall grass beyond the soccer field, feral dogs blurred, sonic booms, a moving around competition held in the school, every classroom full of cots, banners of unending lengths flowing below the drop ceiling, my second grade teacher's head on my kindergarten classmate's body spot lit beside me on a cot among the dim silhouettes of hundreds of other humps, the floor plan of the school moving with banners, immeasurable lengths, sky holes, strobes. I knew the two of us would win with our movements. I knew the win would feel like climbing up and sliding down a steel pole and getting a trophy taller than the two of us stacked as a tower.

That would make them laugh. My good friends. That story. That was a story about why I am me. They loved my words, all of them. They used to put me on their shoulders and hold me in a sunrise. They always said I was perfect in every way.

When this was on television, when music played, it meant commercials were coming. It was all very obvious.

Right now would have been one of those points. Music played. Commercials came then went away.

There was a sky. There were very few trees. I was alone, shown as a man, looking at the trees. When there are very few trees trees can be your friends. One tree will grow on you and become your

best. If it is evergreen it is a friend that will never die. Take a woman into it. Put her bottom on a branch. Hold her face in your hands. Kiss her closed eyelids. She is a little sweetie. Two-waying on a woman with a tree is less uncomfortable than with a man with painted-on ab definition. A tree participates as furniture. And a woman that loves the two-way is not a little sweetie, will never want to become a wife, at least not again.

A little sweetie loves when you straddle her to sit on her ass to draw on her back with a tiny tipped pen, your legs in an M, your mouth burning hers, sipping coffee, Sunday mornings. A little sweetie reads for herself but to you aloud, a pillow under her Vs of arms and compressed breasts, until the drawing is full of leafy detail, landscapes sprawled, built structures bent slightly in the soft grades of concavities, until she rolls over under your straddle, puts the pillow under the small of her back, moves your pen to the nipple that always seems to get attention first. A little sweetie loves a sunny world drawn on each nipple, smooth dunes spread over an implied sphere. You put your best eye into it, attend to each move of the pen, the tiniest leak of ink controlled. When on the second nipple, the dunes just blowing in, a little sweetie always becomes impatient, gets squirmy under your straddle, squinches her nose, convulses in little smiles. A little sweetie will throw a pen across a room and give you the best words in the wettest sound you've ever heard, centipedes devouring to skeletons anything she once thought was love. You will never find a little sweetie double-grip pumping two dongs she spit on. This is This day and age. God's not dead. He refills us with blood when we sleep. He drums up our sports. He gives us choices. He shows us a winner in the center and a slapped child crying in a corner learning to hate.

When this was on television, this was another point where music played. Commercials came. It is all on tape.

I was a child until life was sped up, illustrated in part by grass growing up through sand until it was hands waving at trees. The hands were then seen to be waving at a fast growing me.

I grew smooth into a bipedal greyhound, climbed around in mirrored towers in a tie. My face pushed like cream from a tube into rooms, then my suit, then my job. I put my nose into eyes. I poked buttons. I put suction cups into eye sockets. I looked serious reflected in flickering screens showing pupils dilate, capillaries swell.

The hands were then seen to be clapping, following me through halls, applauding even my peeing. I could not have known I had come to embody a polite community's white racial pride, allowing it to be ostentatious behind spirited facepaint masks. I was always trying to look black. The hands were then seen to be opening hearts, spigots of blood.

It's not that I would seek to open hearts, it's just I did it so easily. Chests opened when I moved into a room. First, of course, shirts opened first, then the chests, for a display bursting and free. Most were women. But some were men wanting to bleed all over me wanting to be me. Tractors of men rolling over the land in bright big shirts of love. All their eyes all over my tongue. Fathers without real buddies holding on tight to what they thought was in their blood, moist at their openings. They would have opened my pants, but there was no need.

The opening of my pants I left up to the women, the ones with hearts spraying hardest from the shiniest wounds. I never understood why there were so many. I put a clip on my lips and let life unfold.

But I did have my ways. I preferred my pants opened rather than off completely, a bad image, the zipper as an explosive laurel for the lengthening. God could be shot for allowing such a possibility. But what of visuals when it's all about feeling?

As for the pants of the spraying hearts I hoped they were skirts. But if not I also enjoyed sliding pants, jeans preferably, down, sitting in chair while doing it, messing with zippers, grasping calves, circling the belly button with my nose. How could I refuse the relentlessness and variety? Once I tried and there were tragedies on the news, me sucking on a pen feeling like nothing. Skirts I preferred as I enjoyed the ease of it, at least the possibility of ease. I didn't want ease, just the possibility. But mostly I enjoyed the cooperation of my hands and eyes when a shirt was opened, a heart spraying, a woman telling me what they imagined I was like as a child.

When this was on television, music came, commercials came, families, grass stains, eating came, then went away.

I was a small child, no memories. Then there was a rat terrier named Jeff. He was a dog-faced jackrabbit with a head clicking on a swivel, tearing apart a procession of possums that was advancing from tall grass into scraped ground that was to be a yard. My real dad was high on a ladder attaching colonial columns to the shed that was to be his house. There was the sky.

Two saplings, the only trees, bent in a wind. Jeff yelled as he tore at the possums backs, rolled, gave them a look. But they didn't want to die. They just kept coming. There was a leader. It walked up to me, smiling hissing static, the procession following. My real dad came over to shadow. He said the

possums were sick. He said I had a job to do. Other men appeared. They began to clap. My real dad said to use my heel.

When I finished the sky was orange. My real dad and the other men were drinking yellow cans and smoking in the black shade of the house. My real dad put me on his lap. He put his face into the top of my head. The shade of the house turned all the men's faces featureless. Cigarette tracers coursed bad spirals.

My real dad pulled me from the bean bag that was my bed, had my arm at the pit. Tall grass cut at me. We came to a creek. There were beavers moving. My real dad held me over his head. There was no sound. There was more tall grass. My real dad pulled me through it. There were lights in the sky. There was a grain truck. My real dad rolled me under it. I kept my face in folded grass. There was no sound.

There was no sound until there was a woman. She pulled me out from under the truck, tall grass folding. She had on these long basketball socks full of calves, white and stripes. Her face was too far away to see. She lowered to lay with me. She had this warm body that touched mine. She had this sweet smell. She had this mouth in my ear that told me I would always be better than anyone I would ever know.

When this was on television, again music came. But the commercials did not come straightaway. I stayed.

I was alone, shown as a man, digging in sand. There were very few trees. There were grassed

over dunes, one worked as a quarter-oval low on the screen. A vapor trail grew from behind it to mask a thin line of sky. Life was sped up, the sun put down, a little moon lit, a campfire, the cauliflowers of stars. I was at the top of one of the trees holding a burning log in one hand. The dunes were on fire, all of the other trees. I moved the log over my head throwing embers. The tree pulled from the sand as if rising from a squat and carried me over the dunes toward my home.

Look. Now you are clapping and you will never stop.

I Laid a Ladder Beside My Home

Dirt mounds move. One backhoe scoop causes a conical one to squat. Men scream over the general explosives of the machinery but it doesn't last. The gorilla face of the sun moves around the sky.

If there were a shade tree in this place to sit under there would to have be two. Such is the summer in this place, my home, a place of young trunks, a scarcity of leaves, oaks are slow, all species are about the same. There are no trees in the dirt mounds and no one wants them there. Not even me, face peeling, raw areas, trouble spots. If you put your hand under dirt to notice the cool what else do you notice?

Who are you? I notice I do not feel fast. I am not taller than a partially built tower.

Can it be said the same desires that impelled the building of Jerusalem or Athens or Florence are at work in this place? The deliberateness of it, the weak necessity, the immaturity of its trees. It is a place. That much is an embarrassment to question. We can go back to the beginnings, watch the earthmover processions, whites fleeing farms and black cities, rural areas leveled, laid dynamite, stacks of concrete cylinders, bedrooms, master baths, half-baths. But what would be the cause?

Here, in this place, my former home, my home now, unrecognizable, is perspective ultimately possible when what is to be won is unwon and celebrating like guns waving near an exit ramp to keep you away? This is a place of disappearance despite the signage of steel cursive bolted to queen beds of limestone. Never mind the neocolonial church campuses scraping upland grass for a moment. This place was once a place of creeks of crawdads and leeches, teens tonguing holes in unfinished houses. Me, me, me, me, my, mine.

My return to this place was supposed to have been an age of healthy perspective having won what was to be won, tethering you by bungee to a fast car, training you up. That is what the TV said. That is where the TV movie ended, me and you, my big son, and a new car on a holy plain. I had to make the rest.

When I stick a finger into a dirt mound and move it around I can be in frozen underwear, dying on a ladder spanning a crevasse, dreaming I had never started to climb a partially built tower made into the highest mountain on Earth. I can do anything. I am always me.

When sitting in the soft lap of a dirt mound, when the gorilla face of the sun drops beyond the unseen Interstate, the backhoes are put to sleep. The east grows polluted with the light of the distant city and the crowns of the high horse weed. Cranes hoist trailer-mounted generators and leave them to swing for the night. Spines of roofs repeat south into cropland.

Release down the mound on a little avalanche. The music during descent is inappropriate with bubbling synths. Carry love like a bee to bulge the calves, vein the quads, stretch the hams. When I go home to our house the front door is always locked. I unlock the door and my fourth wife locks the master bath door and steam comes from under it. But there is another way to get into our house I want to try. I laid a ladder under the master bath window.

Ever-Coming Love

My second wife's legs kick the air over my desk. I cannot write my birth. She moves her mouth, I never hear what she says. When she was full-size she was always self-aware. Now she just leans back on her hands and scans over me. I want to put her in my pocket and get on a missile. When she was full-size I would press my face into her neck and imagine what it was like to be lonely. Her neck is now so small it barely catches the lamp light when she looks at me then looks away.

My second wife believed immaterial things held meaning. When she was full-size I would put in a tape and take off my shirt. The TV would push out giggles and little screams looped in a fast beat. She would look at the TV and see me covered in oil sliding over a length of yellow plastic toward an oiled pile of women's mouths and bodies. It wasn't really me, it was the TV movie, but these were things that had happened to me and I liked to moisten my eyes. She didn't yet know she could never really be me.

When she could see she could never be me she gave me some face I had never seen. I gave her the face I wanted her to see. She pivoted her hip on the arm of our couch and dislocated my kneecap

with a straight long leg. Saxophones over a warm beach. I was free.

There was a time I tried to show my second wife my life without her. My second wife didn't want to see, or maybe she did. She cupped her hands around her mouth. I couldn't hear what she said. She might have been afraid of me when my two fingers descended on her. She was just this little thing. There was little warmth between my fingertips. I carried her upstairs and pushed her legs into the watch pocket of my jeans. She cupped her hands over her mouth again. My fourth wife could be heard in the kitchen. I wanted my second wife to see how she moved, her machinery, how her face had a constant look of belief. I moved carefully.

My fourth wife was on her toes taking from the oven a Sunday roast that smelled like the one spot on the neck of a woman that breaks the mind. Her legs had heart below the backs of her knees. She turned and gave me her face and passed a finger behind her ear. She put me gently into a chair at the table. I couldn't hear the little bones snapping inside my watch pocket. There was nothing to hear under the smell.

My fourth wife and I ate the whole roast and took each other to the floor. Her eyes said I was all that she could see. I have always wished I could lie.

We kept it naked all day, passing the lasso, pounding tongues. I became tired. I wanted to watch my life for a while. I put in the TV movie and tan women ate mangos from my lap in competition. My fourth wife said she could make a machine that would pull out her eyes and everyone would think it was me. I told her I never pulled out both. Nothing can seem like me. She fell asleep clutching a patterned pillow that said, *I'm a little girl that loves hearts and heels.*

I love so powerfully when I can feel someone really loves me. I have seen so many people asleep beside me. I have looked into faces and made them dream. I have watched so many pillows torn from their cases as if I were being gutted in a street.

My second wife came back. She was in the basement the next time I sat at my desk. She wore a little back-brace for a while and tape on her knees. She healed, leaned back on her hands and kicked so cool.

Have you ever fallen to your knees in a sweetness? Have you ever taken your fist and shoved it between your teeth and let it rest? Have you ever wanted to throw a person into a sunset just to watch that person eat a quiet meal alone? Have you ever looked up from birds pecking at your wife and children's graves to see a person locked in prayer on your face and it takes a moment for that person to pull from the lock of your face, and in that moment you just have to pray to that person's face, lock, then you want to eat that face, eat it without a fork, because the face is just this face, locked on your face, this face you've never seen, nothing like it. You had never wanted to eat a face. You had never wanted to wipe your face over another face as you ate it. You had never wanted another face to eat your face. You had never wanted another face to wipe over your face as it ate your face. You had never wanted such things. And then you did. And then that was the end of everything that came before this wanting. Nothing was left except some mist.

DIE ZUGSPITZE TOWERTOP LOUNGE

I want to touch your eyes, Seattle. I want to be more than I am. I want to rise to the sky in a crest of falcons' wings. I want to be your hometown. I'm not afraid of small towns, but I am afraid of their people. I want my town to be bigger. A big egg spread over your bed. I want to hand down the sunshine to you on a nice set of sheets, strategic pillows, streetscapes, mounded comforters on the floor. I don't want two slim handed women rubbing my feet after walking my new streets. I want one with no hands to touch my neck when I least expect it. But I want all of you on top of sheets so we can watch one another unfold. I'm not having fun unless you are having fun, a beach ball on the bed, men's legs, a steady base. I can really let out a laugh. I can be your home and up inside you. The way I tickle never leaves a bruise. I want to fall in love with you in a tent near my town lake in a storm. I am your hometown, a caring cabin in the snow repeated in a pattern. Model home banners flapping behind traffic noise berms. Prairie creeks crowded with little friends, creatures sounding, scaled, furred. And look: patriot teens at night in front of headlights: being white, raw dog, real gripping stuff.

Picture a Teen Made of Space

There is nothing symbolic in this story. It is just that it begins in my nation's capital.

There was a teen in line waiting to buy a souvenir t-shirt in that restaurant where everyone wanted to buy a souvenir t-shirt from back in the Days of Thunder. It was me.

How do you see yourself when you look back at your life? Do you see yourself, how you bent your limbs, how your shorts moved up your legs when you walked, squatted, sat down? What did the light do to you back then, really? Can you see that?

I felt myself then in my nation's capital to be made of negative space. But who is a void? I had a specific hairdo held in place by spray, Umbros moving up and down my frog legs, braces over my teeth, a souvenir burger in my belly. But I must have been little more. I was. I was everything. I know that now.

Now I can see my life and all the light it was bathed in. The action that happened in my nation's capital was so close I could smell the woman, then the man, their colognes and breaths. The movement of their bodies whipped up little winds over me. I smell the action still when I see certain women with certain men. Little winds move over me and I fill with myself.

If you would have seen me in that line waiting for a t-shirt that day from at least a few feet away

you would have seen me made up of the space between the man and the woman. It would have been a specific picture in your mind until you died. Not because of me, the man and the woman, or all three of us standing in a line among others along a wood bannister protecting us from falling into a staircase, at the bottom of which was a windowless wood door, nupe, naw, no, it is that you would see yourself in line doing what you would do in that scene.

I was not a child too tiny to be seen lost in a planned Baroque city of monuments and history days waiting in line to buy a t-shirt. That is not why the man and the woman made this scene around me that day. I wasn't full grown, but long muscled enough to pull apart a man's fingers. Hair was colonizing under my shorts for sure. I was one of those pieces of America with acne sideburns doubling over in frightened laughter when I could just to find some space within the loudness of the social creature.

But I didn't laugh or move as the woman and the man moved in to make me in negative space. The woman's profile was just below my left eye. I had then just wanted to buy a t-shirt. Now I just want her to hold me down and look at me. She didn't look at me that day. She had these short legs. She never took her eyes off the man's. He was a big collegiate boy with the white face of the time. He was taller than me then but wouldn't be now. He could have thrown me over the bannister into the staircase. He could have pulled out my intestines and choked me with them and his would have been the last face I would have seen. He had the woman's arm. He wore no expression. He showed no teeth. He jerked at her arm like milking. The nylon jacket sleeve around his arm made sounds and sent little winds at me. He never saw me. He just looked into the woman's eyes until he released her arm. He looked down to her middle expressionless. He grasped her ass with one hand and lifted a cheek, held it in place for a

couple counts. The woman slapped him across the face like in an old movie except her face didn't change expression. Nor did his. And there was no pause to watch them in a charged moment. He just pulled her quickly by the arm down the staircase and through the door. She went so easily. She didn't miss a step. When the door made the closing sound I searched the other faces in the line. They had seen the scene. I looked to the adults in line to lead us all to the next horizon. Their faces started flipping back to the retail experience. The door was down there, the finish was weak, little slivers of veneer were pulling up under a soft yellow light from a bulb hung in a cage above the doorframe. The door never cracked again. There was no charge in the air. No one else went down the stairway.

For years after I thought that it had been an experiment to see what a line of people would do with that type of scene, a scientific study, a TV special, TV's America, cologne, a man, a woman, little about it was convincing beyond it happening. I didn't know what the scene was while in my nation's capital waiting in line to buy a t-shirt. I know now it wasn't a real event. I know now it had been designed specifically for me. It was a scene that gave me choices. It showed me how I would always be. It built so much of what I would become.

I bought a t-shirt. I walked onto a plane with my teachers and classmates. I was dropped at home. My mom wasn't there. There was a drawing of a man on the front door. I put on the t-shirt and went to a movie with my friends.

I met a tall legged girl after the movie. She asked about my t-shirt. She pulled at my arm and moved me toward a door. My real humanity began then and has always stayed steady. So many people I meet pull me by the arm into dark spaces behind doors and I go so easily. But when they get me alone behind the door I am the one lifting the cheek. No one considers how much I want. They just know

what I will do. So many people I meet just want me to be me.

My Third Wife

It was wild happenstance that we were able to discover one another despite the miles between our homes. She would call with cool talk of epiphanic embraces and comfortable nudity in flattering shadows, just us, no wants. But it was mostly the soft hum of jet liner tubes, me alone with mini-pretzels and Sprite. So we married and she moved to my town.

She was a young, tall, well-muscled white woman in a young white town with a perfect white man. We bought a new house on a new street. We moved in all our shit. My hometown rejoiced. This was the new America.

The skeleton of an office tower rose around a concrete elevator shaft near the Interstate. The top of it, a hollow pyramid sheathed in sheets of copper and capped with a smaller pyramid holding a flag-less pole, could be seen in the distance over ranges of dirt mounds and spinal rows of house roofs, from atop a dirt mound just beyond the sodded yard of our new house.

Excavators were eating out holes in blank land as my wife and I sat in the soft lap of the dirt mound, a nimbus of insects around our heads. The ranges of mounds and spines of roofs spread over

the blank land. We were bitten by flies and lit by the sun. We were married, but life was mostly the same. I still had to fly away. We still got welts on our skin, still had to sleep and eat. We thought somehow it would be different. But life is a ghost train piloted by cockroaches. You pull matter from your eye and realize it's a worm.

The gorilla face of the sun moved around in the sky. Oo Oo Ah Ah. My wife stuck her finger into the dirt mound and said it was cool. I watched a conical dirt mound grow. An excavator swung its arm into it and made the shape complex. No one in the young white town believed us when we said we were really just the white center of a nation, like them, just really tan, well-muscled, pretty-assed, diamonds. The town wanted what it wanted.

My wife made friends in the city as I claimed it for my practice. She liked her heavy athletic form within the precise facial hair of tiny active men. When I was first introduced to her friends I pulled confidently at their arms until a shake was realized. They were whip-necked and wiry, little powerful athletes with only master's degrees and tattoos commemorating mountaineering expeditions. The handshakes they returned tried to tear my tendons from knuckle to shoulder just slightly, their eyes filled with a light that explained they thought I could not hang. They always called me Doctor. They always bragged that they were poor. They didn't know how much I wanted to hold their eyes.

My wife and I would sit slightly separated from her friends. It was the way I liked it, though more distance would have been ideal. Her soft skin and bulging face looked like art in the dim lighting of those places deep in the city. I would purse my lips while wrapped tight into some muted burst of feeling as sweat bubbled beautifully under her soft chin. She would say she had to use the toilet and I would grasp for her slippery disappearing arm.

To steady myself in the arrangement of men I would turn slightly to her friends. They spoke a guttural slang among themselves and got into unspoken flexing contests as they passed appetizer plates around the table. Kissy lips often dried on their faces, not knowing how easy it is to cry over a lost eye. They would go all hangdog and sigh, purr. She had told them my affliction was that I was too good for her. To her it was something to be celebrated.

She would return with clear drinks and wet hands. I enjoyed following her large twisting frame. But when she turned away to her friends I dematerialized into a mean heap and thought about their eyes rolling, moist ball bearings in my palm.

Her friends were flexible with long discussions and competitive segues. They were on and on until one of them raised both arms and sent the others into stinging reflection. I always imagined the crotches of their pants were in constant conflict behind zippers. Me, me, my, mine is always ready.

Alone my wife wore me into a dangling rope until I was a dull nub. She gave my fall into flaccidity importance when she spoke of it. She once cupped a wooly worm in her hands and chanted what she said was a thankful chant. She often spoke of flattening desire with breathing exercises and laxative teas. She had only small successes. She liked to put lotion on my feet and work her way up.

We went away for a weekend. We set up a tent by a lake. Wind folded the tent over us in the night. The lake was unseen until lightning showed it churning and white. We got out of the tent and the wind took it into the sky over the lake.

We drove out of the clouds. The wind died. The sun was coming up. The landscape was straight lines, slight wooded depressions and thin blinking towers. The sun angled through the windshield to make my wife's face glow golden. The highway curved onto flat uplands bounded by hedgerows. Itchy

rectangles. The sky a ropy ceiling. Hawks on fence posts. Small flocks of birds diving in and out of tall ditch grass. Scrub cedar crowding the meadows.

The land sagged toward a slow river. My inner ears compressed. Real flags were wired to oncoming truck grills. A wounded rabbit convulsed toward a ditch. Giant slow moving sedans, power steering. My wife ground her head into the window and closed her eyes. Low clouds stacked on prairie. A localized numbing formed in my abdomen. I stuck a stuck a fingernail into it and dug. The highway ascended and coursed between two timbered bread loaf hills. Welcome to Missouri and the light was sucked from the sky.

My wife's face went behind her hair. A procession of filthy dump trucks shook the car in waves. My wife ground her head into the window. The highway carved into an engineered canyon and dropped deep into a bowl. The hills were indistinguishable from the air. The highway fell under a rusted railroad bridge. My wife was making a squeaking sound. A creek roared under the car then the highway ascended into thickness. I kept digging into my abdomen, using other nails. The numb released into a sharp little burst that flowed.

A yellowish rectangle bled through the air. A faint toothless man's face was above a mule kicking a jug. Another rectangle bled through. Two giant smiling faces, a woman and man, book-ended a parade of smiling children riding on the backs of sheep. I pulled the car into a steep hollow.

A deserted gift shop village of log cabins sat below a severe forested cliff, hundreds of broken birdhouses hung in the trees. I watched blood drip from my nails. My wife opened her eyes and looked at my nails and then she was out of the car and running and I was running after her as she went into the trees. Sometimes I feel like a terrier with a man's hands dripping blood from the nails.

In our living room my wife would see my beauty as affliction as she eased out of her large dresses. She had these exercises she said would cure me, even us, level out our lie. We were supposed to just sit naked and synchronize our breathing, but her form made me lunge then pant things into her regularly candled ears, cup her big chest in my hands on the couch and get melty as her chanting failed. She would break into pieces to work on me until I was on my back buried in cushions and she was bent over the sink, scouring pad to wok, mouth crumbling great snacks.

She said I possessed a shy intensity once as she put my carry-on bag strap over my shoulder and pushed me gently into a terminal. She got into her car and broke toward the city.

She often said that her friends were amazing, but not in the way I was amazing. Sometimes still I want their eyes.

I came home from the airport just in time to watch my wife walk into the dirt mounds behind our house and into the spines of roofs. I followed. She picnicked alone in the bleachers of an empty softball diamond. She pressed her cheek into the asphalt of a new road. She stuck her head in a clean storm sewer. She went back home.

I sat in the dirt mounds alone and watched the light fade. Life was the same in this place as it was in every place. It was better than having bees in your mouth. I wondered, if I descended the dirt mound and went into the house and found my wife in bed, if a baby could made. She could have been watching TV and eating, but she was lotioning her legs.

A baby was made.

Each gangway walk I prepared for a larger her. She kept growing. Each facet of her: appetite, form, sadness. She started knocking over coffee drinks from café tables and statuettes at the city flea markets she took me to. She stopped picking me up at the airport.

“Just when I can’t stand it anymore you arrive,” she said once as I stepped off the shuttle van. I warmed with a smile and she went to one knee to weep gently over her big belly. I wanted to tell her to keep growing until the land was only her soft mass, it was what I could see. I learned though that she would tear apart at such reinforcements of her expansion. She hated it and there was nothing to say. I just kept seal around my mouth for the most part, or I might ask her about movies we could see together. She started tearing my pants to get them off. She would work hard on me then sprint to the kitchen to jab microwave buttons.

A baby girl came. It came too soon. It was tiny. It couldn't see. It had no eyes. No one wanted to look at it. So it died.

My third wife moved out of our house. She got an apartment in a complex with a pool in a town attached to mine. She said she needed some time to swim inside God's hands alone. I kept my eyes on her skin surfaces when she would see me. She was made of folds and spheres. I wanted her to wear me like dead fox, but I have never once stopped moving.

When your town is attached to another town you can leave your town and arrive in another town at the same time. You can arrive at an apartment complex and see there is a party around the pool. You can see all types of bodies that you want to get inside. You can climb the steps to an apartment in two-by-four shoes, chunking off mud. You can hear a TV. The windows can be all lit. But you can't see inside. You can scratch at the door of the woman that called you there.

The night air was being sucked into every window and crevice of her apartment. She looked at the way her leg spilled over a chair and mentioned the striated muscling of her friends. She said she wouldn't touch herself with a triple layer of rubbers. She crawled from her dress and sat with me on the

couch.

We tried to synchronize our breathing, but her breathing was labored. She was this beautiful mass of impossible geometry. I wanted to lather into her. She was looking to her dress. I lunged. She put out a blocking pair of open hands and tugged at my earlobe twice. She rose from the couch and put on her dress. She pulled her fingers through her hair and gave me my clothes.

She said what she was going to say was going to kill her. And she went on with an uneasy presentation, thanking all me, my words, my body. She took us apart with terrible evidence as she put pins into hair and applied thick makeup.

The music around the pool became boots against her door. She was all over the room, applying deodorant, filing fingernails, lotioning legs, praising my spirit as green juice dripped from her chin.

The couch cushions shifted, lifted me to my feet. Her front door burst open with huge sound. My eyes didn't want to leave her. I wanted to burrow into her and live within her as a son, but she urged me toward the door with one bad hand as she applied scented oil to her neck with the other. I backpedaled until I found myself two floors below her door at the base of the external wood staircase.

If she would have just looked over the railing to make sure that I wasn't dead I might not have climbed the steps to her door. I might not have told her to look at herself and think about how she used to be seen. I might not have turned up the truth.

—God, I could project the party around the pool on another cloud sprayed from your face, but you were there. You know it looked like a dream. I could pull your eyes from your sockets. I could press my foot down and you wouldn't be real. You don't need to

see. But I want another cloud. I want the party. I want the bodies. I want the pool. I believe in dreams, the fact they come true. I want everything to see I am always being me. I want you to see you:

You noticed I was clean. Everyone else was covered in drinks. Women were on their toes pushing up their fruits. One was blowing a saxophone that said, feed. Most of the men were bashful in shirts, but not you, my God. Your shaved chest was all that was looking at me as you lifted it so weakly. I took off my shirt and the saxophone screamed.

Your belly button looked so deep. Do you ever dream about getting inside of it when it is full of a slushy drink? The way you held your arms out as if crucified made them look like legs squatting to take a country dump. Then you were eating from a box of saltines. You looked so happy when you looked at my feet. You said, "Look at your shoes!" Then you told everyone to look at my shoes and then you sprayed a cloud of saltines.

No one followed us when I grabbed your head and pulled you away. Was this something you had dreamed? Something you had seen on TV? Were you really God looking down at muddy two-by-four shoes as they held more beauty than you had ever seen? We all hold a sadness in our hearts. You shouldn't have put yours on me. I have never once felt someone else inside myself. I want

everything to be outside.

I can't lift my foot from your heart, but I want you to see:

The street is new and empty. There are no houses, not even fresh basement holes, just black weeds. If I pull out your eye and hold it up maybe you could see. The apartment complex is distant layered dog heads behind. Ahead are spires in the sky sticking up from something I have never seen: a partially built tower being built for just me.

It was night when my next plane lifted. I rested my forehead against the window. The city was a yellowy vaporous grid until it ended abruptly and there was only black space.

Once my third wife said, "we just fit," as she mothered me in her arms.

PATRICK HENRY BALLROOM - B

I am just like you, Arizona! I will never walk into a dark day and say, today is for fantasy, and raise the sun with my hands. I am earnest. I am not laid out on a high branch in a spotlight with my dead tongue hanging down. I am not a fucking triceratops. I am not a box of food. I don't wear five shirts, a long coat and a rope chain. I don't wear an ankle knife. I don't wear a neoprene knee brace. I don't wear sandals. I don't look like shit. I will never be a rotting corpse, will never show the signs of pressure of a very proud man with a shoulder injury keeping him out of some league. I don't shoot light from my eyes. I receive light. It is not given to me in hands. I work hard. I work hard to feel pain like someone on their last leg on their last chance for a new family. It is hard when there are so many tears rolling down faces for you. Everyone is always screaming: I am trying for you in every way! It always feels right to be touched by a tongue. But I am the number that needs to roll over and feed. There are just some things I want to eat up whole. I ache. Sometimes I cry. I am Number One. I want everyone to know that I wanted to know them all at such depth, but the variety at my heights gives me a view no one else can see. No one can be me because of the light I receive. Have you ever walked under a skinned coyote hanging in a barn by baling wire and bumped the snout with your head and had blood pour over your hair and down your face and fallen to your knees?

America

The sky was bright with low clouds reflecting the illuminated streets that fed my subdivision of homes. My third wife had moved back to her city. Frogs and insects made their respective sounds and they didn't have much time left. Backyards butted up against my backyard, where we all sat, Coyote Face, Reagan and me.

Coyote Face and I reclined on patio furniture. Reagan sat rigid-backed in his wheelchair with woolen socks on his shortened legs. His face hung. His legs had required amputation at mid-femur and his facial muscles had lost all tension. My subdivision's Neighborhood Association newsletter called him a hero because I said it was true.

Reagan blistered his hands on twisted steel tubes and endured many gym mat therapy sessions so that he could roll down my street in front of houses with his chin up toward the dirt mounds.

Turducken is a dish in which a duck is cooked inside a chicken, which is cooked inside a turkey and served in layered slabs. Coyote Face told Reagan and me about. He had eaten it at a black tie banquet. The Denver Nuggets Dance Team pelvic-thrusted through service entrances as they brought it

out on gold trays. “They shook their tits in your face when they dished it out,” Coyote Face said. “They were all coked up like they were rich, but I knew what they made.”

Reagan was silent and staring. Coyote Face and I smiled with teeth, expanded the turducken to include other birds, from ostrich to humming bird.

Slight variations of home models repeated in front of us. My backyard was striped with mower swaths until the six-foot privacy fence. There was a young tree near one fence corner, and just off the patio slab was an overturned inflatable pool shaped like a killer whale. It wasn't mine. It had blown into my yard. A peacock made sounds on a nearby rooftop. It sounded like a karate fight. Coyote Face and I expanded the turducken. Chicken, peacock, bald eagle, turkey, emu, ostrich, flying from our fun mouths. We put our smiles to Reagan. Skin was folded under his eye sockets.

A peacock landed on one of the roof peaks in front of us. It scanned the subdivision and made karate fight sounds. It would be dove season soon. The dove has symbolic importance. We stuck it inside the duck. Then the goldfinch, then the humming bird, then the bumble bee. Reagan stared into the lawn straight-backed, his face hanging down around his knees. Hunters blow doves from telephone wires. They hide in the tall grass and just wait. No dogs or decoys. You can cook their little livers and smear them on saltines. Jets exhaled above the clouds and peacocks made karate fight sounds. Coyote Face rose from his lawn chair and stretched toward the sky. He showed me his teeth and walked over to the fence, put his back to Reagan and me.

“Look at that pool, Reagan,” I said, “it looks like a whale.” He was wearing a *Headache & Pain Center* t-shirt. He could have been slithering from his chair into the killer whale and writhing on his back as he gave me his eyes.

Look. Look at the repeating rooftops. Bite your knuckles to the bone. A peacock stretches its wings against the sky. Coyote Face stayed back-turned. I overturned the killer whale pool and lay down inside. The sky was fast. The killer whale was a raft. The peacocks stopped yelling, beat their wings and passed over the yard.

The sky was cloudless and flat. There were jets are above. Coyote Face wore creatively bleached jeans and an ornate sweatshirt. He dipped his hooded head to get his long frame through the doorway and helped Reagan's wheelchair down the front porch steps. Reagan wore a sweatshirt that said *Dance Dance Dance*, a camouflage vest and a blanket over his lap. I wore a yellow slicker and followed with my metal bat.

Police in patrol cruisers made the sirens bloop bloop in the street. A middle-aged, three-piece Navy band broke into a militaristic song and marched in place on my driveway. My neighbors came from their homes in jogging suits and lined the sidewalks.

Coyote Face wheeled Reagan into the street between two cruisers. The Navy band rotated keeping their sounds on Reagan. A photographer directed us to smile. Reagan put his thumbs into the corners of his mouth, his fingers under his eyebrows and pulled his face up into a smile. The photographer lowered his camera. The Navy band slowed down a few measures then regained tempo. Coyote Face showed me his teeth. I bit one knuckle holding the metal bat.

The Navy band marched into the street, the cruiser sirens blooped once, a procession commenced down the street. The neighbors lining the sidewalks matched the pace.

Coyote Face pushed the wheelchair as Reagan held his smile together. I followed with the metal

bat held in two hands. Reagan looked straight ahead.

The sirens bloop blooped to delight the neighbor kids on the sidewalks. A newspaper reporter trotted backwards alongside of Reagan's wheelchair.

“He’s an inspiration,” a woman in a crinkly jogging suit said from the sidewalk. The rest agreed. The Navy band burped, cracked and brayed. “You’re an inspiration, Reagan,” another woman in a crinkly jogging suit said as she waved her hands over her head. Reagan looked straight ahead holding the smile with teeth jutting from his face.

There were yellow sawhorse barriers in the entrance of a cul-de-sac not yet filled in with homes, a high pile of pushed over trees and brush, the partially built office tower beyond. The tower's copper top was burning through the lattice at the top of the pile, only the flag-less pole was sticking up above all of the limbs, the red light on top of it blinking.

The police moved one of the sawhorses. I backed into the cul-de-sac with shoulder tosses. The metal bat was a long heavy thing. Coyote Face wheeled Reagan into the circle of asphalt. Reagan’s face was suffering under his fingers. The police established the crowd’s distance from us.

Coyote Face locked the wheelchair wheels and massaged Reagan’s neck. Reagan pointed his held together smile at the brush pile and a flag rose to crack on the pole beyond. I looked to the police. They got into the cruisers and feedback squealed from the roof-mounted bullhorn speakers. Coyote Face and I put our smiles on Reagan. I put the metal bat to my shoulder like a shotgun stock, looked down the barrel and threw it around the sky.

The smile fell from Reagan's hands. Skin unfolded, flowed over bones into hang. Coyote Face put his face to Reagan then screamed through cupped hands to the police.

The police cruiser bullhorns burst with a chant of Reagan's name. The neighbors joined. Coyote Face put his face to mine and showed his teeth. I stood beside Reagan with the metal bat over my shoulder. The chant rose in layers.

The brush pile shuttered into trembling. Pops, snaps and confused chattering scattered from deep inside. A rabbit shot from the brush pile into the cul-de-sac, slid to a stop and right angled over the curb into the dirt clods, juked left and right, charged hard, injected into a stand of horse weed. The brush pile erupted with three fat peacocks throwing iridescent feathers and screaming karate fight sounds. Reagan didn't blink. He gave me his face. I looked to Coyote Face. He nodded and turned away. The copper top burned through the brush pile. The red light blinked. The flag cracked. The chant was spraying into the sky and bouncing on the Earth.

You are not supposed to say the word America anymore, because it's been done too much. I knew that then. I know that now. I know you are supposed to dance around it. But it's hard not to say the word when you are dancing within it, within a circle of friends. And it's hard not to say the word when you are twisting within it within a cul-de-sac, bearing straight teeth and swinging a metal bat into a good friend's head.

The neighbors looked junky in their colorful fabrics against the spines of the subdivision rooftops. They waved their arms and punched at the sky and chanted. The bullhorns sucked in some of their sounds and sprayed it out hollowed. The chant was no longer Reagan's name. It was mine.

Moving Through Horse Weed

The horse weed is 6-foot-11 to 7-foot-1. George Washington was 7-foot-3, 285. I remember a school nurse telling me I would never be that tall. I wasn't and I'm not. I could be. But I've hung Titles around my neck at my height with a meanness that moistens everyone's mothers to puddle. But still, if I were tall enough to see over these weeds the world would be a different place. I would hear about myself more. People would tell me what I looked like to them, unafraid, height disarming beauty. It's nice to hear about yourself.

“You're so hard I can't think,” my second wife said our first time.

“I'm the floor,” I said.

“The floor burns, it makes me.”

“I knew it would.”

She halved. I fed. She grabbed the floor and received between and around, the floor in constant motion, filling with lead. She didn't feel anything I didn't mean.

“I found myself,” she said.

“I always try hard,” I said.

“I felt it all.”

“I was the floor.”

“It was just.”

“I was George Washington.”

“Crack a walnut between your fingers.”

“Is this blood?”

“Now it's yours.”

This is not George Washington pushing through the horse weed. George Washington was not lacerated by leaves and stalks into slow bleeding. He was a crystal mountain thinking clouds like frosting breaking. I can be too.

George Washington named the city of Topeka by standing atop a ridge and seeing a hole in his boot. The Indians said the ridge was a shield. The ridge was cut into in the Sixties with a freeway and topped with a city water tank. A tornado descended on the Capitol, took the dome and leveled a law school. Houses in the path were comical, children were found in trees.

My mom and I found a box turtle with a broken shell walking down a sidewalk in downtown 1978 Topeka. The shell crack was moving with ants. We watched it slide into a bush. We drove to the zoo trailed by a blue exhaust that dissipated behind us in the mirrors.

There was a small train we rode, concrete animals I climbed. We smelled the inside of the hippo house and saw only heads of lettuce floating in the concrete pool. Giraffes teetered behind tall chain

link. I was in my mother's lap below. The giraffe necks crashed together, intertwined and loosened to send up big belches. I placed my hands over my stomach and began to laugh a laugh that would not stop for days. When it stopped there was a knock on our apartment door. All kinds of brown clothing spilled into the apartment: "I'm Gary. I'm in love." I was watching the episode of Little House on the Prairie where a little girl is abducted and killed by a mime. My mom put on a Carpenters record. Winter came. All kinds of boxes slid slowly into the apartment.

Gary painted the television screen white. Acrylic painted nudes lifted onto the walls. Cologne gathered over hard luggage and moved into my mom's bedroom. Stiff fabric in heavy rolls followed. Gary wrapped my mother in yards of it, circling her, squaring her off with his hands.

My teeth loosened naturally. I knew the tooth fairy was a mime. When Gary would leave I would crack the bedroom door and watch my mom smoke, the fabric piled in slabs of folds around her head, just one loose hand.

Gary

"Do you like the way I look? How I take my own temperature with your sweet mother's hand? The boat-like dimensions of my pants? The Corsair squadrons I reference when speaking of my dead father? The ancestry I claim when hoisting family crest mugs? The pencil-tip sharpness of my toenails? My tender ticklish feet?—tickle one of them for a second, stop! sometimes I feel too much, burger to cow—my long earlobes?"

Gary

"Your mother and I love to dance, or we did, and we love to parade to in front of you with this chocolate lab with the metal shock collar. Or I love to. Your mother would I'm sure. We're sorry dogs don't love you.

Gary

“This is your mother's breast at quarter turn in melted plastic smeared over plywood. We're sorry we have to hang it over your bed. I took a workshop. I wanted to castigate the teacher. He was trying to seduce me by biting his lip too often. We're sorry we have to move your bed into the living room. It was in an uncomfortable arrangement with the art. We're sorry we have to move your bed into the basement storage stall. It doesn't fit in the living room. You could sleep in the stall. There are crickets. We could padlock the gate. But the couch works. Watch out for the dog. He thinks it's his. Watch out for the glass coffee table. Don't piss. Goodnight, ugly little kid. I'm kidding of course. You're delicious.”

Gary

“Look, the dog is dead! His nose is in the water dish. His mouth is so open. There's blood. Look. It's coming from his mouth. It's pooling. It looks like a country. I loved him. He was a being. There were games we played. He loved that couch. Where is that little kid? How did you get out of the bedroom? Look at the dog! Look at your nails. Look at the television. The paint. When did you do this? Where is that little kid? Why are you smiling? Why I am going to my knees? What is in my stomach? What is coming out of my mouth?”

Taking a Wife

My fourth wife has irregular periods that make us grow excited in expectation. We have oils and lotions. I smoke grass and she takes pills. There is a story about how we met. People used to ask how we met, but don't anymore.

People like that in black suits and red dresses. People like that under the big black awning of a steak house under a tall parking garage. The tall parking garage where I used to lean top level on nice nights for something to do, looking down, smoking, terrorized by moths and horsefly cousins, the tall parking garage where I watched a woman work below, a valet. People like that in black suits wanted to talk to the woman after their red dresses moved inside to pee together. There were conspiracies formed in timid circles, impotent double dares, shaming, guffaw. The woman stood on braided legs or sprinted.

I began to want to talk to her so I did. She was from a lake town, a boat capital. She wore a brown tan on legs like a tiny rare deer. She said it was as if Heaven opened its arms to The Devil when I looked at her. I wanted to make love to her so I did, seriously, in the parking garage, in my car with our hearts flopping on the shotgun seat.

Certainty is a thing to be shunned, but there is a time in everyone's life that one must eat solid food and there is a time to put up the walls and ceiling on a solid idea, present a fact. When certainty is involuntary is when a mammal's guard is down, and one should be weary, absolutely frightened. But there are certain times when certainty is the only choice.

We drove to her lake town and drank light beer at a place with a banana piloting a boat on a sign. This is the place where she repeatedly tightened her rubber sport sandals and spoke of once seeing a play called *Frida Kahlo's Children* starring a woman playing a young Margaret Thatcher and girl playing an adopted Chinese boy, saying the play got her to thinking and she has never been able to stop.

“Strip down to the undercoat to understand the totality,” she liked to say. Then the TV was turned on, her face pinched toward the nose bridge, her hamstrings stretched.

We moved around on each other, found places of maladaptation, muted peaks of stress, bouts of obsession with warmth/cool. I was bringing East Indian-Oklahomans into my practice, hovering over them, but they knew more than me. I recoiled into bathrooms, looked into the mirror: “I seem to affect the world.”

The woman decided we should learn to couples fast dance just in case we were ever needed to. I told her I could teach the class. But we were placed to clasp our hands together and shake our fronts and asses. There was something certain in her face that was distracting, something to touch with an archaeologist's brush. Our instructor said the woman's dancing was like watching a dog look at you as it was shitting. He pushed her aside. He pulled my waist into his and told me to teach.

There were seasons and those issues. When the dance-swollen times ended there were men barking from on the radio. There was a deafening applause with every micro step through the day. A

cylinder of voices grew under my bed. I once knew a guy that gyrated anytime a woman of mild attractiveness was depicted on TV. There are teens that beat the life out of their grandmothers. There are women who lead desperate men into booby-trapped apartments where upon they strip these men naked and mock their ridiculous physiques. Everyone loves to fuck.

The woman said she needed to repent, be hurled through space, forget. She found this long church, congregants in bleacher seats, face over knees, throwing smiles down on a stage. She had us go.

Three Somali children were frightened by a pastor in a dog suit. He knelt. He moved around in the air. The tallest boy's face was motionless, his eyes throwing light, the shortest boy latched to his hand.

When we were spilled down through the exits into thick fellowship a tall teetering man gave us a brochure. It urged me to break bread with my brothers at the City Wide Men's Breakfast. The woman shook the tall teetering man's hand for too long. When he was released the woman said I should go, definitely go. This woman once drank body oil and let it flow from her mouth, down her naked front. I became a pillar of myself, grew brooding in the car. The car has to be a plum-colored American, hers.

The dark was total. It gave me these powder soft paws. She was in the middle of her living room on elbows and knees. The dark bruised my face or maybe it was the dance music she has chosen, bass undulating within the carpet pad, a phrase of limp claps punctuated with screaming children. She was slapping her flanks. She was dripping juices. Maybe I smelled this. She was saying words, adding them to the phrase just before the screaming children, just after the slap until she stopped and turned on the light to find me blind and unmoved.

My car was waiting for me, reflecting light in front of the woman's house.

There came a day that was to be the day I turned over new leaves—all leaves, not just one and not just the ones on the ground. I was going to turn over all leaves everywhere, anywhere leaves were found, in any form. If leaf or leaves meant semi-truck, house, or blue whale in some other language I was turning those too. There was a woman standing heel-to-toe, spine curved, one elbow pointed back, on the side of the road looking at bad tire.

This woman's apartment was full of colored pencil drawings. She said after the tsunami she began to draw pictures of eagles delivering aid over expressive wave shapes, blasts of stars. She drew herself in billowy pants and with bangs like eagle wings and parachutes. When she showed me drawings of herself her shirt always came off.

The Battle of the Bands Against Drugs was a festival. We smoked two hog legs on the way. It gave her this laugh that was concussive, overdone. She said my head looked like a finger pointed to the sky. She said she meant this deeply.

There was a wind. The woman's bangs were spray-held. She wore sailcloth pants. A group of young men were encircled near my car, all of them in tank tops and basketball shorts, clapping their hands hard periodically, rolling their shoulders, adjusting their backward upside down visors, unable to stop smiling, shoes like alien ships, no socks, legs tanned, translucent hair, smells excreting from tiny holes. I could smell them. She could smell them. They brought her into their circle. I left her there with them. I didn't want their eyes. I walked toward the music.

It is not a secret that certainties are malleable and bordered with undefined limits but somehow it seems we may take certainty for granted, accept that it is tangible, or at the very least accurate, at least to a point that the overall idea is distilled somewhat accurately, enough to be poured in varying degrees of intensity depending on emotional investment and/or baggage. But there is a time in everyone's life when you need to strip down to the undercoat to understand the totality: there was a woman standing on braided legs watching a weak dance troop jump around in a band shell. She was standing beside a man. When she turned her face opened to me. She rushed up to me then stopped. She said she thought she knew me, that she was sorry. I could smell what was in her hair. I wanted her to say all she needed was me. But she said the man beside her was her husband. I sort of wanted to take the man's eye, but not very much. There was a sadness of fear that lived in there. The woman asked if I was true believer. It's like she didn't want to take her eyes from my face, but she did when the dance troop cleared the stage quickly and curtains closed. The crowd shut the fuck up.

The curtains began to quiver. The crowd raised their palms to the sky. The woman raised her palms to the sky and asked me if I was ready, that this is when He comes, but before I could ask her what she meant a certainty pulsed up through the crowd, and through my arms and out of my palms, and I could not stop smiling, asking her, "Is this what it's like? Is this what it's like?" even though I was certain that is was, and she kept nodding, looking straight ahead, watching the curtains move, waiting for Him.

I took the true believers, the wife and her husband, into the sand dunes. We dug a pit in the sand and filled it with a real fire. I stripped down to my headlamp and checked for ticks. They stayed

clothed.

We put a hollow log on the fire. There was some animal living inside the log. We didn't see it, just heard it scream, "I speak English!" Then it went silent.

That should have put us under the terror of the setting moon, but the fire became a cheery conical buffalo rising in the sky. We laughed so much.

When the fire lowered I put on clothes and we climbed atop a high dune. The sky was gray with stars in tight hunks hanging down, and in bread bags, and mats woven from bread bags, and folded fabrics studded with cockle burrs, and goat heads poked in socks, scraping the ankles of aliens with eight-foot eyes extruding to where there is no such thing as time. Somewhere, miles away, and maybe years, an uncle wiped with a poisonous weed and was hospitalized.

The next morning, while we were drinking instant coffee against a log we had named, Couch, an older man on a horse rode into our camp. He asked what we were looking for. He was wearing a tan ball cap. He was closely shaven. We were just sitting drinking coffee on pine boughs we had cut down for seat cushions. He said to make sure our fire didn't get away from us. There was no fire left in the pit. We had buried what was left before we hit the tents the night before. The man on the horse was older than us. He thought that still meant something. He felt so tall atop the horse. He made a moan when I pulled him off the horse. He rolled around face-down in the sand all high-pitched as the woman and I whipped him for a while with pine boughs. The husband and the horse just stood there and waited for it to be done.

The woman, her husband and I walked the dunes and talked about God as jets made lines in a cloudless sky. We named certain dunes, we gathered prickly pears and more wood. Night came so easily.

The husband lay back and thanked God for the stars, for his wife, for me, for all of this. The wife's face was orange on the other side of the fire. She rose and circled to my side of the fire. She warmed her legs by the fire and placed one next my mine. The husband said, with his face to the sky, in the dunes, he felt like he knew what it was like to really be alive. He said it all felt like a dream as he fell into silence. The woman rose and quietly pulled me into my tent. She said she had never really screamed.

A husband will give away his wife, but it's not easy. He has to cry. You have to pull him up from the ground and let him use your shoulder and cry with him. He has to say he is giving his wife to you, as a father. A wife cannot be taken or given, but you don't have to let him know.

I really like to be around true believers. They think they will never die. They believe in eventual justice and know they will see skin burned off the deserving. They breathe certainty. They move in fear. They receive their instincts from a guy in the sky, a guy you should know. Maybe you've heard the news.

ROOM 6109 EAST TOWER

Sometimes I wonder who I am but it's forced. I am always me. I like a fun life in a place of very few trees. I believe in dreams, the fact they always come true, Oklahoma City.

When I dream now there is never a story. It is just me believing in me with everything I have ever seen spinning around me as one cylinder raining my name.

There could be things said about my flaws. But my flaws never put me in a jail. They just gave me the blues, and others too. Leave them alone. There are a lot of things about seasons, how they kick you in the face no matter which one is standing over you in those big boots. If you would think of me while showering you would never get the blues.

Your hand would be my hand forming a circle, making a ponytail, ringing the soap out with a slow slide. That's me behind you with all those white teeth. That's a promise, a real value. But I am not magic. I am perfect, but I am also like you. Simple explanation describes me. I want.

Simple Square

I felt my fourth wife was the lower bones of my legs as a lawnmower drove over them. Then I awoke. It was still dark. I got out of bed and did one thousand pushups and sit-ups as she slept. I boiled a pot of water and stuck my face in it. A crust of dead skin slid off and dissolved in the water. A steam of me filled my sinuses. I went outside and lifted my nose with a thumb. I found there was nothing in the air that morning and that that day was “today” and that that today would bring what it would bring, though I understood that that today would be beyond terminology if it went forward. To call it “today” would be too weak a designation. But that is every day for me. I didn't want to get on a plane so I didn't.

A dirt mound peak stuck up behind one low range. I had watched it grow up. I climbed to the top causing little avalanches. The partially built office tower was distant and dark except for a red light blinking atop the flag-less pole. I watched it blink. I saw a horse growing in the sky.

Have you ever eaten a horse after riding it until it died? I haven't. It seems like a beautiful experience. There were days when I thought about a horse. I could use a horse. A horse can build a real life on the side of a hill with a man on its back. A horse is a hill of muscle. A horse never sits all sensitive in the corner of a room, hugging its legs, hanging its head over its knees. A day I thought about a horse

was when I saw one growing in the morning sky.

Have you ever seen a horse jump over a red blinking light at sunrise with a baby boy on its back? I hadn't, but before I saw you standing below me at the base of a dirt mound that is what I saw. I thought you were riding the horse, but you were tackling it. You pulled it down on top of you and broke its neck, tore it apart and fed it to dogs that had gathered. Is that what happened? Or did you just walk up and hold your arms up for me to lift you, and I walked away through the dirt mounds and spines of roofs?

I went through the dirt mounds and spines of roofs. I climbed the berm of the Interstate and felt everything shoot past. When I crossed the lanes the partially built tower grew wide.

A yellow 2000 Monte Carlo with checkered flag decals, under the silver light of lamp poles, under a pink sky, in the parking lot of a partially built office tower is not a visual anyone should want to see. They shouldn't have coincided. They shouldn't have been on display together, an unfinished tower and a yellow car so sad about what they were under a brightening sky. A short man got out of the yellow car with coils of rope and cast six dim shadows over the parking lot toward the tower.

The tower became a torch in the rising sun. I couldn't forgive that I found everything I could see in front of me as ever-coming beauty. Long ropes were hanging down against the tower from the burning copper top. The short man stood within the light looking down at the car. I wondered if he had a wife.

The short man played in the backyard of his house with his dog, a bounding collie he was calling, Gosh. The ball bounced beneath and behind them and against the privacy fence. The short

man's house was the monolith in the dark behind him. He tightened his rubber sandals. The dog cried and snapped at the lawn. Satellites barely passed through the sky.

The short man took the dog's head in his lap, folded an ear in half and kneaded it. It caused the dog these moans. How soothing. Inter-species. There were jets high without sound. The short man loved on the dog so deeply. He sped the kneading of the ear. I watched him from a roughed-in window of the unfinished house beside his.

Hello wind, I said to the wind. It felt like it was coming down from a mountain, my face leaning into it, the arches of my bare feet pressed into copper at the base of the partially built office tower, my body angled high over the parking lot, a rope around my waist in a different angle attached to the base of the flag-less pole, keeping me there, to look over my home, my land. The yellow Monte Carlo pulled into the parking lot.

I put my eye into the black of the elevator shaft. Ropes hung down from a horizontal beam above me and disappeared down into a soft square. The ropes stayed still as sound gathered deep in the black and crawled up the concrete of the shaft. The ropes moved when I could hear the song the short man was singing. The ropes lost tension and snapped back hard to taut with little squeals from the fulcrum. There was something meaningful in the air of the shaft, a smeared drawing of the unseen building in the black. I could hear him all, his hands over the ropes, his grunts, in reverb, his breathing between the words of his song: You are everything, my God, you are everything.

The short man stopped singing, his headlamp broke the black square, lit up the ropes, passed over the concrete walls and rested on his feet on a door ledge a floor below me. He sang his song and the ropes squealed. I stepped back and went wide into a stance.

The ropes squealed and the short man swung into me, his headlamp went into my eyes. I pulled it from his head and turned it on him. He stayed there in front of me. He didn't strike. He wouldn't breathe. Meaningful air wouldn't pass into him without and any locomotion of his short body, but maybe God did not want to see his movements. Maybe even God does not wish to be reminded of failures, like short men that believe in the flawed so deep and climb toward it. It is impressive to have created a being, but God created everything, including God, so being reminded of creating a being that moved the way the short man did, unbeautifully, is maybe not something God would feel as pleasure. So for the short man to move in the air, or to even breathe in the meaningful air that God had given him might lead God to feel bad about things. If he stayed still and waited for another man to act maybe God would be more pleased. But the short man did move. He showed God the way he moved unbeautifully and fell backward into the black square.

Little Avalanche

Sink your calves into the mound and hear flags crack. Lift your shirt, dam with a thumb and forefinger a soft pond of abdomen, poke at it with each finger on the other hand. Can you do it?

Trucks pull equipment on trailers away from the partially built tower, get on the Interstate and move toward the city. The parking lot and streets feeding it are bathed in silver light from tall lamps sticking up from ovals of dirt. The east is polluted with the light of the distant city and high horse weed. Spines of roofs repeat south into cropland. Release down the mound on a little avalanche.

Watching people do what they do for a living is suffering. They grip gearshifts. They measure. They smile with such teeth then go suddenly expressionless in a vacuum of desks and chairs. They move over carpet to bathrooms, putting fingertips on walls, all sorts of little decisions, salt leeching from skin, hardening into irregular balls on hair between legs, little tuggings, hair pulling from follicles, tangling into intact hair.

Watching me make a living is different. I don't stack hay on a flatbed bumping through buffalo wallows.

I don't piss under the sky. I don't sit down when it's implied. I don't listen. I speak. Lines are shaved into the sides of my head. I wear perfection on my face as a brow-line. Faces are given to me because I am me.

I am a terrible fence. I take too much pity on people. I know it would be hard not being me. No one else can really be. It's hard for even me sometimes. I am a hammer and a cute rabbit with a nail above it.

I have always been unique. I keep wanting and giving everything I can.

I can stand a yard with a six-foot privacy fence. My yard is bounded with one and pear blossoms snow onto new grass for three days each spring. When I was a child I would walk into creeks and pick up creatures that would bite me. I would run screaming for my mom to hold me down and swab monkey blood into the wound. My mom is gone now, but I still walk into places and pick up creatures that bite me. I don't run any more. I watch what the creatures do to me until it's done.

When I go through the front door of the house my fourth wife sprints to the master bath and steam vents from under the door. I have seen her bathe before, many times, back when we were new. This is what she looked like while bathing: God. Then she put on her clothes.

We go on evening jogs together and notice the same clouds. She likes the feel of my heartbeat under her hand and arches her back when I pinch her nips. We have all kinds of baby names. But I only want a son, you on a hill under the sky. We will have a swimming pool installed after you are old enough not to drown. Our bed is big. There are tickling straps she attaches under my buttocks. Then we pinch and

tongue until we are clinch-mouthed and panicked.

When a day is a day that is beyond terminology it still just ends like any other day. When the next day comes, the day that had been beyond terminology becomes just another tomorrow. I unlocked the master bath window before I last left the house. I packed the spaces between the two sliding halves of the ladder with t-shirts after I laid it down.

At the top of the ladder, against our house, an elbow on the sill of our master bath window, these flat lawns of our subdivision jump with dark-eyed birds that examine the grass. Streetlamps pop then hum as joggers hit the sidewalks. Then come the powdered moths and diving bats. This place, my home, could evaporate into the sky and nothing would be felt. But it won't. And I will never give up.