the red wheelbarrow

so much depends upon

a red wheel barrow

glazed with rain water

beside the white chickens

wcw
What if he's got a gun or something?
No time for this, just get your pants up, Charley.
Clatter. You've knocked the wastebasket. Shhh. He's heard. He'll run.

Now what?
Get out there.
And do what?
Got to do something.
You don't quite get the buttons right, so you have to hold the pants with one hand, but you go to the door anyway. He's not there and you wonder if maybe you imagined it.

Downstairs, the door is open a crack. The plastic hourglass on the kitchen table has been flipped and you watch the sand filter through. In the bedroom, the dog whimpers in the corner, his milky eyes searching for you.

The Red Wheelbarrow
early spring 2003

editors
brittany cavallaro
jessica page-carreras

thanks
to delp and therese

cover art by max sindell
In the town, people eat boiled potatoes and cabbage for supper like always. They ask about what happened in the town that day while they were out plowing the fields. A new government will be just like the old one and in a month it will be gone, the men tell their wives as if they really needed to hear it. The wives carry the leftover cabbage out to the pigs and walk out over the quiet fields for a moment. They watch the clouds slipping over the moon, blue ghosts sliding over its bright light, and think about the moon. How it passes overhead while people sleep. How it goes through its cycles of darkness and radiance, but always comes back again, fresh and new, but sure to dwindle soon enough.

The troops stop to rest. They leave their uniforms in a ditch. They stuff the money into their boots and run off into the light.

A woman comes by, herding her goats back to pasture. She picks up the general’s coat. She could rip off the gold braid, she thinks, and the baby can play with the buttons. She sticks her finger through the hole in the back. She will go home and put it to rags.

Sarah Wylder
You come to expect it after a few years. The troops march in; the man hauling a cart of cabbages stops beside the road and holds his horse hard by the reins and looks away. Cats run underneath porches. Women run to the windows to watch them march in. The uniforms are different colors, they carry different flags, and each time the routine is the same. No one is sure of the politics of it, even Herr Heuboden, sitting on his porch with his pipe, loudly explaining the problems of German government to anyone with a moment to listen.

The town complies. The general leading the army presents a document to the mayor. From now on, this army will run the government. He makes an announcement to the people about freedom and embracing their new leaders. The children dance and sing songs in the square.

General Koeper takes his place in a blue leather chair behind a mahogany desk. He runs his coarse palm over the smooth wood, letting his cuffs scrape against the edge of the desk. The gold braid is coming unstitched. He wonders where the uniform has been and whether the dark patch on the back is a bloodstain. The man he bought them from seemed pleased enough to get rid of them. At a few marks a piece, he could afford to dismiss any dismal visions of dead soldiers stripped and robbed on the battlefields. Still, he'd been safe so far and lucky for not running into any real armies. The men he recruited thought it a fine joke, and he supposed it was. It had to be the best idea he'd ever come up with. Marching into towns dressed as soldiers and taking all the money out of the bank. It was a government bank, after all.

He toys with the paperweights, the pens, the bits and bobbles the mayor left on his desk. He finds some paper and writes out an order to the bank. He asks Captain Kuemmel, a man who used to be a grocer, he thinks, to take it and return with the money.

They march out late at night, every pocket stuffed with gold.

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The green gray light
of waking
between song and flight
before the earth
rolls herself over giving birth
to fruits
roots
tall green shoots
to blinding strips of yellow
and distant calls of swallows
I rise,
full of empty dreams
the rhythms
leap up out of my mouth
carry me to the rivers down south
moving me to see the colors
bronze mothers
amber fathers
oak brothers
mocha sisters
Mister.
Nigger.
I rise,
up through the fog
and the boogie man bog
out of time
full of rhyme
new born sunshine.
bremser’s madness

I am old and I have lost the poet:

the collective loathing of youth,
a voice un-stretched,
a whisper faint between the buildings,
instilling doubt as well as assurance
in their concrete marvel and verisimilar resolution.

My constitution has varied
and I have lost my will to wander,
so I stare out and survey the city blocks, the monolithic buildings,
the boundaries on nature that segment the horizon
as sure as a siren responds to the approach of a ship.

Sitting as I do I have seen squares made of the ocean,
green and gray forests, and thousands of rectangular deserts,
microcosms of a greater Nature broken down to a finger’s width.
I cannot be their singer.

I am old, and I have lost the poet:
the certainty, the surety that everything is as it should be.

Worse than horizons, I see segmented people,
an influx of apathy towards sentiments we share,
rhythms and reverence lost on a nation,
this “beat” generation, this iconic tread
that spread from California, growing and grinding
the stone that had sired the city that fired it
out like a buckshot: spreading, imbedding,
and becoming something different and dangerous,
unlike the innocent idea you loaded in that gun.

Today Marion Bradley had some sort of sickness that made her eyes crusty,
and Heath Bronavin had toppled over a very tall stack of massive plastic
blocks three times now (this would have been fine, except he was standing
on top each time yelling, and Megan Holiday and Brandon Makey had been
struck on their heads by the falling blocks all three times and were wailing
quite loudly in the corner).

Whatever her final reason, she decided that enough was enough.
Today she would make sure that Leo would be of some good to the nursery,
instead of just allowing him to sit quietly by the door. Leo looked up at Ms.
Chandler, quite intimidating in her purple dress and towering over him.
“Leo,” she said, “Would you hold Bobby while I help the other children?
What a good little helper you will be!” She thrust the snotty four-year-old
onto Leo’s lap. The boy had, at least, a visible cold as his nose desperately
needed to be wiped. Leo stared at the disgustingly dirty boy who was
suddenly sitting on his lap and who stared right back, unblinking.

Perhaps Bobby was a little shell-shocked at being put on a new lap so
abruptly. After about 30 seconds of unbroken staring, he calmly leaned
forward and wretched his breakfast of pancakes and syrup all over Leo’s
polished black shoes, then scampered away quite relieved and unconcerned.

Outside the sun was just beginning to show through a screen of
thinning grey clouds. He half danced down the sidewalk, skipping over the
thin slivers of shadow the bare branches made on the sidewalk. Ten dollars,
he thought. Ten whole dollars and a new pair
of shoes. His father had written
him about how much he liked the museum on Main Street, telling him about
a soldier’s hat from the Civil War worn by Leo’s grandfather. Leo thought
maybe he’d like to go see that. He could buy dinner at the diner, too. His
mother never went out, and she would never take him to a diner. Today was
Leo’s day, he had it all to himself. Maybe he’d stay at the museum all day.
Maybe he’d go and get coffee and toast at the diner, just like his father might
have done when he was still alive.
for a moment. She was sitting at the head of the table, her back to the window, eating poached eggs and rye toast. "Here." With her forefinger, she pushed two pieces of cold white toast toward him. "Thank you, Mother," Leo said politely. He poured himself a glass of grapefruit juice from the glass pitcher on the table. His mother drank only grapefruit juice on Sunday, Tuesday and Thursday, and the rest of the days it was V8 or water. She had read somewhere it kept your vision and hearing sharp. His mother focused on her breakfast, and Leo was happy to look out the window in silence, taking clean, precise bites from the toast. After breakfast, Leo and his mother went to the front hall to put on their coats and then walked the three blocks to church.

A third of the way into the service, all the children over 12 were excused to attend a Bible study or, if you were under age 11, to play in the nursery. Leo followed a herd of yelling children into the nursery. He took a seat in the same chair he always had. He was never glad to be in the same room as all the annoying, snot-nosed children, but the older kids, although not as snotty, were not any more intelligent.

Ms. Chandler, first year nursery supervisor and conductor of the church’s new children’s bell choir, glared at Leo. Just that morning her washing machine had exploded and her Jack-Russell terrier had escaped and dug 26 holes in their front yard just as she was spilling the milk that was delivered to her stoop. She was the type of woman who becomes uncomfortable when all the children in her care are not building with obscenely large blocks or bashing each other’s brains in with large blunt toys.

And all of this on top of the nursery’s condition that day. Bobby Thrasher had the flu and his mother had taken him to church anyway. Ms. Chandler was annoyed by the fact that parents think they can just toss their kids into the nursery and forget for an hour that their child has a broken arm, an ear infection, and some weird undiagnosed fungus of the mouth.

Now the fires of youth blend into monotony and fade from the foreground, reduced to a flicker, a cinder, a sermon on the aging creation, suffused inundations on the way things were and the way things should be...but there are no more poets.
elvis hitching a ride by a 7-11 at three in the morning

His stained white leather jumpsuit
glowed orange green under a midnight blue sky
with a lopsided creamy moon,
in one of those fly-over drive-over states.
It was raining.
He was wearing sunglasses, holding a small plastic bag.
It rustled as he jived over and knocked on my window.

“Hey man, would you mind, uh, givin’ me a lift?”
His voice unmistakable,
that low rolling tone of cool,
and the rhinestones on his wrist
glittering in the rain,
the last lights of stardom
he’d chosen to see.

We left that 7-11 behind.
Out of the corner of my vision
the shadows of my wipers
played across the white tassels of leather
that lay across his lap.

“What’s that there?” I asked.
He flipped and creased the wrapper in his hands.
“Origami.” I stared blankly ahead.
“Paper cranes, and stuff, Japanese folding, you know.”
There was one of those

sunday

On Sunday morning Leo Leopold woke up on his back. It isn’t
that sleeping on one’s back is particularly strange, but in all his eight
years, Leo had always slept on his side or stomach. He put his glasses on
and dangled his feet off the bed. It looked cold outside. The whole
block stretched away from the angle of his window and it appeared
mostly brown, with brown brick houses and houses with brown siding
and brown grass showing through between patches of dirty brown
snow. I reminded him of the last photograph his father had sent him. In
the picture, his father had a man propped up in his lap (the caption said
“Jacob”), the pale bandage wrapped around his head soaked through
with muddy blood. They got a telegram saying his father had been killed
two weeks later. In any case, today did not look cold enough to snow.
No sun either. Leo pulled his lips tight together and tried to pinpoint
the odd feeling now settled within him.

However, this was a Sunday, and on Sundays you do not fiddle
fart around. There are places to go and people to be polite to, if not a
whole houseful of things to clean and polish. Leo padded to the
bathroom. He brushed his teeth and gargled a little salt water to clear
his throat. He wet his hair and combed it down, with a nice, neat part
on one side. He turned his head back and forth slowly and checked it
over. He shook out a couple drops of hair oil and combed it through.
Satisfied, he went back to his room to dress quietly in his outfit for
church, laid out over his chair the night before. Same outfit as always:
first, the pressed white shirt (his mother believed that age seven was old
enough for a boy to learn to iron), then the black pants with a crease,
then clean white socks, then the black jacket, then the red clip tie, then
finally the black lace-up shoes with a weekly polish. After he had tied
them, he tapped happily down the stairs to the kitchen, although the
sound was muffled by the thick stair runner underneath.

“What was that you making that awful scuffing noise, Leo?” His
mother picked up a butter knife and held it above the pale slab of butter
Suddenly Nunca found herself tripping in the dark past gaunt men with their hands around the necks of broken beer bottles. Drag devils in exquisite red velvet sucked pipe smoke between silver teeth and hissed at her as she walked by. Scared, dark little boys hidden under hard faces and gang leather danced with fists in the middle of the streets. When the man with the shaved head and sparrow bones rattling along his wrists grabbed her from behind, Nunca started to run, following every road that she could find, the beat of her own heart echoed as a gong inside her head.

She ran through the open fields beyond the black magic of the streets, scattering moonlight off the dense, short grass and singing silently along to the drums that had flared up in her mind. Soon, the field faded into dust, then into road, and then to rock, so that her bare feet bled and she began to stumble and trip along the torn hems of her skirt. The song in her head was lulling down to one piano; she lay and slept, dust curling between her teeth.

“So how about this weather?”
He shrugged, and laid down
his vocal molasses, sweet and thick,
“It’s rain, baby. And when it rains, baby it pours.”

We didn’t say much else.
He fell asleep with some Twinkie on his chin,
and I listened to the Beatles tell Loretta to get back.

I slowed to stop for gas at a Chevron,
and on what seemed like instinct, he awoke, blinking in the sunrise.
Fumbling with the sunglasses,
and brushing the yellowish crumbs from his chin,
he asked to be dropped off at some hotel he liked.
“They have great continental breakfasts.”

I left him curbside,
and he thanked me,
thanked me very much,
jiving his way inside.

I hit the onramp as the moon waned,
the king’s seat still warm,
the wind whistling in the dawn.
The music of the hogs reminds me of fall, each of them a baby Benny Goodman or Satchmo - skin pulled tight across their trumpet snouts.

It is silent when I approach the fence line, but as soon as the slop hits the trough their squeals erupt like blossoms, blooming and falling to the ground. The climax, this brief moment of screeches, so absolutely primitive and understated.

And I, the farmer, leap from my boots into the mud to bask in animal decline, bask in this coming full-bellied contentment.

I welcome the hog's bites, each like the prick of a stem - jabbing softly as if I were buried, eyes closed, a kid in a pile of leaves.

comments and the almost palpably slithery looks he had made like grease marks across her skin. But forgetting had never been hard for Nunca, especially as she strode out into the grand distraction that was Tijuana, the buzz of cacao smells and open air, the panorama of reds and golds. The man in the truck was an echo of "consiga detrás aquí magnífico" behind her, and the roads were paved with marigolds and street musicians, daylight winos and Virgin Mary statues intermittently serene inside a haze of cigar smoke.

It was then that she began to think about San Francisco; the whole ghost of it had been appearing to her as a wild boy, swinging dreadlocks and conch shells in some reggae-warrior dance with a business card just peeking out of his back pocket. And that if San Francisco was this boy, that Tijuana was a salsa legend, with asphalt-carved wrinkles lining his kind face and mussed earth-brown hair draping over it as he twanged a rose-painted guitar. Tijuana and the song in her head jammed all night; his catcall riffs matched her tango rhythms and quick-spoken Spanish chords jived on hallucinated tambourines. Nunca felt like she was balancing on the neck of a buzzing guitar as she padded through the twilight, only stopping to eat black-bean fritters and to sing a Buena Vista Social Club tune to a stray dog. It wasn't until the streetlight above her burned out that she ever thought to stop.

Because it was then that the Tijuana man suddenly put down his guitar and the music in her head turned into a wounded, moaning saxophone. It was then that the city turned into an old-world witch doctor. He pricked his fingers to drop blood into vials of clear liquid, twisted, and burned and stabbed pins into dolls to make someone distant bleed. He was laughing into a candle flame as he watched dark smoke curl around the incantations that still hung in the air, meant to stir out all the creatures of the night.
murmuring. The veins in her neck were swollen big as carnation stems and her hair was down and mussed to cover them. When Nunca walked in she didn’t look up, but stopped talking, or even breathing, as far as she could tell from the doorway. For a moment the loudest sound seemed to be the pulsing of her mother’s blood.

“You should know,” she said. “It’s been ten years since he left, but you should know.”

Nunca didn’t dare to cross the room. She didn’t try for fear her knees wouldn’t want to come along. Her mother’s hands were still and large with blood, still clutching the rosary as if to say to Nunca I’m still praying in my head. And in profile, her mother did seem at prayer; her head bent and sinister with the dark shadows of the unlit room, her face thin and tear-streaked, the whites of her eyes wild and blank with fear, full with the undercurrent of blood.

“He’s dead. He died three years ago. He died of the same thing.”

But the last words were lost inside a whisper, and even the breath it took to say them was carried outside as Nunca sprinted after Chase.

By the time Nunca reached the main road the sun seemed like it had sprawled across the full dome of the sky, everything blinding and pale as always. It was easy enough to hitch a ride with her sundress and bare feet, and within minutes a rust-red pickup had rolled up, its fender dragging across the pavement and the driver inside dragging a tongue across his teeth. The man introduced himself as Carlos; she introduced herself as Jade, almost immediately afterwards noting that she was twelve years old and a concubine to the Genghis Khan, hoping maybe that if her dirty looks wouldn’t fend him off that the idea of her being insane would. It didn’t; Carlos only gave her wolf eyes and asked if Genghis had ever taken her to Reno. The rest of the ride to the city was spent cactus-spotting along the horizon, tugging on the hem of her dress and giving one-word answers. She jumped out at the first alpaca vendor and shook off the
dear james dean

JBD—
I know how you feel. I even know how you felt—left the rural Midwest behind for a shot at Hollywood and debuted in "East of Eden" as a farm boy. I know all about that kind of thing. I've made it all the way to a corner of the country. I'm not in the middle anymore, but a real corner, see, like you. Corners are better than middles: you know where to look. Sometimes it's just better to have your back to a wall.

Now that I'm here, I just write poems about leaving home and I go to Nicholas Goluses recitals. Well, for the record, my best friend back home plays the guitar (not so much Bach as Cash and the Clash—a difference of an aisle or two). Maybe you made the right decision. You loved acting, you didn't love love. James Dean, I like your accent. I've always love "well" said "wull". (An accent is whatever you haven't got, I suppose.) I also mispronounce "Gide" and "Lytton Strachey." Some things I'll never get used to. That broken handle over there, for instance.

I can see, finally, what you saw in men. They're not so bad, are they? My boyfriend looks like Jesus and don't you think I don't know it. When we kiss, it's a pieta. We talk about canoeing and Tati films, barbecue and sex—not, needless to say, necessarily in that order. James Dean, I wonder if you ever avoided a mirror. (Mirrors are confirmation, I suppose.) I found out the first person I ever dated only wanted me for my mind. Thought for a long time about it, then invested in some low-cut sweaters. The first time I was ever called voluptuous, it was followed by a quick, earnest, "And I mean that in the best sense possible," and I began to wonder what the hell that meant. I had to learn how to take a compliment like a prizefighter takes a punch. Or whatever. Remember how in "Rebel" the guys insulted you and you walked away, smirking, mumbling, "Yeah, and I'm cute, too." One of these days, I'm going to be one of those girls who gets fake tits just so she can go, "My face is up here, jackass." And once, this girl thought I was hitting on her, so she slapped me with a biology book and my lip bled till lunch. I was so proud and I don't have the slightest idea why. So I kept my mouth shut. Sometimes it doesn't pay to be honest when everyone around me is just going to think I'm being ironic.

turning up the volume. "Yes, I know that entirely."

She laughed and reached across him to the button on the steering wheel that made the top of the black and pink convertible accordion-fold its way down, grabbed the joint and kissed his temple.

"I am in love with you," he had said. "And I am stoned, and in ten minutes I will you take you home to your Mexican mother who would rather tear out my lungs than let me in her house, and I will still be stoned, and you will tell her..."

"I will tell her that I am in love with you, and that I am stoned, and that we are going to Tijuana together to live like wild bohemiens and sleep in your car and buy candles and be completely reckless and poor and in love."

"You are a poet, Nunca."

Sixteen year old Nunca put her bronzed feet up on the dash, stuck her hand out the window and felt the wind as a full weight against her open palm. She spread her fingers and straightened her elbow and watched the sun stream through in brassy tendrils of light.

"Yes," she said. "Yes, I know that entirely."

The car had streamed down the last of the scenic route silently, Chase singing along nonsense words about dark eyes and picket fences to the tune of So What and playing with the back of Nunca's neck. Nunca watched his mouth moving pink and soft, his hair streaming back from his face like gold fireworks until the radio turned off and the car braked to a halt. He turned his star-spark blue-silver eyes towards hers.

"I'm not really going to say anything to her. You know that, right."

Nunca bit her lip the way she did when she was thirteen and her mother brushed her hair. "Yeah, I know."

He kissed her goodbye and she climbed out of his car, and still dizzy on pot and the taste of his mouth, she walked to the front door.

Her mother was in the living room, a rosary between her hands,
l'affront

Le chemin était le même.
A gauche puis tout droit,
C’est la grand maison sur la cinquième.
Mais il t’attendait, prêt à bondir sur sa proie.

L’odeur, des sexes putréfiés se mêlent à la sueur,
Les miasmas de la jouissance inondent la pièce.
Les amants s’acharnent. Cri de douleur...
Sa verge mal aiguisée la transperce.

Femme meurtrie par les années d’attente,
Il t’a salie...âme inerte...
Tu peux frotter, pénétrer au plus profond de ton être,
Le Fils de la Haine t’a brisée...Esposse de la Honte.

En rentrant, tu allumes une bougie,
Impassible, statue inaisissable.
Tu regardes la flamme, vacillante.
Pleurs ! Je t’en prie !

Tu chuches un réponse, une explication
Pourquoi toi ? Pourquoi lui ?
Tu veux comprendre ce que tu as fais ?
Comme aux autres, tu lui as simplement souris.

Je jour où il t’a voilée.

marie clapot
The path has always been the same
to the left, or straight on
to the house on 5th street
where he is waiting for you.

The decaying smell of sex mixes with sweat
the stench of the climax filling the room
the lovers are persisting. Crying in pain.
The man recklessly shoving.

The bruised woman has been waiting for years
he ruined you...left your spirit lifeless...
you can scrub, penetrate the deepest part of you.
The Boys of Hatred broke you... Wife of Shame.

In returning home, you light a candle
an impassive, elusive statue
you watch the flame, flickering
Cry! Please!

You’re looking for a response, an explanation
Why you? Why him?
You want to understand what you have done
like the others, you have only smiled for him

The day when he raped you.

Chase had made up words to the tune of every song Miles Davis
had ever written, lying on the swing in Nunca’s front porch while she
cought fireflies on her tongue. He always denied they were his
invention, that the words were always there in the music, only coded
and translated into the shapes of sounds. “Words really aren’t so distant,
in everything, even silence,” he had told her that morning, when she
asked him how he knew so well. “Just the brilliant parts of them, the
definitions, the ideas get broken up into pieces, that static of essence
and meaning that man has applied to form. Really, that’s the process of
language; the words are already there, even when they’re not spoken.
Silence. See, that’s a word.” He took another drag on his joint and
turned his eyes back towards the road, staring down the green of the
willow branches and the yellow dashes on the asphalt that seemed to
come towards him at the exact rhythm of Kind of Blue.

“You know you don’t make any fucking sense.”

“Yes,” he said, throwing his arm around her shoulders and
moon and the pink azalea bushes outside City Hall, curled against herself like something wild and the boughs bending, praying for her inches from her face.

When she was out of memories and her mother was out of tangles, Nunca would stand up and walk silently back to bed, trying not to give a glance to the veins straining blue in her mother’s wrists and neck. She tried not to see the sweat on her tan face, the tears thick and transparent in her eyes. She opened the screen door without saying anything, only half hearing the voice from behind her hands saying, “Nunca, you do not know pain.”

The next morning the song had not stopped. It was still near to night outside, the black in the sky just done ebbing from the stars, cuts of pale blue only peering from behind the first rays of dawn. Outside of her window she could see the shadow of her Grandfather asleep underneath the mango tree, his dark face curled into his arm and a few sparse hairs twirling on his scalp. His borough, tied to the trunk and kicking one hoof into consciousness, raised his head towards the last stars on the horizon and pawed down at the earth. It was perfect; besides the song inside her head, it was silent. And though everything inside her told her to rouse her grandfather, to greet him in the kitchen with the smell of banana pancakes and a drink to cure his hangover, the song was calling to her from somewhere eastward, from some place in the sky where it was still dark.

She packed her bag with fruit and money, skirts and strands of beads and mirrors and anything she thought she could trade for something later. Out of habit and tradition, she threw in her father’s picture, along with her mother’s dried snap-dragons wrapped in a doily, and forgot her hairbrush in the top drawer.

First, she teased the dew-stained grass with one toe; then she pressed the soft, bare arch of her foot into the dirt, feeling the wet earth

donald york jr., july 4th, 1974

The beauty of the summer this year came from knowing you weren’t going to Nam, the four times you went to see Magnum Force, hours spent looking through the cracked window of your father’s Chevy wrecker, as the sixties died, when your father let you “just clean up” the girly hair you’d grown, and the violent growth that stretched you thin, too quick for your muscles to keep up with. So much growing that as you lay in bed, over the calls of night birds and bull frogs and your own heart’s sweeping in your ears, you thought you were hearing your bones grow, like the distant rumble of fireworks.

brenin wertz-roth
embroidering on her dress, all the details, leaving only the silhouette of her holding a comb and a bucket. “Wake up, Nunca.”

She knew what came next. She knew her mother would never call it punishment, or discipline, or even having anything to do with Nunca’s running away. But it was what it was.

“Come along, you look like a mess.”

She stumbled out towards the dim mustard and green living room, towards the brown tweed furniture and the crucifixes on the wall, towards the smell of burned tortilla shells and the screen door. She followed the back of her mother’s turquoise dress until she couldn’t anymore, when she had to sit on the porch step as her mother stood behind her, plunked the bucket down on the concrete, kneeled with the comb in Nunca’s hair and pulled down hard.

If she screamed, even inside a whisper, like she learned to do later, her mother would not stop. “You come from proud people,” she would say. “Who wake early in the morning and spend the day with their hands in the earth and the sun on their backs. They know pain. This—always, here, she would yank out a knot, pull the clump out of the comb with her fingernails and throw it in the bucket next to her. “This is nothing.”

So thirteen year old Nunca, with her snarl-thick hair long to her waist, her head bent, the wind and the sun breezing through to make her face hot and make her hair attack her ankles, would bite down harder on her lip and say nothing. Instead, she would relive in her head where she had gone, what she had done to bring her here; picking roses from a stranger’s garden, breaking the stems with her bare hands and bloodying them on the thorns. Dancing in the alley behind the Cactus Moon, listening to the music throbbing out of the windows and the walls until she could feel it in her hips and her temples, until the streetlights turned into candlelight and the asphalt was her lover, dark and dumbstruck on his back. Standing on the rail of the Golden Gate Bridge with the ocean swallowing air behind her, cars whistling past in front as she laughed into screams. Sleeping under the
Nunca sat along the sun-bleached edge of the unvarnished porch, her feet bare and her hair crowded by snarls of wind and her mouth full of halved papayas she eats out of a small dish with a wooden spoon. She knew it was the last day of summer by the cadmium sun, the way it made the tired-looking maize stalks beyond her seem to blink and dim as they became too bright to look at, flax and emerald, then too bright again. The stick of the clear, pale orange juice ran down her cinnamon fingers, drying into little sugar stars when a wind rolled by, smelling like burlap and waiting. Nunca didn’t know what was beyond her grandfather’s fields, how the little clouds of cotton came to slip out of a breeze carried from the next plantation, or Tijuana, a few dusty miles south and hissing with smog and an orange glow in the earliest parts of the morning. She didn’t know its churches, the white candles and sugar skulls and deep creases in the priests face, did not know a ceramic Jesus with a smile and two open palms. She was eighteen then; her long limbs tanned by Mexico sun and thin from hours of wandering towards nowhere, looking for the answer to the question she hadn’t even begun to ask. She squinted her eyes up and looked for a reflection of something in the round mirror of the sun.

Now, she thinks that it was at this moment that the song came, battling its way through the com silk and cotton breezes, attacking the mud-colored dog that blurred into the crab grass, skittering its bony fingers along the paneling of the house, sticking itself comfortably inside her ear.

She dropped the bowl, watched the juice run down in veiny rivers through the dirt, turning it sweet and orange. The sun glared, winked back.

Her mother had been standing in the door when she woke up, the half-light of the sun through the blinds erasing her face, the...
New Year's he was thinking about how he's really raising them the right way (Harley's ten, half a man now, and doing so well in school) how maybe he could relax now. But how it's never really time to relax, like right now is his vacation, but he's staying with his seven brothers, and they're so unforgiving of everybody, and maybe that's why they're all single and getting older.

As he talks he stares into the girl's big eyes of too many colors, his own eyes grow confused and searching, and he forgets about her. Perhaps she's on a break too, from college, and perhaps she has a brother as well, and perhaps he can't handle himself either. But the man will never know. Even when he begins to tell of the things he's heard and found and believes in now, like, *life is too short,* and *keep to the things that speak to your soul,* it is only to hear them out loud. And even when, after asking her about her four-year plan and receiving only an amused smile, he begins to diagram a plan on a notepad, an x for today, an x for the day she achieves her goals, and a series of x's in between. Still, he thinks only of his pinpoints in time, and his steps in between.

The girl watches him try to translate his life into words. She watches him do what all people must attempt sometimes, to make their lives fit into a story, to make the metaphors stand clear and strong, to underline the sentences on which the story rests.

After he has drunk the last sip of cooled espresso, smoothing out the lines of his face with a sigh, he tells her it is her turn to talk. She understands that he means for her to do the same as he has. But she has watched a man offer up his life for an hour, and in the end, neither of them could contain it in anything other than itself.

This girl excuses herself and walks out the door, pushing herself against the cold. She walks too fast with her eyes darting from car to ground to sky. She can feel just how much farther she is getting from him, how much closer to her small, quiet house. The frozenness of the earth is loud under her shoes and hard on metal signs and thick on the roads. When she stops at the crosswalk her silhouette is just as frozen, and it is she who feels the enormity of her life come over her. It is she who does not know how to control it, in this moment between one scene and the next, where she is so unknown.
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A girl stands at a crosswalk. She stands still now, but she has been walking toward the small coffee shop for fifteen minutes.

This girl is a thin girl. She carries her body on her hipbones and the back of her neck. When she starts walking her shoes will be too much for her body. When she begins to talk, you will see that her words are too heavy for her eyes.

She reaches the center and her movements are fluid. She moves naturally, though her body is too light. She moves past the windows of stores. She settles in a coffee shop, so she can watch its distracted customers. They all look like they intend to leave soon, go do important things.

There is one man there who only pretends to be one of these. She watches him dart his eyes and fumble with the change inside of his pockets. He catches her eye and watches too, chums out smiles, already mistaken. His shoes make a squeaky sound against the floor. She looks away.

When he sits down next to her with an espresso, it takes him a while to figure out that he has nothing to do with her. At first his glances and words mean only that she is pretty. But when she is only polite, he drops his eyes to her lap. Her fingers are like fallen shards of the moon, thin and luminescent. When he doesn’t stare back she looks at his face and sees how much it has been lived in, but also how badly it fits together.

She decides that she will stay. She will ask him questions. She will make her voice small, so that he will miss her words and talk over them, so that when he starts, he will forget what she has actually said.

He talks. He tells her why it’s okay for him to be in here—he’s on break, see. A break from teaching, he’s a woodshop teacher, and well maybe it isn’t glamorous, but he’d taught a girl with one arm and a broken hip how to saw well. He talks about how his ex-wife was a teacher too, an artist who taught. That, yes, they’d been divorced recently, and its been really hard on his children, Harley and Jamie. He talks about how this
embroidering on her dress, all the details, leaving only the silhouette of her holding a comb and a bucket. “Wake up, Nunca.”

She knew what came next. She knew her mother would never call it punishment, or discipline, or even having anything to do with Nunca’s running away. But it was what it was.

“Come along, you look like a mess.”

She stumbled out towards the dim mustard and green living room, towards the brown tweed furniture and the crucifixes on the wall, towards the smell of burned tortilla shells and the screen door. She followed the back of her mother’s turquoise dress until she couldn’t anymore, when she had to sit on the porch step as her mother stood behind her, plunked the bucket down on the concrete, kneeled with the comb in Nunca’s hair and pulled down hard.

If she screamed, even inside a whisper, like she learned to do later, her mother would not stop. “You come from proud people,” she would say. “Who wake early in the morning and spend the day with their hands in the earth and the sun on their backs. They know pain. This—” always, here, she would yank out a knot, pull the clump out of the comb with her fingernails and throw it in the bucket next to her. “This is nothing.”

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moon and the pink azalea bushes outside City Hall, curled against herself like something wild and the boughs bending, praying for her inches from her face.

When she was out of memories and her mother was out of tangles, Nunca would stand up and walk silently back to bed, trying not to give a glance to the veins straining blue in her mother's wrists and neck. She tried not to see the sweat on her tan face, the tears thick and transparent in her eyes. She opened the screen door without saying anything, only half hearing the voice from behind her hands saying, "Nunca, you do not know pain."

The next morning the song had not stopped. It was still near to night outside, the black in the sky just done ebbing from the stars, cuts of pale blue only peering from behind the first rays of dawn. Outside of her window she could see the shadow of her Grandfather asleep underneath the mango tree, his dark face curled into his arm and a few sparse hairs twirling on his scalp. His borough, tied to the trunk and kicking one hoof into consciousness, raised his head towards the last stars on the horizon and pawed down at the earth. It was perfect; besides the song inside her head, it was silent. And though everything inside her told her to rouse her grandfather, to greet him in the kitchen with the smell of banana pancakes and a drink to cure his hangover, the song was calling to her from somewhere eastward, from some place in the sky where it was still dark.

She packed her bag with fruit and money, skirts and strands of beads and mirrors and anything she thought she could trade for something later. Out of habit and tradition, she threw in her father's picture, along with her mother's dried snap-dragons wrapped in a doily, and forgot her hairbrush in the top drawer.

First, she teased the dew-stained grass with one toe; then she pressed the soft, bare arch of her foot into the dirt, feeling the wet earth

donald york jr., july 4th, 1974

The beauty of the summer this year came from knowing you weren't going to Nam, the four times you went to see Magnum Force, hours spent looking through the cracked window of your father's Chevy wrecker, as the sixties died, when your father let you "just clean up" the girly hair you'd grown, and the violent growth that stretched you thin, too quick for your muscles to keep up with. So much growing that as you lay in bed, over the calls of night birds and bull frogs and your own heart's sweeping in your ears, you thought you were hearing your bones grow, like the distant rumble of fireworks.

brenin wertz-roth
The path has always been the same
to the left, or straight on
to the house on 5th street
where he is waiting for you.

The decaying smell of sex mixes with sweat
the stench of the climax filling the room
the lovers are persisting. Crying in pain.
The man recklessly shoving.

The bruised woman has been waiting for years
he ruined you...left your spirit lifeless...
you can scrub, penetrate the deepest part of you.
The Boys of Hatred broke you...Wife of Shame.

In returning home, you light a candle
an impassive, elusive statue
you watch the flame, flickering
Cry! Please!

You're looking for a response, an explanation
Why you? Why him?
You want to understand what you have done
like the others, you have only smiled for him

The day when he raped you.

Chase had made up words to the tune of every song Miles Davis
had ever written, lying on the swing in Nunca's front porch while she
cought fireflies on her tongue. He always denied they were his
invention, that the words were always there in the music, only coded
and translated into the shapes of sounds. "Words really aren't so distant,
in everything, even silence," he had told her that morning, when she
asked him how he knew so well. "Just the brilliant parts of them, the
definitions, the ideas get broken up into pieces, that static of essence
and meaning that man has applied to form. Really, that's the process of
language; the words are already there, even when they're not spoken.
Silence. See, that's a word." He took another drag on his joint and
turned his eyes back towards the road, staring down the green of the
willow branches and the yellow dashes on the asphalt that seemed to
come towards him at the exact rhythm of Kind of Blue.

"You know you don't make any fucking sense."

"Yes," he said, throwing his arm around her shoulders and

warm and moist beneath it. She could smell the morning like every
other morning, the dirt and midnight rain and cornmeal from the
kitchen behind her, and for a moment she believed that somehow this
would be just another day. But as she smelled and saw and felt and
tasted the morning, she heard what was not that morning quiet, that
sound of the moon dying in its sleep. Instead, a low voice was singing
just above a quiet drum. She thought there should have been silence,
that she should have felt regret—but as she broke into a run, sprinting
out into the darker half of the fields, the only trace of a feeling was in
the dry leaves crackling like paper as she parted them with her hands;
the warmth of the first sunlight beaming against the back of her neck;
the surge in knowing that she was not running away from, but actually
running towards something for the first time in her life.
l'affront

Le chemin était le même.
A gauche puis tout droit,
C'est la grand maison sur la cinquième.
Mais il t'attendait, prêt à bondir sur sa proie.

L'odeur, des sexes putréfiés se mêlent à la sueur,
Les miasmas de la jouissance inondent la pièce.
Les amants s'acharnent. Cri de douleur...
Sa verge mal aiguisée la transperce.

Femme meurtrie par les années d'attente,
Il t'a salie...âme inerte...
Tu peux frotter, pénétrer au plus profond de ton être,
Le Fils de la Haine t'a brisée...Epouse de la Honte.

En rentrant, tu allumes une bougie,
Impassible, statue inaisissable.
Tu regardes la flamme, vacillante.
Pleurs ! Je t'en prie !

Tu chuches un réponse, une explication
Pourquoi toi ? Pourquoi lui ?
Tu veux comprendre ce que tu as fait ?
Comme aux autres, tu lui as simplement souris.

Je jour ou il t'a voilée.

marie clapot
dear james dean

JBD—
I know how you feel. I even know how you felt—left the rural Midwest behind for a shot at Hollywood and debuted in “East of Eden” as a farm boy. I know all about that kind of thing. I’ve made it all the way to a corner of the country. I’m not in the middle anymore, but a real corner, see, like you. Corners are better than middles: you know where to look. Sometimes it’s just better to have your back to a wall. Now that I’m here, I just write poems about leaving home and I go to Nicholas Goluses recitals. Well, for the record, my best friend back home plays the guitar (not so much Bach as Cash and the Clash—a difference of an aisle or two). Maybe you made the right decision. You loved acting, you didn’t love love. James Dean, I like your accent. I’ve always love “well” said “wull”. (An accent is whatever you haven’t got, I suppose.) I also mispronounce “Gide” and “Lytton Strachey.” Some things I’ll never get used to. That broken handle over there, for instance.

I can see, finally, what you saw in men. They’re not so bad, are they? My boyfriend looks like Jesus and don’t you think I don’t know it. When we kiss, it’s a pieta. We talk about canoeing and Tati films, barbecue and sex—not, needless to say, necessarily in that order. James Dean, I wonder if you ever avoided a mirror. (Mirrors are confirmation, I suppose.) I found out the first person I ever dated only wanted me for my mind. Thought for a long time about it, then invested in some low-cut sweaters. The first time I was ever called voluptuous, it was followed by a quick, earnest, “And I mean that in the best sense possible,” and I began to wonder what the hell that meant. I had to learn how to take a compliment like a prizefighter takes a punch. Or whatever. Remember how in “Rebel” the guys insulted you and you walked away, smirking, mumbling, “Yeah, and I’m cute, too.” One of these days, I’m going to be one of those girls who gets fake tits just so she can go, “My face is up here, jackass.” And once, this girl thought I was hitting on her, so she smacked me with a biology book and my lip bled till lunch. I was so proud and I don’t have the slightest idea why. So I kept my mouth shut. Sometimes it doesn’t pay to be honest when everyone around me is just going to think I’m being ironic.

turning up the volume. “Yes, I know that entirely.”

She laughed and reached across him to the button on the steering wheel that made the top of the black and pink convertible accordion-fold its way down, grabbed the joint and kissed his temple.

“I am in love with you,” he had said. “And I am stoned, and in ten minutes I will take you home to your Mexican mother who would rather tear out my lungs than let me in her house, and I will still be stoned, and you will tell her…”

“I will tell her that I am in love with you, and that I am stoned, and that we are going to Tijuana together to live like wild bohemians and sleep in your car and buy candles and be completely reckless and poor and in love.”

“You are a poet, Nunca.”

Sixteen year old Nunca put her bronzed feet up on the dash, stuck her hand out the window and felt the wind as a full weight against her open palm. She spread her fingers and straightened her elbow and watched the sun stream through in brassy tendrils of light.

“Yes,” she said. “Yes, I know that entirely.”

The car had streamed down the last of the scenic route silently, Chase singing along nonsense words about dark eyes and picket fences to the tune of So What and playing with the back of Nunca’s neck. Nunca watched his mouth moving pink and soft, his hair streaming back from his face like gold fireworks until the radio turned off and the car braked to a halt. He turned his star-spark blue-silver eyes towards hers.

“I’m not really going to say anything to her. You know that, right.”

Nunca bit her lip the way she did when she was thirteen and her mother brushed her hair. “Yeah, I know.”

He kissed her goodbye and she climbed out of his car, and still dizzy on pot and the taste of his mouth, she walked to the front door.

Her mother was in the living room, a rosary between her hands,
murmuring. The veins in her neck were swollen big as carnation stems and her hair was down and mussed to cover them. When Nunca walked in she didn’t look up, but stopped talking, or even breathing, as far as she could tell from the doorway. For a moment the loudest sound seemed to be the pulsing of her mother’s blood.

“You should know,” she said. “It’s been ten years since he left, but you should know.”

Nunca didn’t dare to cross the room. She didn’t try for fear her knees wouldn’t want to come along. Her mother’s hands were still and large with blood, still clutching the rosary as if to say to Nunca I’m still praying in my head. And in profile, her mother did seem at prayer; her head bent and sinister with the dark shadows of the unlit room, her face thin and tear-streaked, the whites of her eyes wild and blank with fear, full with the undercurrent of blood.

“He’s dead. He died three years ago. He died of the same thing.”

But the last words were lost inside a whisper, and even the breath it took to say them was carried outside as Nunca sprinted after Chase.

By the time Nunca reached the main road the sun seemed like it had sprawled across the full dome of the sky, everything blinding and pale as always. It was easy enough to hitch a ride with her sundress and bare feet, and within minutes a rust-red pickup had rolled up, its fender dragging across the pavement and the driver inside dragging a tongue across his teeth. The man introduced himself as Carlos; she introduced herself as Jade, almost immediately afterwards noting that she was twelve years old and a concubine to the Genghis Khan, hoping maybe that if her dirty looks wouldn’t fend him off that the idea of her being insane would. It didn’t; Carlos only gave her wolf eyes and asked if Genghis had ever taken her to Reno. The rest of the ride to the city was spent cactus-spotting along the horizon, tugging on the hem of her dress and giving one-word answers. She jumped out at the first alpaca vendor and shook off the
The music of the hogs reminds me of fall, each of them a baby Benny Goodman or Satchmo - skin pulled tight across their trumpet snouts.

It is silent when I approach the fence line, but as soon as the slop hits the trough their squeals erupt like blossoms, blooming and falling to the ground. The climax, this brief moment of screeches, so absolutely primitive and understated.

And I, the farmer, leap from my boots into the mud to bask in animal decline, bask in this coming full-bellied contentment.

I welcome the hog’s bites, each like the prick of a stem - jabbing softly as if I were buried, eyes closed, a kid in a pile of leaves.

comments and the almost palpably slithery looks he had made like grease marks across her skin. But forgetting had never been hard for Nunca, especially as she strode out into the grand distraction that was Tijuana, the buzz of cacao smells and open air, the panorama of reds and golds. The man in the truck was an echo of “consiga detrás aquí magnifico” behind her, and the roads were paved with marigolds and street musicians, daylight winos and Virgin Mary statues intermittently serene inside a haze of cigar smoke.

It was then that she began to think about San Francisco; the whole ghost of it had been appearing to her as a wild boy, swinging dread locks and conch shells in some reggae-warrior dance with a business card just peeking out of his back pocket. And that if San Francisco was this boy, that Tijuana was a salsa legend, with asphalt-carved wrinkles lining his kind face and mussed earth-brown hair draping over it as he twanged a rose-painted guitar. Tijuana and the song in her head jammed all night; his catcall riffs matched her tango rhythms and quick-spoken Spanish chords jived on hallucinated tambourines. Nunca felt like she was balancing on the neck of a buzzing guitar as she padded through the twilight, only stopping to eat black-bean fritters and to sing a Buena Vista Social Club tune to a stray dog. It wasn’t until the streetlight above her burned out that she ever thought to stop.

Because it was then that the Tijuana man suddenly put down his guitar and the music in her head turned into a wounded, moaning saxophone. It was then that the city turned into an old-world witch doctor. He pricked his fingers to drop blood into vials of clear liquid, twisted, and burned and stabbed pins into dolls to make someone distant bleed. He was laughing into a candle flame as he watched dark smoke curl around the incantations that still hung in the air, meant to stir out all the creatures of the night.
Suddenly Nunca found herself tripping in the dark past gaunt men with their hands around the necks of broken beer bottles. Drag devils in exquisite red velvet sucked pipe smoke between silver teeth and hissed at her as she walked by. Scared, dark little boys hidden under hard faces and gang leather danced with fists in the middle of the streets. When the man with the shaved head and sparrow bones rattling along his wrists grabbed her from behind, Nunca started to run, following every road that she could find, the beat of her own heart echoed as a gong inside her head.

She ran through the open fields beyond the black magic of the streets, scattering moonlight off the dense, short grass and singing silently along to the drums that had flared up in her mind. Soon, the field faded into dust, then into road, and then to rock, so that her bare feet bled and she began to stumble and trip along the torn hems of her skirt. The song in her head was lulling down to one piano; she lay and slept, dust curling between her teeth.

“So how about this weather?”
He shrugged, and laid down
his vocal molasses, sweet and thick,
“It’s rain, baby. And when it rains, baby it pours.”

We didn’t say much else.
He fell asleep with some Twinkie on his chin,
and I listened to the Beatles tell Loretta to get back.

I slowed to stop for gas at a Chevron,
and on what seemed like instinct, he awoke, blinking in the sunrise.
Fumbling with the sunglasses,
and brushing the yellowish crumbs from his chin,
he asked to be dropped off at some hotel he liked.
“They have great continental breakfasts.”

I left him curbside,
and he thanked me,
thanked me very much,
jiving his way inside.

I hit the onramp as the moon waned,
the king’s seat still warm,
the wind whistling in the dawn.

kea wilson

max sindell
elvis hitching a ride by a 7-11 at three in the morning

His stained white leather jumpsuit
glowed orange green under a midnight blue sky
with a lopsided creamy moon,
in one of those fly-over drive-over states.
It was raining.
He was wearing sunglasses, holding a small plastic bag.
It rustled as he jived over and knocked on my window.

"Hey man, would you mind, uh, givin' me a lift?"

His voice unmistakable,
that low rolling tone of cool,
and the rhinestones on his wrist
glittering in the rain,
the last lights of stardom
he'd chosen to see.

We left that 7-11 behind.
Out of the corner of my vision
the shadows of my wipers
played across the white tassels of leather
that lay across his lap.

“What’s that there?” I asked.
He flipped and creased the wrapper in his hands.
“Origami.” I stared blankly ahead.
“Paper cranes, and stuff, Japanese folding, you know.”
There was one of those

sunday

On Sunday morning Leo Leopold woke up on his back. It isn't that sleeping on one's back is particularly strange, but in all his eight years, Leo had always slept on his side or stomach. He put his glasses on and dangled his feet off the bed. It looked cold outside. The whole block stretched away from the angle of his window and it appeared mostly brown, with brown brick houses and houses with brown siding and brown grass showing through between patches of dirty brown snow. I reminded him of the last photograph his father had sent him. In the picture, his father had a man propped up in his lap (the caption said "Jacob"), the pale bandage wrapped around his head soaked through with muddy blood. They got a telegram saying his father had been killed two weeks later. In any case, today did not look cold enough to snow. No sun either. Leo pulled his lips tight together and tried to pinpoint the odd feeling now settled within him.

However, this was a Sunday, and on Sundays you do not fiddle fart around. There are places to go and people to be polite to, if not a whole houseful of things to clean and polish. Leo padded to the bathroom. He brushed his teeth and gargled a little salt water to clear his throat. He wet his hair and combed it down, with a nice, neat part on one side. He turned his head back and forth slowly and checked it over. He shook out a couple drops of hair oil and combed it through. Satisfied, he went back to his room to dress quietly in his outfit for church, laid out over his chair the night before. Same outfit as always: first, the pressed white shirt (his mother believed that age seven was old enough for a boy to learn to iron), then the black pants with a crease, then clean white socks, then the black jacket, then the red clip tie, then finally the black lace-up shoes with a weekly polish. After he had tied them, he tapped happily down the stairs to the kitchen, although the sound was muffled by the thick stair runner underneath.

“Was that you making that awful scuffing noise, Leo?” His mother picked up a butter knife and held it above the pale slab of butter
for a moment. She was sitting at the head of the table, her back to the window, eating poached eggs and rye toast. “Here.” With her forefinger, she pushed two pieces of cold white toast toward him. “Thank you, Mother,” Leo said politely. He poured himself a glass of grapefruit juice from the glass pitcher on the table. His mother drank only grapefruit juice on Sunday, Tuesday and Thursday, and the rest of the days it was V8 or water. She had read somewhere it kept your vision and hearing sharp. His mother focused on her breakfast, and Leo was happy to look out the window in silence, taking clean, precise bites from the toast. After breakfast, Leo and his mother went to the front hall to put on their coats and then walked the three blocks to church.

A third of the way into the service, all the children over 12 were excused to attend a Bible study or, if you were under age 11, to play in the nursery. Leo followed a herd of yelling children into the nursery. He took a seat in the same chair he always had. He was never glad to be in the same room as all the annoying, snot-nosed children, but the older kids, although not as snotty, were not any more intelligent.

Ms. Chandler, first year nursery supervisor and conductor of the church’s new children’s bell choir, glared at Leo. Just that morning her washing machine had exploded and her Jack-Russell terrier had escaped and dug 26 holes in their front yard just as she was spilling the milk that was delivered to her stoop. She was the type of woman who becomes uncomfortable when all the children in her care are not building with obscenely large blocks or bashing each other’s brains in with large blunt toys.

And all of this on top of the nursery’s condition that day. Bobby Thrasher had the flu and his mother had taken him to church anyway. Ms. Chandler was annoyed by the fact that parents think they can just toss their kids into the nursery and forget for an hour that their child has a broken arm, an ear infection, and some weird undiagnosed fungus of the mouth.

Now the fires of youth blend into monotony and fade from the foreground, reduced to a flicker, a cinder, a sermon on the aging creation, suffused inundations on the way things were and the way things should be…but there are no more poets.
I am old and I have lost the poet:

the collective loathing of youth,  
a voice un-stretched,  
a whisper faint between the buildings,  
instilling doubt as well as assurance  
in their concrete marvel and verisimilar resolution.

My constitution has varied  
and I have lost my will to wander,  
so I stare out and survey the city blocks, the monolithic buildings,  
the boundaries on nature that segment the horizon  
as sure as a siren responds to the approach of a ship.

Sitting as I do I have seen squares made of the ocean,  
green and gray forests, and thousands of rectangular deserts,  
microcosms of a greater Nature broken down to a finger’s width.  
I cannot be their singer.

I am old, and I have lost the poet:  
the certainty, the surety that everything is as it should be.

Worse than horizons, I see segmented people,  
an influx of apathy towards sentiments we share,  
rhythms and reverence lost on a nation,  
this “beat” generation, this iconic tread  
that spread from California, growing and grinding  
the stone that had sired the city that fired it  
out like a buckshot: spreading, imbedding,  
and becoming something different and dangerous,  
unlike the innocent idea you loaded in that gun.

Today Marion Bradley had some sort of sickness that made her eyes crusty,  
and Heath Bronavin had toppled over a very tall stack of massive plastic  
blocks three times now (this would have been fine, except he was standing  
on top each time yelling, and Megan Holiday and Brandon Makey had been  
struck on their heads by the falling blocks all three times and were wailing  
quite loudly in the corner).  
Whatever her final reason, she decided that enough was enough.  
Today she would make sure that Leo would be of some good to the nursery,  
instead of just allowing him to sit quietly by the door. Leo looked up at Ms.  
Chandler, quite intimating in her purple dress and towering over him.  
“Leo,” she said, “Would you hold Bobby while I help the other children?  
What a good little helper you will be!” She thrust the snotty four-year-old  
onto Leo’s lap. The boy had, at least, a visible cold as his nose desperately  
needed to be wiped. Leo stared at the disgustingly dirty boy who was  
suddenly sitting on his lap and who stared right back, unblinking.

Perhaps Bobby was a little shell-shocked at being put on a new lap so  
abruptly. After about 30 seconds of unbroken staring, he calmly leaned  
forward and wretched his breakfast of pancakes and syrup all over Leo’s  
polished black shoes, then scampered away quite relieved and unconcerned.

Outside the sun was just beginning to show through a screen of  
thinning grey clouds. He half danced down the sidewalk, skipping over the  
thin slivers of shadow the bare branches made on the sidewalk. Ten dollars,  
he thought. Ten whole dollars and a new pair of shoes. His father had written  
him about how much he liked the museum on Main Street, telling him about  
asoldier’s hat from the Civil War worn by Leo’s grandfather. Leo thought  
maybe he’d like to go see that. He could buy dinner at the diner, too. His  
mother never went out, and she would never take him to a diner. Today was  
Leo’s day, he had it all to himself. Maybe he’d stay at the museum all day.  
Maybe he’d go and get coffee and toast at the diner, just like his father might  
have done when he was still alive.
You come to expect it after a few years. The troops march in; the man hauling a cart of cabbages stops beside the road and holds his horse hard by the reins and looks away. Cats run underneath porches. Women run to the windows to watch them march in. The uniforms are different colors, they carry different flags, and each time the routine is the same. No one is sure of the politics of it, even Herr Heuboden, sitting on his porch with his pipe, loudly explaining the problems of German government to anyone with a moment to listen.

The town complies. The general leading the army presents a document to the mayor. From now on, this army will run the government. He makes an announcement to the people about freedom and embracing their new leaders. The children dance and sing songs in the square.

General Koepel takes his place in a blue leather chair behind a mahogany desk. He runs his coarse palm over the smooth wood, letting his cuff scrape against the edge of the desk. The gold braid is coming unstitched. He wonders where the uniform has been and whether the dark patch on the back is a bloodstain. The man he bought them from seemed pleased enough to get rid of them. At a few marks a piece, he could afford to dismiss any dismal visions of dead soldiers stripped and robbed on the battlefields. Still, he’d been safe so far and lucky for not running into any real armies. The men he recruited thought it a fine joke, and he supposed it was. It had to be the best idea he’d ever come up with. Marching into towns dressed as soldiers and taking all the money out of the bank. It was a government bank, after all.

He toys with the paperweights, the pens, the bits and bobbles the mayor left on his desk. He finds some paper and writes out an order to the bank. He asks Captain Kuemmel, a man who used to be a grocer, he thinks, to take it and return with the money.

They march out late at night, every pocket stuffed with gold.

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The green gray light
of waking
between song and flight
before the earth
rolls herself over giving birth
to fruits
roots
tall green shoots
to blinding strips of yellow
and distant calls of swallows
I rise,

full of empty dreams
the rhythms
leap up out of my mouth
carry me to the rivers down south
moving me to see the colors
bronze mothers
amber fathers
oak brothers
mocha sisters
Mister.
Nigger.
I rise,

up through the fog
and the boogie man bog
out of time
full of rhyme
new born sunshine.
In the town, people eat boiled potatoes and cabbage for supper like always. They ask about what happened in the town that day while they were out plowing the fields. A new government will be just like the old one and in a month it will be gone, the men tell their wives as if they really needed to hear it. The wives carry the leftover cabbage out to the pigs and walk out over the quiet fields for a moment. They watch the clouds slipping over the moon, blue ghosts sliding over its bright light, and think about the moon. How it passes overhead while people sleep. How it goes through its cycles of darkness and radiance, but always comes back again, fresh and new, but sure to dwindle soon enough.

The troops stop to rest. They leave their uniforms in a ditch. They stuff the money into their boots and run off into the light.

A woman comes by, herding her goats back to pasture. She picks up the general’s coat. She could rip off the gold braid, she thinks, and the baby can play with the buttons. She sticks her finger through the hole in the back. She will go home and put it to rags.

Saraw Wylder
impotence

The bathroom is decorated with flowered pink wallpaper. It was your wife’s idea, but you wouldn’t object. Not even now that she’s dead. Your medication sits by the sink. One for the liver, for the stomach, you can’t remember what that purple one’s for. There’s one for impotence. You don’t use that anymore. It’s still in the cabinet. She liked it better when you put them there.

Reading a magazine about fishing. Think about how slow it is on the water there.

Slow as you drift. Slow even as you pull that trout out of the water, even as it flops in the bottom of your boat. Slow like sand. You used to work at a factory that made hourglasses. Small, plastic ones, stamped with the Statue of Liberty and the Golden Gate Bridge, then shipped to New York or San Francisco for tourists to bring back as a sad reminder of their trip. You have a few of them, defects, surplus, but you’ve never seen New York. You spent a lifetime watching sand filter through plastic funnels. It’s late now and you’re tired. Even so, you flip to the next page. Finish the article.

Listen. There’s sound. From downstairs. Just the dog, you say. The dog? It’s not convincing. The dog is as old and lame as you are. Wouldn’t be up now. Besides, you can hear footsteps in the hall. Drawers being opened, things being moved. There, listen.

Oh god. Get your pants up Charley, you’re being robbed. I can’t just run out there like this.
The toilet paper. Quick.
No, wait.
The house, your house. No time now.
Wait.
He’s got your wife’s jewelry by now, I’m sure. That’s all you got of her.
What’ll I do when I get out there?
Christ, I’ll bet he’s got the money now too.
What if he's got a gun or something?
No time for this, just get your pants up, Charley.
Clatter. You've knocked the wastebasket. Shhh. He's heard. He'll run.

Now what?
Get out there.
And do what?
Got to do something.
You don't quite get the buttons right, so you have to hold the pants with one hand, but you go to the door anyway. He's not there and you wonder if maybe you imagined it.

Downstairs, the door is open a crack. The plastic hourglass on the kitchen table has been flipped and you watch the sand filter through. In the bedroom, the dog whimpers in the corner, his milky eyes searching for you.

colleen fullin
the red wheelbarrow

so much depends upon

a red wheelbarrow

glazed with rain water

beside the white chickens

wcw

the red wheelbarrow

EARLY SPRING 2003