

FROM "LEAFMOLD"

When working from refined material the thing unwinds in more directions than expected, clouds taking the places of mountains, ridgelines collapsing into silty, tightly-coiled rivers. If (and when) great blue and red stones in the earth turn (perhaps) into hulking, flightless birds—well...fuck it. The dog leads himself around by the nose; that wet magnet pulls to anything with a worthwhile odor. Market day: one dozen brown eggs, a pound of ground lamb, a bundle of asparagus, three blocks of cheese, a strawberry-rhubarb pie, a fistful of purple and burgundy flowers I can't identify. It occurs to me now how badly I want it all to end well but it can't. The urge this afternoon to grab the sledge and throttle every breakable thing on the property. Arrowroot: a word God created with snakes in mind. The thing is a moon, then a horn, then a thing again—finally just an echo in your blood: a town of hawks, a wooden jug leaking tea on a gravel lane, a grassy horizon oblivious to buffalo.

Drums and glitter: the dancers remind you of weary horses. My father hooks his electric knife up to a car battery. (We spend an hour together cleaning fish.) From here, it's a freefall: a malfunction with purpose, a command that does not obtain the desired result and yet remains desirable. I light a scentless burgundy pillar candle singing a Wilco lyric to myself: *Via Chicago*. She pulls a cartload of duck wings through the river district until her shoes are finally still at the haberdasher's doorway. Fever drags its chains through the dives and skyscrapers—the risks repel us, the dog has a thick smile on his face, sleeping upside down in the sun on the kitchen floor. I dream I am an adder striking an ox: a tough nap. He tramples me and we watch one another die: vile yowls, cramps, farts, a gaze won by succumbing. I mock the tendency to invent: the yule, the day of the mother and the day of the father. My neighbor argues with his two kids in their yard. He points toward the house. His children brand him with a vast disregard, aiming index fingers right into his eyes.

I can't imagine a time without birds—without men, yes. Everywhere: we see wires coming from people's ears. If I told you that galaxies were rotting in the salt-crust on my boots, what would you say? If I told you that men with guns and bombs were exacting revenge on the innocent, what then? Eighteen degrees tonight before the official beginning of winter. I'd say it's here. Once we bring barbed wire into this world, how can it be removed? The sole element of any thing is everything. The men I become in my sleep have nothing to do with me: their skies have cleared, the waters they stare at are thawing. We see an ambulance at our neighbor the knife-maker's house and wonder if he's made it. A big cardinal swoops through the sleet. Home moves with us, watching our steps and miming our actions. Constant song has warped the boards.

The universe exists inside of a dog—snow flies and it’s only the glow of organs that we are able to walk by. The only way to describe our wide window on the backyard is *turquoise*; rain descends, March withers into dusk, pines take on the color of a sun-filled sea. The rest of evening reverberates under a surge of ibuprofen: her crossing the room naked, the shower’s pulse, crisp bustle of pages turning. Tuning yourself to thunder means you’re out of tune. Something’s broken... the doctor? No. What hangs from his neck? No. What he uses it to listen to? I saw a whole hillside of willows blooming this morning. When you qualify freedom, when you redefine, it’s lost. Want to piss someone off? Turn out the light as they’re reading this page. Hoofbeats of deer across asphalt, a marsh etched from moonlight—each life is difficult for differing reasons. When I pretended to sleep, thinking it would go over as precious, my mother said “wake up.”

Spiders, given light wind, can build webs miles out over the charging waves. The dog is sniffing out the night, finding his way around the world. Blue windows and low groans between sobs. I fought myself again last night. A terse prayer in the taiga's green cloaks and we're back on the unpaved road south. I've been granted one spine to my name—I intend to make a lightning rod of it. The scheme erupts: the book opens and out comes a forest: pine needles, leaves detonating into half-leaves with soil frantic underneath and the insane merrymaking of coyotes echoing from the marshy islands. Suddenly, the moon is everywhere: a melon tossed to the road's edge, an owl's eye in the brow of a drunken tree. Time to get back down to it then: shoe leather's whisper as it bends, three slow beers before a silent walk across town and the gate opening just wide enough for the body to clear. Two dots of green tea shape the word into an unknown with familiar edges. *And out of the garden they went.*

Bury me in the clothes I'm wearing when I die. Stuff my organs into holes of trees around Winter Garden Nature Preserve. Don't tell the priests. Don't tell the cops. A part of home: eight o'clock and my glass of temperanillo casts a vaginal glow on the kitchen table. God bless you Paul Simon for saving me night after night in my deeply fucked up early manhood. At the top of the compass a mountain of red earth. To the left the ocean, to the right another. At the bottom of the compass: the whole of creation staring back. Big Gunpowder Falls presents one particular situation— Little Gunpowder Falls: a slightly smaller one. All this worldly talk around the unalterable facts: sun through pines, mouse bones in the owl's dense pellet. When I listen to the radio I am wondering about death. When I drink my coffee, I am wondering about death. When I wash my face, I am wondering about death. When I am wondering about death, I am wondering about death. *None of these things do I do.*

I am interested in doing and *only* doing. Never meaning. I find *industry*. Weeks ago, a storm reset my alarm—I haven't bothered with it: waking up around nine to find it's actually 2:14. The whole embodiment, this me, remains quicker than bird-shadow across blank paper. A beautiful day in May, but I ache and ache and ache. This side of Panther Mountain, we find rivulets working down to the mouths of wild garlic. The theater of the tongue, the desk made of teeth, the book cast in muscle, tall as figures from Giacometti. I spend the morning terrifying myself with guesses at symptoms and causes. Who goes to an island to study anything but the island itself? *I may be skunked, but I can still find a vein*. A man I used to work with would remark: "Every hole's a ten!" He would've fucked his own shadow if it stood still long enough. Why offer the specters gold when you can offer them campfire, a blacksmith, a plate of fried organs where the fields meet the flooded, prehistoric mountainside? A garden is a hallway, an elevator. A garden is a market, a gin palace, an embassy, a checkpoint. Count from one to thirty three, walking away. Now, turn around.

The laughing animals wanted to be friends with you, wanted to find their way to your elusive, practical core. Always a forgotten scrap of *it* humming and whispering beneath my ribs. The true part of the lie, the sweet scent of night, the defensive wound, the alley of eyes flying forward during sleep. The season has nothing to do with it—it's the season's rituals that stir you into awe. Sleep begins: the ceiling's gray face dulls and thickens, the sheet's color is forgotten, the clothes worn during the day are heaped together—an essence begins; a curtaining, a fragility. We say we'll be the death of one another—laugh a bit, then we're quiet awhile. Fog in small trees at dawn, a purple unexplainable in the west at the end of the road. A small, personal goal: to survive the need to survive, and a notion dispelled: that sun can mend a rip in the heart's red hide, cure a faulty map in the brain. This sentence could go on forever, but no. My teeth fit perfectly together.

Catacombs of dust along a floorboard; a snowy stumble as mercy settles; a silver dollar chunk of ice in the tiger-orange insulation around a greasy pipe. You are holding in your hands a masterpiece of American Literature—or so the ghost-chorus behind me keeps insisting. *“Greasy pipe” was his nickname in college.* A blue jay lands on a window ledge—makes a brief argument, then moves. Lowland sea: where I live, where the swamp was bled to churn in the sinus between sight and thought. *Screw you.* Remember: you turned the lock, turned into smoke and slipped beneath the door. When you crawled back into your human frame you cursed the empty house. Snow tapping a pane—the streetlight waking for no apparent reason. Nightly I level myself with a kiss on your forehead. *I admire you. I am praying for you. I am wishing you well.* We discuss the sun as if it will never burn out. We talk about death and shake our heads.

Getting the good out of it: shoot enough arrows at the cloud and you'll get a bit of rain. *Snodgrass is walking through the universe*. Trying for ten in one day may be crazy—five may be more realistic. I think you have pretty eyes. Ten below and even the air I pull into my lungs (a system so red it deifies redness) breaks its desperate clusters into halves. I'd forgotten something... it had a purpose, an intent, a dustless place above the fire in my head—even a name. Where is the sentiment? Where *isn't* the sentiment? Chimneys all waving their gray, unceasing flags this morning. At one point there's a story and at another, it ends. There were the stars overhead as we broke from forest into the marsh's foggy silence. Stop obsessing, for a moment, about the face of god, and maybe it will turn slightly toward you. The night: endless with wind tossing whole swaths of phragmites back and forth above white waves.