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Counterfeiters

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COUNTERFEITERS

by

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ABSTRACT

This thesis is an examination of region. More specifically, it is about the physical and psychological landscapes these characters find themselves having to exist in. This book examines the liminality of the local; this is very much about thresholds. Rather than examining what exists beyond the threshold, this book considers the forces that drive us to one. This is a book about regional stasis and how, in some instances, stasis can transform itself into suppression. The enclosed environment of community can create this suppression, this contractive or almost gravitational hold the place has on the people who inhabit it. This is a suppression of forced routine and monotony and having to accept things for what they are. This is a suppression that views creativity as dangerous, this is a suppression that locates and identifies creativity with the intent to eradicate it. Ultimately, this examination of region creates a paradox of creativity; through its intended suppression it forces people to get more creative in order to find means of escape. I think this book traces the road of one kind of creativity, here its about the creation of chaos, an entropic environment intended to counterbalance the stasis felt by so many of the community members.

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Chapter 1

Counterfeiters

After the Automobile Rendered the Body Useless

Tonight we're going to party

like it's nineteen-fifty two

we'll sit in the backseat and neck

until your nose bleeds.

Roll through a toll booth, pull off

at a gas station and let

the car guzzle down its gallons.

Head in for a soda and a tin

of tobacco. It's impossible to act

stuck up in the midst of a stick up.

Hold it, don't do anything

drastic. I'm going to put

my hands down slowly, since we are

almost, all of us, now leaving.

Dad always said the way you back

your self back out into the night

says a lot about your character.

Your character: that thing

we thought we found but are still finding.

Let's get serious for a moment

and airbrush our initials on each other.

Come to find out, there's not

an endless back stash of soap
opera love affairs and I'm pissed
to go on living in a world knowing so.
If we keep pressing we're going
to find out why its so hard to exist here
and now and then.
You blow breath between your fists
beside the Lutheran fields
that drag on and on and on and over
and stop abruptly beside a tree line
or Boomer's Bar & Grill.
The wool on the collar
of my jean jacket still feels old fashioned.
Dad keeps saying my whole history
is just me trying to remember you the right way.
He tends to hit it right on the nose.
Which, in the rearview, you are still nursing
with your napkin. You eulogized
the jar of cottonwood seeds you caught
sometime before I met you
and poured them softly from a cliff.
Everyone defines ash differently.
You put your cigarette out in the tray
beneath the dashboard.
Kill the switch. Cut the lights.
I keep telling myself
I've been in the trunk of your car
for so long I'm like luggage.

Portrait of the Body with Bear Trap

Let us start with the relatively unknown mythology
of horse eyes. It is said each palm reads field, reads high wire.
Picture us dragging. Two-track under the power lines.
Deer split and draining in the back of barns.
Just let me, for a moment, think of you
all highway-blind and bone scattered across the blacktop.
Nostalgia: your body naked in an ice-bath.
Forget folklore. Forget psychic. She works now
as lead phlebotomist at the county pharmacy. Pinprick
makes me butterfly, makes me bleed out among the rushes.
It's funny, they say, the way we keep our horses
from the house. All winter we left the sparrow to bathe
bloodless in the birdbath. You, in the back acres sorting
weeds to press between pages of your field guide.
Let's recall that winter we spent diving. Where we cut
a hole in the ice. Rumor had it, underneath there existed
a body in a rusted out Chevette. Even now, I hear you
telling that story. The fish swimming in and out
of sockets. Speaking of electricity: we lost it.
Searchlight over the field rows. Silent silo. Old husk
of husker, rain rusted and mute. Ghost murmur
and wind-shift among the haystacks. Afternoon
is a small animal unscathed, confused of the bear trap
gone off over head who slips out and into a hole
in the frozen ground. Here you come empty handed
in your camouflage over the field. The horses
never lift their heads. Your breath an insipid cloud
suggesting no one can tell you or tell you apart.

Equine Elegy

Figure it's November, twenty two miles outside Indiana

and the heat cuts out. There is a sign to be cautious
of the crosswinds. The highway forces travelers to pass
policeman probing a car in a ravine. Supermarket,
Dairy Queen, cemetery—bury your horses. At a service
station, the young boy with the family in the station wagon
grows frustrated with these forced close quarters and with
a sharpie writes “sex” across the stall in the men’s room.

Strip mall, cinema, cemetery—bury your horses. For the next hour
all he can think about is the things he could do
to the condom he bought like a gumball in the bathroom.

Cornfield, pasture, pasture, schoolhouse, pasture
cemetery—bury your horses. On the other side of Indiana,
figure it's the driveway. Take a headcount of the herd
and like all things picking up steam wish them well as they gallop west
surely to end up at the bottom of the coastal cliffs of America.

Michigan isn't Necessarily a Joke but I'll Keep Telling it Like it is

If a group of hunters walk into a bar and start talking about the wolf that got away the
young man pouring their drinks is going to listen. If the wolf, bullet bitten, crawls into its
den and devours its mate and itself in the same act we will all just write it off as the sort
of mess a cub crawls into. When he walked in to find that his dad killed his mom and
then himself, my friend washed off the walls before he called anyone. The police arrived
as he was emptying the pail of water into a snow bank. My uncle deposits more cans than
paychecks and attempts to yell louder than the echoes from the rifle range. That sure is a
lot of fur in the barbwire. A cat in a field with an arrow through it. My youngest cousin
always falls from the high wire when she's playing circus. Asks why there is never a
thunderstorm in the snow globe. Manufactures a makeshift dungeon in her dollhouse.
Only looks up when she's pushed the thumbtack a little too deep into a callous. Those

cubs, probably on the side of the highway with their ribs exposed and I cross the road wondering, obsessively, if I've left enough lint for a flame in the dryer—if home will still be there when I get there.

Where were you while the rest of us were getting older

From here to less lonely is a long shot.

Dad raises dogs in duos and whistles

them in from the field.

I want so badly to tell you

they don't come back. I want to tell you

the cement now smells like autumn

the kind of concrete you can sink

your teeth in. Both of us

know I gave up

being cute a long time ago.

Still, I want to show up on your steps

knit-hatted and Novocained

so you could pinch the numb from my cheeks.

Poke fun at my ears, the cold

contemplation of our next move.

Farm stands are popping up

all over Michigan, like you'd remember

how you loved to shuck

through the road stand's supply

of cut corn. The attendant forcibly suggested

we put down the sugar beet—

the birds made like his voice

and rose. We hook and laddered

that wannabe Hitchcock

hail-mary-monkey-in-the-middled him

left the beets in the box and biked home.
I want to tell you this
small town's the same now that you left it.
The arms at the crossing still stop the cars
as the train bleats through.
If there was a railroad track
you wanted to be tied to
it was this one. But no damsel.
No distress. And always, just like that, the train
has already made its turn
up past the Wild Horse Tavern.
The bass in the community pond go belly up, it's the best
thing to happen to this town
since that whole Blue Collar
Comedy Tour and a bus trip to the casino.
I want you to tell me all about it.
Neighborhood love stories always end
in a cul de sac at dusk. We try to forget we were born
in a place where nothing startles the bird dogs.
A place where every slot machine
reflects not you but every character
you created in the play house. A place
where *I want you to come back*
the same seems selfish.
Wouldn't you know, I thought I saw you
with your legs through the window
of a Pontiac parked close and looking out
over the gravel pit. This is just to say
I'm a stones throw away

from feeling better. It feels a lot like you left me
alone in a movie theater but had the decency
to feed the meter I'd been parked at.

If you don't mind I'd like to be the shoulder
on the side of the highway I imagine
you walk on with your thumb up.

I was in your woods one winter
blowing breath in my hands
beside the tree line. I watched you
from a far way off pulling your sled up the hill.
I waited far too long for you
to come back down.

Equine Elegy

Because the bales must be unloaded individually by hand
the workers understand the need for assembling
an assembly line. Before there were factories there were
factories. The horse on the dark side of the stable
stays there. A young man and a young woman stand
at the edge of a field and watch her mother aim
a rifle at her father. Both of their glares dare the other
to move first. Unfortunately, nothing comes
of it. The young man and young woman remain
on the outskirts of the field. If he said
it's getting dark he meant he loved her. If she agreed
to shoot the pistol in the pasture, even better.
It's been such a long time since anyone has brought
a lawnmower into the meadow.

Poem Voted Most Likely to Take its Clothes Off in Public

Not because it's about to save someone

from drowning. Not for any apparent reason
other than it's fed up with mowing
the grass and no one saying thank you.

The VFW hall honors a volunteer
every month and this poem has never been
it. This poem is pissed. The fishermen
get used to this poem. It wakes up
every morning and bums a cigarette
from the crew down by the docks.

This poem disagrees with the courts
decision to make it pay back
all of its parking tickets.

Despite all of its shortcomings
you have to admire this poem.

By shortcomings I mean manners.
I mean this poem laughed in the face
of the parents of the kid who grew
facial hair at fourteen that everyone
said was going to be a major league pitcher.

This poem has no problem
letting you know your mother is sexier
than you are, sweetheart. This poem watches
a biker in spandex pass a biker in gym shorts
and suddenly feels bad about itself.

This poem works so much with the water.

This poem's work phone rings.

This poem knows you are the stupid
son of a bitch who got too close to the edge
and "slipped" in. It's like you've gone

missing, in the water for days
this poem is the poor bastard commissioned
to fish you out. This poem doesn't care
about you, your bruised and bloated body.
This poem has trouble paying the bills.
Then again, maybe this poem would slip
down to its skivvies, swim around
and reach for your hair rising up
like an oil spill. Nah, this poem isn't
into the business of saving lives.
The difference between you and this poem
is that this poem is not afraid to admit
if you found it unconscious in the water
it would rather you not try to push
the lake from its lungs.

This Whole River is Just a Grave I Like to Wash My Feet In

I finally give up the idea of digging down to you.
Cold water, two teens don't see us see them
fucking in it. Forget it, lets start with something
less romantic—watch the anchor away, down
and tight
rope the tree to the bow.

It is always almost something close to summer
or like the end of it when rain begins
to drum inside the empty belly of a dumpster.
Strike a mailbox with an aluminum bat and hear
your wrists ring

loneliness: a dog dips its head

to sneeze on the river. Over there, a trailer
backs in to the shallow. *Hold it tight, now.*
Give a boy a lasso and he will create a horse
or hang himself or both

fairly close to one another
a cooler and a bag of chips on the boat bottom—
archaeological lunch break: feeding fishing line
through your teeth.

In the froth and twigs the water spiders mimic rain.
After the river, the smell of river and a city
acts like it's the first time they find a body
barbed with fish hooks.

At this hour, a gas station is certainly not open
for soft drinks.

A blue bowl full of worms and newspaper.
Just a lot of broken glass by a boat dock.

Equine Elegy

A young man puts on the knee-high boots of a young woman's
father to help her water and hay the horses.

Dead of winter. The barn, its three pull-string bulbs,
their naked bodies find cadence in the hum
of the powerlines and evening. It will still be an hour
before her parents are home.

A young woman sitting on the fence tells a young man
if they play their cards right they might have
a full house. Both of them are now unintentionally
uncomfortable. She only meant a hand to bet on.

When the young man and young woman feel old
enough to have regrets, they do. They push their car

off a cliff and swim as far off the coast as they can.

In hindsight, the hind legs were the most important part of the story nobody at the barn party would get behind.

Instructions for Stepping Out of Line at a Theme Park

For whatever reason, all the Ferris wheels stop spinning. It's the last day of school and our bicycles and the Pistons find a way back to the finals. I sit on a curb in the cul de sac listening to you cuss your mother about how we've spent so many summers serving as garage sale attendants. Anyway, the carnival is in town and the power goes out and the sky goes all siren. We turn to watch the wind, cyclonic over the overpass where, last spring, the new highway meant movie theaters, meant an economy. When the highway collapses it means more to two people who live at its opposite ends. See the bridge we're rebuilding? Underneath: paddleboats paddling about. You walked into the river, then I did. Your long dress rising up like an oil spill. We used to watch cars pulling out of the rent-by-the-hour cabins. It's like small town fever always hangs someone's jizzed underpants from the flagpole. You said we could have been hawks, talon tied and twisting in the air. Then we laughed and traded pictures of our privates. Like the railway tracks we can't see the end of, we're getting ahead of ourselves. Like I was saying, everyone began to congregate by the exit. Seek ditch seek low ground, seek nope not in front of a window. Aftermath: neighbors in the street with their candles lit. Out of all the mammals we're the only ones who bury our children in leaf piles.

Here, let me brush you off. You use your teeth to bite
through the buttons. You: breathing hard at the edge of the forest
at dusk. Wind riling the pine fringe, the horse manes.
Leaving a trail because you like to imagine someday you might need
to find your way back. And my last hope is: you haven't yet.

Animalignancy

Well, here we are again

in a it is exactly what it sounds like
situation.

A woman pressing her hands

to a frosted front window
as the pipes freeze.

She did not mention the local E&G

when vasoconstriction
took the cat's life.

Sped through her own heart:

she did not mention
that the humming in the bird cage

was without it. Do not confuse this

for an incomplete taxonomy
of plausible phobias, though, it is exactly

what this has come to be.

In all of their books,

the glaciologists concur

we should catch the next plane

to an ice cap while we still can.

Once there, it begins its lesson on buoyancy.

A weight shift. Someone reaches forward

to prepare the boat hook.

Body in the cranberry bog.
The woman from the front window
is blue and bloated. This has been
an awful thaw. A soft rain falls
as a structure more or less
instinctual: something other
than the incessant impulse
to wipe your eyes. A man whistling.
A hound backing out
of a culvert. Diabolically drear
is the dog kennel, those bones
in the corner of his eyes
have been gnawed over
a period of time relatively consistent
with metastasis. Before we knew ourselves
we knew our personalities
were nautical: not deep or distant
but the color of the décor
in a fast-food fish restaurant.
Dump the guts at the end of the dock
and rinse your hands.
Frame everything in the woodwork
as spontaneous plague: suddenly the grass
becomes a swarm of horseflies.
Nobody questions how to hunker down
in the season of slap your shins.
They hug the guardrails along the road
over the lake. Cyclists
flipbook by us on the downhill.

A last page with only wind
in its whiteness. A person, a far off speck
raises their hands and waves emphatically.

Something beats its wings
and rises out of the field between us.
Nothing worth conveying would carry that far.

An elbow on a fencepost. The dog licking the grass
where I'd spit just moments before.

Equine Elegy

There is no headcount. There is no herd. There is no young
woman or young man haunting any hay barn
in any state from here to the coastal cliffs. There has been
a lawnmower idling for weeks on the edge
of a meadow. There is a can of spray paint at the bottom
of a ladderless water tower. There is a ladder
leaning on the supermarket's awning. Only wind hangs
from its rungs. Elementary swings sigh.

The tires of the car under the tarp rot dry. The horse is in the barn.

If she actually had eyes in the back of her head
she would have been able to see everything creeping up
behind her. The horse in the barn is bones.

It is again what it was then. No one, now, left to worry
whether to bridle or to bury.

Autobiography with Grass (and Swimming Trunks) Around my Ankles

I never intended to begin with exposure, but
here we are with whatever's left
of the lake and out of gas
so we pull the paddles.

Another long day on the water

& your skin's burnt.

The way we circle the summer, it's like

you hit the throttle and I stood up

on the skis both bareassed

& bashful before the tourists at the dairy bar.

The dam hasn't drowned us out

but we haven't stopped hoping.

Look, I mean the children can't find enough sense

to stop stomping on each other in the shallows.

Hold me under. Turn me blue.

The two of us were bred in to this boredom

so you dare me to waterboard you

with your favorite beverage. Dare me

to put a bag over your head and time the escape.

Go ahead, admit it. It's what you're after:

out of here. It happens to all of us after this.

In my mind you will always walk out

to mine the Michigan night. But before you do

you'll strap a headlamp on a mannequin

so you have something to look back at.

Looking back is, well, what it is. I've been modeling

getting older for so long it's actually happening.

The hill I grew up on has rolled over, meaning Dad

hitches something to the back of the tractor and pulls.

Grass goes down easy if you press it.

If I try hard enough I can see you waving

part way down. These hills are not unlike the hills

I lost my lungs over. I logged so many miles.

Cramped so many times at the county line.

Thought seriously about not going back.
The exhausting thing about trails is that you keep running until you come
to the end of them. Just how grass gets its name
from the Old English
all I know about it
is that the football program coughed up
some dough for the new kind.
Who cares what they are laying we are laying
sod somewhere else and if we lay long enough
it'll hide us.
We had a friend who kept his Adderall in a chew can.
It disintegrated. We watched him eat the tobacco
as we prodded the fire pit. He's the same
one who penned the bomb threat to get out
of a math test and instead made us all sit still
in the high school grandstands
while the bomb dogs sniffed our lockers & truck cabs.
I can only imagine the sweat our parents wiped away
knowing where we were headed.
Call it ghost genes, call us phantoms
whatever you call us you'll be forced
to nod our knack for disappearing.
I once got a BB in my bare ass but not because
I was getting careless, I had asked you to
remember me like this forever
but you couldn't unless I was bruised and welted
and I respected that since I had just gotten over
two black eyes from that confrontation
at the swim hole where we swam all summer.

They kept telling us a somersault
from a rope swing has no sound
except if the spine snaps in the shallow.

That must have been years before we stole
the conference in the last two races
of the season & they hung our portrait
in the cafeteria & to this day
I still haven't been back to see it.

It's funny how quick you can go
to not giving a shit. Let's go back to middle school
and the first pair of breasts I saw in real life
but not because I couldn't forget them
but because it was behind a barn, and dark
& I feel like I'm still trying to make them out
in the night. Everything is quick
and from what they keep saying
you'll spend the rest of your life chasing
it down. That's not true. We broke a leg.
We knocked wood. We blew that popsicle stand.

One time I came back to visit
& found a picture of the first girl I loved
in the top drawer of my dresser and it made me
think back to when she gave birth
to her first child and how I had wondered,
sincerely, if she would tell it about me.

I think I probably hate all the versions of myself
that still hang around in the minds of other people.

The two of us turned the topsoil in her yard
to plant tomatoes that would only last one season.

I cut grass before classes but
my first job after high school was as a chauffeur
but the only thing I chauffeured was vials of blood
between hospitals and I still can't convince myself
to get tested because if it came back negative
I would have to find something new to worry about.
I had a few beers in a bar with my manager
after the union refused to fight against our outsource
& I was still a few years underage
but in those places people had gotten over feeling bad
for each other and just kept their heads turned
which made life more interesting
for the drive home but luckily I didn't
hit anybody or anything. I was working there
when I saw my first dead body.
When I say dead I mean blue, bloated, and unattended to
on the grass outside a warehouse. I say this because
I want to draw lines between the dead and the dolls
we are mostly accustomed to seeing in caskets.
Mostly, those who raise up the dead
in conversation come across annoyingly
but again I want to say each family has a stint
with suicide and mostly the experience is the same:
someone doesn't come back
from the woods. Finally, flashlights stretching
and dimming in the tall trees. Coping
is just ignoring the thread that tethers
us to the past. For instance, out the window
of a four door truck there is a huddle

of livestock. Snow drifts.
One cow has sixteen Q-tips in its belly
which is evidence enough that it isn't just the pasture
leaning over for a better listen.
Take the two-tracks. The deer draining
on their hooks. It all leads to the same place:
a tired woman building a replica subway
station in her basement. The kind of mind it takes
to shovel off all this cold. Forget shotguns
think about the two of us on our bikes
down at the dock to watch the trucks
attach to trailers the trailers lose their loads
into the water. Boats circle in the shallows.
Oil and exhaust on the river. Pedaling fast we probably follow
the dripping wheel wells and veer off
as they near the main road.
That must be us on our backs in the water.
Loving the stones and stumps beneath us.
Bubbles billowing from our nostrils.
If I could hold my breath long enough
to give you one less thing to worry about
I would have, believe me
when I say the stillness in the forest at night
is the smell of an ancient man gone mad.
The sound my thumbs make
under a pillow: two twigs snapping.
The pines always whistle
for what seems like hours.
But let's stay away from that for now

because I want to bring in the girl I was dating
while I worked at the hospital
& how she raced horses and loved to hike
her skirt up in the hay barn & also, once
on the roof of her parents house
which was a surprise even for someone
who was at an age of hard
surprises & we would sit there with a good view
of the sunset & the turbines & nothing
not even the Christmas tree, could be as artificial
as it was back then.
I spent all winter sweeping
out a warehouse without heat
in a Carhartt & in between the snowflakes
& broken glass I found time for a cigarette
& watched buildings burn along the river
because that's what happened
in Flint during the holidays or everyday
& I thought seriously about quitting school
& doing this for a living but obviously
this was before the outsource
& let me say one more time
I loved the warehouse
& could not resist busting fluorescent light bulbs
in the parking lot since no one was there to supervise
& besides a little broken glass does nothing to a city.
That guy who ate his Adderall beside our campfire
also left a little vodka and vomit in the burn barrel
& years later would spend some time in the hospital

for running his car into a parked plow truck
in an attempt to, well, you know. It's like this
sometimes I suppose when we're forced to come
to terms with all the shit we missed out on.
I know I didn't miss the arsonist
light the neighbors barn on fire
one spring when we were nearly set up
to take the fall because, like I said, we lived nearby
the burn pile and fire pit & when we saw the smoke
rise over the rooftops we ran toward their house
& woke them all and tried to pull the fifth wheel
from the flames but it was already too late
so we just stood by and listened
to the aerosol sizzle in the rafters
& held our breath when the cans finally blew
the barn roof open
and the firefighters, with hoses in their hands
looked as helpless as we did.
It's such a shame that when the shit hits the fan
all we can do is try to contain it.
I ended up hanging around
with a pair of brothers
whose dad found out his cancer
was already to the point of prescribing
the go-on-home-and-enjoy-it regimen.
No one brought it up. When they buried him
I was far from the funeral but unintentionally.
They bred cattle and sold them in quarters
at the county fair. I remember being quite young

and losing my personalized compass
in their cornfield. Thirteen years later
they were excited to tell me they found it
while turning the dirt for the following
season but when they handed it over
it was not mine & what made things so eerie
is that I wasn't the first
person to stand peering out over their pasture
trying to gather my own sense of direction.
The good thing about dead dried grass
is that it burns quickly when it's baled. So the search
parties, if their searching, won't look long.
I've wished so many times
I could have told you about the horses
outside the abandoned house
we made into a hangout.
They were always spooked in their places
& from what I could tell from the highway
they kept pace with the traffic.
The best breath clouds always emerged
as nostril clutter. Ectoplasm. Crafted prism.
Whatever the light was
was something I first encountered in a wood line.
Something standing at the edge of it
breathing hard at the border at dusk.
There is so much air caught up in a thing
so bringing the hammer down
on the rabbit who was crawling in circles
dragging its back half by the culvert was the only way

to let it let it all out. The one thing I hate
more than road kill is its in-between.
I was one of those kids who got bored
easily & one summer I knew
I could make a dollar if I sold
a mere fraction of the freezer burnt meat.
That same summer an old man bought me
a bike just because
I dug him a hole in the backyard for his dog
who'd been lying there a while in the ditch.
That's when I decided to hate cars
which was impossible since my Dad came home
everyday from General Motors like his Dad did
and his Dad before him
& once when my uncle who married into the family
pulled up to a cookout in a KIA he got shit
for hours and after he left
I think the family talked seriously about betrayal.
Lineage is forged on an assembly line
and my Dad gets pissed when I tell him it's dying.
Despite that, I will say a favorite moment
of mine is him pulling into the driveway
and me going out to meet him
to find a small beagle in his lap
and when I asked *whose*
is that he responded *yours*
and I cried and wanted to hold it.
Physically speaking, my form never filled out
which I use as an excuse for not feeling well.

Sometimes I associate dizziness with roller rink eyes
& arcade prizes or let's just say the sixth grade
when I held hands and skated
circles with a girl while Usher told me I had it, I had it bad.
My mom would take me there sometimes
in the summer when it was raining
and she could tell I was getting antsy
at home & once when a small scale tornado tore through
the area the skating rink went black
and everybody screamed & we drove home
through the aftermath just my mom and I
& our Slurpees.
I remember a lot of tornado warnings
especially the siren that went off while I was in the lake
with the one woman I loved the most
(who would later die of an aneurysm)
who whispered *nothing lasts forever* in my ear
poking fun at the sperm
that surfaced slowly between us.
She wanted things and wanted them quickly
& was known for intelligence
& pulling her panties to the side
but despite the root word of my last name
I was never in a hurry for anything.
After years of frustration over the family
not knowing its history except it started
with Milo and Jennie
I was disappointed to find out
our last name meant essentially

the place where grass grows.
I wasn't the only one because Audrey Hepburn's
birth name is a variation of our surname but she chose
Hepburn over Ruston because no one gives a damn
about small shires in England
where the grass we got our name for
was manufactured for torches.
It might seem medieval
but to break in a hunting dog
the best thing was to keep it in a cage
by the pole barn away from any contact
so the dog can learn when it is un-caged
nothing exists outside of its jurisdiction.
Or so said the old manual
on my Dad's desk
which he didn't abide by
but the dogs were always outdoor dogs
& I remember at a young age
when the dog whimpered like that
in the darkness it was easy to picture
the possibilities of the thing
that must have stood close by
clutching hard to the edge of the kennel.
My dad used to dare me to swim
as far out in the lake as I could
& we would wear ourselves out & struggle
the whole way back & once over a holiday
beside the ocean
we swam out past the continental shelf

& the lifeguard in a tizzy whistled us in
saying we were lucky
the riptides hadn't been stronger
& who were we to not know
the one thing about a body of water
is that it is notorious for swallowing
bodies. Sometimes in that boredom
so many of us were bred in
we have no other choices but to create
confusing situations for everybody else
& mostly in Winter
when everything closed up
we would wait by the highway
& choose a car come up off the exit
& follow it as far as it would go
& sometimes when we were lucky
the driver would panic
and do something drastic
like burn rubber or call for help
or the brave would confront us
at a stop sign and threaten to hurt us
which was exactly what we deserved.
It's no lie I hung out with some bad influences
& I still feel a little bit guilty
about accepting the money
my friend handed over
after he went into the store for a Pepsi
& called it my half of the stick up.
This is the sort of thing you can try to avoid

associating with for the rest of your life.

If you're lucky you won't get caught doing it.

You'll go home someday and listen

to the listless rap of long toss in the parking lot

of two of your ex-teammates

trying to impress the town.

After the pissing contest peters out

you might acknowledge

that even the numbers on the back of our jerseys

have grown cracked and wrinkled.

I laid down with you once in a hotel

& we talked about the ceiling tiles

& said nothing of the future. I ran ten miles a day

for a few years of my life

& on the way to meets I'd stare

out the bus window listening to Bob Seger

before I knew that song

was even about cross country.

I told myself a lot of things

but most especially that it would hurt

like hell to hear it when I was older

and I was right: it does. I've never trusted

anyone who talks about their running

but let me explain.

The hills look different now

that I can see

the end of them.

That dog my Dad brought home

got congenital heart failure
in his later years
and I did my best to keep him
less active. Sometimes it's instinct.
Sometimes it's how we're trained.
Sometimes there is too much temptation
in a rabbit and the pace of things
just passes us. When the dog ran
right out of his body I rested a while
with him there in the long grass
before the burden of carrying him
from the woods & digging a hole
in the backyard by myself.
I'm never too full to eat
my own words. Let me say up front
I've been pretty damn stupid
to not realize how many times I've loved
the places where grass grows.
How it would grow everywhere
if we'd let it.
This ain't nothing you've never heard.
The stories of small towns
are almost homogenous.
When I left the north, not having a winter
made me susceptible to want, regret
whatever you call that thing
that makes me sweat in the night.
The last day at the hospital
when they asked for our keys & our badges

I was driving away and thought I saw that Adderall addict
sitting on the docks packing a pack of cigarettes
between his hands.
It wasn't him so it must have been someone
from the cafeteria or the stockroom
on break & at the stoplight I watched him
strike a match through his leg hair
& the steps he sat on were all smoke.
Sometimes the ominous figure in the rearview
is worth leaving there. I've long lost track
of the days you've been gone
but if you ever come back this way again
drop me a line before you do
& I'll bulldoze the houses down
the street so the city will look just the way you like it.

When I came back from shopping
a grocery sack in my hands
I found you writing a note for me
on the front steps and I learned a little bit about hesitancy
about the here-after. It's still light out and we've nothing to do.
Stay a few more minutes.
We've condensed years into hours
and found out all that ever mattered
was minutia, miscellanea, and how the people loved
most get left out. I should admit
I only ever paid attention
to us out of gas on the water when that wall
of weather blew in from the north

we lost our shit and snapped
the paddles. You tossed tin cans
in the air and if I wouldn't have known any better
I could've sworn you lit up
with the lightning.
How quickly we metastasized into that mass
of sense everything we knew
was never making.
It's been such a long time
since I showed my bare ass to everybody
on the beaches
& how you laughed and laughed
slipping us out of our suits
& off the side of the boat.
By the time we finally come
across something good enough to give
we are long past giving it to each other.
We are all of us most likely guilty
of more than we let on. All of my biggest regrets
are of the things I didn't get caught doing.
So run me out. Run me over.
Run me til my lungs burst
red beneath my t-shirt.
Hold it. Right there. The end
of a meadow. Where all the deer go
to lie down.
No beach chairs. No beach.
Just grass from here clear up
to the water's edge.

The one thing that's still
growing between us
is this lake.

They keep telling me
if I have the right kind of speed
I won't even need skis.
They keep telling me if I run fast enough
I won't feel a thing
as I cross from one side to the other.

I keep telling myself at the end of everything
is a grass stain or a splash.
How there is absolutely nothing
to grab on to if you are just a body
somewhere between a rope swing
and the water.

Epistolary Elegy

Dear Holy Father of Hayfields,

Being, especially, with the way it was in the beginning, is as close to not being as one could be. Please, permit me the personality to reminisce. The human brain is highly legitimate, just ask it. The dog claw in the bear trap suggests, sometimes, things just come apart. Beginning, especially, with the way it came into being. Suffering has always been sufficient at obtaining information. Don't ask me to tell you more than what I know. When the media cried the death of the letter, we forgave it. Preservation is really our last hope for expansion. The height of goal posts, alone, ices the kicker. Listen, I understand you're under a lot of pressure. It's time to face it, as suggested, trajectory is a force that stretches out to encompass the eventual. According to apocalyptic theory

all accommodations will be located on the coasts. Meaning: even at the end of the world nothing changes.

Any Resemblance to You, Yes You, is Completely Coincidental

Give up on the whole

 this landfill is romantic

I'm sick of hearing it

 you got a lot of nerve

to drag me out past dusk

 just to show me your parts

in the backseat of a Buick

 where things can get a little foggy

like check out these hand marks

 we've left for the future archaeologist

whose arthritis flares up

 and prevents everything

from being closely examined

 forensic statistics suggest

99 percent of burglaries

 are committed by the bully

your neighbors are raising

 in their basement

they've got small dogs

 they've swept up off the street

so obviously it's an interesting concept

 the community now has

to deal with adolescent aggression

 I put the dart gun in the dog's mouth

just to watch it piss across the playground

where you broke your arm
in the mulch beneath the swings
it's been bulldozed to make room
for a reservoir commissioned
by the contractor for the Wal-Mart
built for stimulating this city
is all about feelings
and I'm fed up with having them
it's just a bad idea we need
to come up with something else
say remember you carving
our curfew into the front door
I remember you a lot like that
for instance the way you placed
roach motels next to the pond
because they too must have preferred
a room with a view
yes you you who makes house
buying decisions based on the bath
tub you'd look best bleeding out in
I think sometimes it's easy to forget
how peaceful it can be
locked in our attic apartment
letting the dishes clog up the drain
downstairs I've got this funny feeling
the broken glass on the tile beneath
the window is just a quicker way to explain that
by this point in the story
the house has already mistaken the intruder

for one of its own

Portrait of the Community as a Building, Imploding

After dynamite brings the abandoned building to its knees

one might try to trace the wiring

back to the bike-pump-modeled detonator in an attempt to lift

prints. What I mean is sometimes burglars report

their own robberies for reward. It's hard work, the heaviness

they feel in their hands, as it is for

the mailman who, while at the party, speaks toward this sad decline

of letters and reminisces of a time when there were people

who took the care to articulate their message. Which was

fear or I'm afraid.

The fear felt over contaminated finger foods.

The fear felt like names we'd give to fish or lakes

where all the dissatisfied lovers throw their diamonds downstream.

What I mean is that nobody at the party dresses up

like this daily, which now makes sense, considering

nobody could name the plant they had pinned to their lapels.

Our mailman arrives home to find someone dismembered

his door chain, stained his loveseat, drank his liqueur.

Made off with his favorite vase and a carton of milk. He says

his story is not unlike all the manuals on animals

that suggest we can exercise entropy responsibly. His desire

is his disorder. Even in a pinch the mailman delivers.

The billboards read thou shall not be the bearer of bad news.

Thou shall not not shoot the messenger. It's all a joke, really.

Knocks coming at you in twos and nobody left in the rubble

to ask who's there. Save for the stray cinder blocks, harvested

and used primarily for anchoring the overly ambitious.

Epistolary Elegy

Dear Holy Father of Hayfields,

Believe me, when I'm bored to death, I stand on the edge of the bridge where all the dissatisfied lovers throw their diamonds down river. This is the type of thing that, even if recovered, should not be resuscitated. I'm talking about love. Like many things, our fatal flaw is persistence. For example, the calf with the contusion continues to charge the fence post until it convulses in the pasture. There was never any warning against shaking things up. In the public garden, a woman suggests, to her toddler with a tantrum, that he consider cooling it. It's safe to assume we're all looking for a deep freeze. The extended history of human longing begins with the desire to be legitimate at the molecular level. For no other reason than to maintain a projected image of herself, the movie star takes the centenarian to see the ocean for the first and last time. Over one hundred years the old woman had been served the under hand. It's not unusual to consider how easily the waves, overlapping, formed a rhythm she could beat her chest to.

Self Portrait of a Stilt Maker

Top shelf service is best left for the bar, hell, I'll raise

you one better: I'm all bummed out on the crack corner
with all the other folks with vitamin b deficiencies, waiting
for Walgreens

to slide open this morning.

When I met you I told you I was a bartender,
a stilt maker, anything other than *I hang ladders*
at the hardware store. If it isn't too much to ask
I'd like to stand here until I feel like myself again.

Tall, dizzy, and like myself again. You insist
on the importance of invasive procedure. Home burglary.

We cut keys in the back of your father's barn
where you taught me to weld

together my broken bike frame.

I didn't need a seamstress. But, the way you acted
toward my untied loose ends
made me self conscious. We learned how to keep clean
houses. But as far as actresses go you were not a good actress.

Please, don't take your clothes off
the clothesline. The Sunday dress you left on my dashboard
must be in a second hand store by now, I'm sure of it.

When I used to wake up next to you
on an air mattress, the birthmark
on your left butt cheek

looked like Ohio.

You became so obsessed with sleep.

When I caught you looking out across the county line
with a canteen of chloroform, I knew our days were numbered.
Listen, remember when you told me if you kept your mouth shut

long enough in this town
it would find ways of making you talk?

Well, there's someone coming down the sidewalk
and maybe once, for old times sake, I'll put a bag over their head

and you'll do the creepiest thing you can conjure up
in your mind.

They'll reach for the bag first and then the sky

like maybe there's a key on a hook in the air above them
a lock somewhere blocking the way out.

The tall tales this whole town grew up believing.

Even to consider it is a stretch.

I Sing the Body Allergic

I've got a dryer tied to my trailer hitch

and you screaming only thirty two more
miles to Des Moines. We've driven all night
to get there, and when we get there, I want you
to tell us, without hesitation, to leave there.
It'll be like discharge or that night I shared
a hospital room with the old man who consumed
too much carpet cleaner. Despite that, I want you
to shoo us away from your doorstep. I want you
to call me clingy. Like humidity or hay fever.
I'll reel in what's left of the dryer and put the rest
of the rust in a burn barrel. This used to be
such a classy diner, I'll think to myself, as you hurl
a cocktail from your side of the car. Flames
contort the dust and the darkness behind us.
You were all rearview remorse for miles.
You haven't looked me in the eye in ages.
The last time I had a good grip on your collar
bones was standing behind you in the river
fish swimming between your legs like goalposts
while we agreed the last score left to settle
was why we got into arson in the first place.
We had all sorts of reactions. I welled up.
I wiped tears from my eyes as you dusted
the dashboard with your dirty feet. It made me
consider a shower, the rain, how everything
happening is slow. Methodic. What made us
fire starters also made us fugitives. Apparently
we are listed as wanted in all states
we aren't currently driving through.

When I say allergic I mean trailed, I mean no way
will I sneeze my way out of this one. I consider
the semi, the rotational pull of its tires—the way
I wipe sweat from my brow as it keeps pace
beside us. Like how in the hospital, when we lost all
electricity, it took such a long time for both
the hives on my skin and my roommate to pass.

Epistolary Elegy

Dear Holy Father of Hayfields,

The newborn screams in his sleep and there's nothing I can do about it but suffocation. Our options are not as endless as we would like to believe. There is only wind in the fields and the bales are still burning. Nobody considers neurology, not even when their arms go numb. Apparently it's colder than it's been all century. If you play dead for an extended period of time, they'll start calling you cadaver. This is the part of the story where we give up envisioning future developments. How hard it is to accept. How hard it is to accept there is no animal sipping at the perimeter of a puddle with an unknown depth. No plumber to plunge his utensils through our piping. I don't mean to insinuate the only place we're all connected is in the sewer. Had you been there, on the railings of an abandoned cruise ship, during a sunset reminiscent of all other sunsets, you'd have seen an image to which we've grown accustomed—something spewing into the sea. I'd like to think, if ever you can unthaw thought, of someone who left her lakefront property to the limnologist she fell in love with in a prior life. The finality of everything is that we legitimize our love affairs by leaving.

Consider the Daylight, Our Diminished Rates of Accuracy

the thing pursued fleeing over the landscape.
a hound with its snout stuck in a culvert.
the way it barks if it happens to bark
sounds like distance, sounds like get me out

of here. consider us when we come to the edge
of the forest. consider the way we walk into the suburb
the mail blowing down the street to where it ends
up in a leaf pile. rain on the end of the rifle.
consider tracking anything through a place
known for its traffic. perceptible presence: a light
on a timer by the window clicks on.
so much more than time and its short duration
makes the house dark. somebody's fooling no one.
consider the next house. someone asleep early
on the couch in a rainstorm and the floor underneath
their cigarette is all ash. voyeurism: hand marks
on the window the morning after. consider getting out
of there. consider the broken compass, how direction
is now determined by the flip of a coin. Consider the sign
on the fencepost as far as it goes we are never
permitted to return to a meadow. Consider
the daylight now diminished, the trail ending
on a high ridge that seemed like the spot
for a clear shot, the crosshairs a crucifix for nothing
no target just a man picking up his mail in the dark.
Consider the tin cans tied to the rear of a vehicle
slow clapping past on the highway below like a sound
of whatever I was after getting farther away.

Diadromy

Just last spring a bull shark was spotted in Lake Superior
causing, as you might assume, a slight hysteria and hesitancy
for anyone considering to enter the water without an ax
the rule has always been, especially when ice fishing

to have a tool sharp enough to break the ice, but this town is not
the kind of place one seeks out to engage in conversation
and for good reason, for example: last night a woman walked out
through tree fringe carrying a cow's placenta in a paper sack.
Before that, it had been a while since her last hallucination.
She spent all autumn carving a canoe out of an old oak husk.
When asked what was inside it, she said her mind, and waved
toward the river as the canoe floated away, empty.
I remember that winter by the way the fish acted
like there were schools of smaller fish swimming in their brains.
When, under the pressure of a blizzard, the pine boughs break
their silence by erasing the path taken to the lake.
When, under the lake ice, her body fashioned
my hands in a motion resembling the steam
swipe of a mirror, I took the gloves off to clear the snow
away quicker and by the time I realized my reflection
was her looking back at me, I almost became that part of the path
a dead body redirects.
Snow blows across an open field and haunts the ribcage
of a downed steer. There is little meat left in the ice chest.
It has all been handed over to the sailors expressing a need for bait.
You should hear how they reeled in the shark and split it open
right there on the boat deck. How they found a compass in its stomach.
How its body suddenly looked like a needle pointing north.
All that evolutionary cross breeding going down at the estuary.
There is very little left for the rest of us. Snow is an endless sort
of structure. It falls on the water. Fish surface, they offer at the flakes.

Epistolary Elegy

Dear Holy Father of Hayfields,

It's no use to be concerned with a height only achievable by airlines. You should know scientists have finally solved the algorithm for salutation. Their computations are not available to the general public, which means it does not involve you. According to evidence supported by recent tests on animals, performance can only be safely permitted inside fences. I hate to be a bearer of bad news. When we are older and our eyes have sunken in and the envelopes sent between the two of us have yellowed with age and must, I like to think we'll think about the smoke, those trains on the move mid-century. This will be before the finest things of us are framed, before we picture ourselves as Polaroids or fast fading strips of film. I don't mean to downplay our dormancy. All of our conditions are credible. Besides, there is no one left to authorize the production of an asymptomatic alternative. The cells in the cylinder grow colder. The human brain is best at being by itself. This is how to stand equipped at the end of an electrical age. A box of memorabilia belonging to a being before you. A list of suggestions for things you should have said in a scenario with a sunset. It's a shame, this animal apparatus does more to us than decades. Everything is contingent on the calculations of the caretaker. To hell with whoever it was that first thought up an ending to begin with.

Portrait of the Body in a Bed Sheet with Eyeholes

It's that time of year again in America

when I must apologize for my attic.

The insulation left in the yard. The two boys

masquerading around the cul de sac

with pitchforks. The figurative skeleton

in my closet shares your marrow

and its got me thinking about how we hid

in the hay barn. How when I met your dad

you had bailing wire in your hair

and told him we'd been playing
scarecrow. The only thing he'd ever bought
was my inconsistent stammering.
It's that time of year again in America
when we start to feel romantic.
A stowaway forgets his bedroll on the horses
back as he makes his transfer
to a boxcar. An assembly line foreman sits
at the state line with a body in his truck bed
thinking: there's still a lot of desert left
until morning. This is that crossing
where trains pick up weight.
I haven't seen a penny pressed like that
in ages. Everyone is riding under the influence
of elm trees and their droppings.
It's that time of year again in America
where we rake up what we can.
It's that time of year again when everything
is haunt and gimmick. The sun going down
over a subdivision. Two kids outside
of a station wagon with their pants
around their ankles doing that funny sort of friction.
My love, it's like we've worked so long
in a Laundromat. All tumble and dry heat.
My love, we've hitched our hopes
to an MTA bus notorious for its breakdowns.
My love, you're on your way
up the stairs to tell me you found tickets
to the next town over. You'd like to say

something standing there in the doorway.

Hold your thought, the framing of it.

It's that time of year again

when everyone sees right through me.

Documenting the Distance of Our Last Hail Mary

Forget the aggravation

of the aggregate small town.

The fathers and their fathers

lining the trophy case.

I couldn't begin without mentioning

how little faith this place puts into turbines.

Forget I brought up the environment.

Just forget

we leave our trash in a pile with our pants.

Outside the house we grew up inside of

a smell of boxed-up-belongings

in the back of a box truck.

This is how we exit

the old life

is like the dog dies, then dad

disassembles

the dog house and moves on.

We could bury so many bones in the yard.

I'd trade you skeletons

if I hadn't already

hacked mine apart.

You know that shiver. It's like the leaves

prophesizing rain.

It's not only the emptiness. The hardest part

is handing over the hammock
that back and forth
of pulling away from the property
as if, for once, we were finally better
than the places that became us.
You will not die of asphyxiation
by choking on your own foot
despite what the fortune teller told you
in the alleyway
I confessed all this left a bad taste
in my bottom lip. I spit
my own blood over the brickwork
you, having punched me there, for good reason.
Forget the aggravation
of the aggregate small town.
Things that never mattered. All the evidence
I've had to sink in the river.
Memory is a foul tip into somebody's temple.
It's like the warning siren chasing the geese
low over the tree line.
It's like rain starting in the leaves
and my shirt's off.
It's like I just convinced you
in the backyard
to go long