

# Bone River

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أعرف نهرا حيث يخلع الموتى ثيابهم

*~ I know a river where the dead undress*

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Here

*...don't run, it will come for you...smiling the orchid smile...black winged...whisper-soft and terrible...*

*...don't look, it's lost down the river of lovesong and prayer...gold light, gold light you knew so well, gone too...it will soon come for you...*

*...don't speak, the mouths have been turned into flower beds...the doors can't remember the dead gone off every which way now with other dead...no more hurry-home drops on her cheek...no amending or talking it through...it will soon come for you...*

*...don't fall, into the vulture slipstream...black winged, orchid smiled...right here where you left her...whisper-soft and terrible as the gold-light morning...whatever you do or don't do, it will come for you...*

## Savagery

Nothing to be done  
but watch rats nest in  
these tired palms.

Last year we might have  
roasted your heart, picking  
our teeth in honor of your  
ghost.

Now most of our women  
have us by the short hairs.

We trim lawns above the  
underworld, where soon  
we will be consigned.

Next year, creatures less savage  
than us will grovel on their knees,  
clipping to a fine uniformity every  
last golden braid of our  
graves —

every last goddamn golden braid.

## History Of Her Arms

Sometimes the floor is made of snakes  
and you must dance partnerless and devoid

of all music. Because we are just pretending  
here, it would be fine to imagine her arms riding

shotgun the bones of your wasted hips, fine to feel  
the first pale vaginal flower flesh pulling you down

and under. I am told there are equatorial birds  
caught out in squalls who come to lose their flying,

who fear the sky at morning as if hell followed with it,  
who cower at dusk like one might hang back trembling

when called home to glory. But sometimes the air my  
friend is all sheets and pillowcases hissing with promises

and betrayal, and you must dance brave as a leaf, making  
as you rise and fall, a way for your

Brothers and Sisters.

## Wormwise

In moments of the swan,  
I share the concerns of water  
and wind. An accounting of me  
must include all swans, and the  
lives of swans before naming  
of water, wind and swan.

When I am a horse,  
there is only horse music,  
hooves and ground and the storm  
of all horses approaching. Nothing  
is horselike or opposed to the horse,  
but all around me is horse eternity.

Should I aspire to tiger  
dreaming, I will hunt primordial  
air for things that move in darkness;  
tiger things invisible to everyone but  
tigers. Tiger knowledge is mine to stalk,  
should I aspire to tiger dreaming.

Wormwise I swim where others walk,  
eat where they fall, and burn with a final  
omniscient flame.

All worms then are perfect wormwise  
disciples of the tiger heart.

## Failed Painter

I am a failed painter  
who could not apprehend  
the stale light after a wedding,

or how a drowned girl's hair  
takes the wind in a way only  
drowned girls know.

Whatever secrets the world retains  
are to be found at rained out ball games  
and the end of shamefully attended  
parades, where brown boys in

orange jumpsuits drag brooms along  
the ruined streets and spit each other's  
names. I could not get the ridiculous  
orange or shit-brown finality

of this, so I must turn my eyes now  
to the simpler grotesqueries of half built  
movie sets where the director has long  
since been fired, and no one is left

to untie the horses or wrangle the flies  
off the actors' necks.

## Emanations

Not quite darkness,  
but emanations of ambulance light  
or laptop glares cast up on faces some  
mortician might be proud to call his  
finest work —

it is the dull days  
finally, that kill us off.

And I think we've always  
mistook each other, you and me.

In the perfect and violent unfolding  
of this one true night, something  
unnamable moves out there

between sirens and  
echoes of sirens — hushed

and relentless as a tiger.

## Magic Hour

Most evenings I sit out on this  
rotting deck at what might be called  
the magic hour, as if a film crew were  
here to walkie-talkie the sun down  
and cue the moon and stars from their  
trailers...below the tree line, the lights  
are timed to chaperone the valley through its  
various impending nightmares...even if the  
town should dream its doors smeared red with plague  
and its dead hauled to the curb in silk white sheets,  
even if blue dream rats should declare human flesh the  
next delicacy, the town would wake up golden tan rested  
forever moneyed and luxuriant in the magdalene  
arms of its beloved...and I heard somewhere if  
you look down low in a certain western sky  
this time of year and tilt your head just so,  
you might see Venus and some of the others  
hanging there in the violet hour after the sun  
and before the cholera dreams and feel yourself  
a part of this earth and this earth a part of  
all the rest of it...but I am too far gone on my  
third Ferrari margarita just now to try such  
mystical pantomime; anyway the dogs  
are all whooped up over something  
moving through the marsh grass...all  
whooped up and howling like they have  
wakened the wolves inside themselves.

## Fast Darkening

I am from a dead city and know nothing  
of blue herons or shy white ghosts of deer  
thinned out of these woods like penitent  
wives sent to baptism.

I would hope to evangelize: “die to yourself  
and enter love’s measureless arboretum”, but  
the afternoon melts away and I am sick of  
words and their insidious seductions;

sick of hard sells, strip-mall shills, the  
multi-abortion small town girls parading  
grand opening signs with their blow-up  
doll teats in the air — manic

to sell you again and again the same  
moon and litter of stars.

I wish I could testify: “here slips  
Jehovah down heaven’s greased fire pole,  
comin’ for to spirit us home.”

But it is cold and fast darkening like Satan  
flipped a switch, and I have no spine or  
calling for it right this minute,  
Brother.

## To Make A Bed From Darkness

To make a bed from darkness,  
gather in what light you can from

stones, cause all stones are mile  
markers on the road to sweet

by n' by. But know that you lay down your  
bones in cities made of other bones, some

so white they must have been  
licked clean by God's pet snake

himself. I remember once in Dalton  
waiting on the miracle blue drugstore

sign to spell "*open, open*", bringing  
up a fountain of bile the color of Dairy

Queen butterscotch from some sub-  
basement in my lower guts, thinking of

George Jones in the backseat of a gold metal-  
flake Eldorado, spouting cocaine Jesus parables

to a cardboard cutout of his one true brother,  
Hank Williams and soon despairing of these,

*(cause according to some fanatical minions – Mathew  
Mark Luke and John – all the words of Christ*

*incarnate could be spoke in one two-hour swoop)*  
the greatest singer walking the earth created a

brand new duck language and swore to  
speak in nothing but quacks for the rest of the god-

damn year “*quack, quack*”, and how it is all just a  
matter of degree you know? before they get busy with

hammers and nails and Magdalene Mary is sponging  
dried blood off your toes, and yes there is an awful

dance we all must finally learn – “*the facedown dirt  
fandango*”, “*the boneyard boogaloo*”, “*the came-to in the*

*pigsty shirtless cemetery strut*”. So if  
you are making a darkness bed, you will  
need to rehearse the delicate shadow

plays of Townes Van Zandt on a winter  
morning, whose translucent fingers made the

dust get up and swirl her skirts like a crack-  
whore I dated in Corpus Christi but

that, my amigos is another tale  
for a kinder place and time.

## Something In My Skin

Something in my skin of  
idiots autographing air, shrill  
receptions after hangings where  
the hostess laughs too long  
and loud.

Something in my throat of false  
goodbyes from Safeway girls – artificial  
fireplace smiles replete with brains and  
pigs' feet, bloody livers and receipts.

Something in my legs of  
loveless bedrooms lit by infomercials  
televangelized across the  
Oxy-Contin hills.

Something of the sitcom cackle  
scalding in my skull, the squeals of rats  
on wheels arriving, always climbing up  
and diving,

Something deathless in the  
swimsuit model's frigid Blu-ray eyes –  
something vacant and remorseless,  
something altogether wise.

## Note To The Sweet By'n By

Hate crime sky, let's get on with it – rain me some red armadillos.  
Rain me seven suitcases addressed to seven sad corners of planet E,

containing if you could, seven choice dissections of all our lost loves,  
so that we in this fucked-out flea circus might be spared the indelicacy

of any chance meetings at Home Depot as we Seroquel and Depakote  
our way through what was once rumored to be “the garden”.

Since you the sky must be God's mood-swinging emissary, I leave  
all rendering down, dismemberment and dissemination of “the final

beloved solution” to your esteemed offices. Rain me also a sideways  
squall of ripe tossed off G-strings from the great and gleaming

Axis Mundi stripper's pole – I am a simple flea, easily pleased.  
If you and your CEO cannot procure red armadillos,

red raining rats will suffice,  
would be nice.

## Dancing Chickens

Nights when new  
deer crowd the roads,

homo sapien kennels –  
canine cantatas,

vomit and sobs and  
the slow hypnosis of

toilet-flush dervishes,

oil spill nights when you  
are commanded to kneel

before a bleached  
crone disguised

as moon, nights  
of hyacinth and amber

alerts, mops and  
gurneys and drains in

the floor, love spelled  
with a small “L”, love

with her tits out  
and her tireless

molestations, nights  
of coyotes among the

radishes, stale semen  
pillowcases flapping  
in santa anas,

knowing you

have run out of all  
vendetta and spleen

and whatever  
attending seraphim

of forgiveness,  
nights of asteroids,

failed drive-bys and  
manic weathermen

promising frogs,

promising rapture  
and weeks of sunny

damnation, dark-  
matter nights

when nothing

and no one can  
stop the dancing

chickens.

## Ruined Children

Run ruined children  
through houses and  
yards, scoured

of love like deloused  
bedclothes.

Clean you must be  
to inherit this world;

hard as a dung beetle's  
dun-hued guts, empty as  
mountain or skull.

Before the wolves make off  
with our skins, you must put on  
your war face.

Someone has erased the maps  
and all sublime topographies —

lips we might have bathed in,  
breasts we might have  
climbed.

## The Stronger Heart

The stronger heart feeds the body  
and the world, ever receiving  
and relinquishing.

All we can own or deny  
is born in these red rooms;

the floors and walls adorned  
with the dead, serene as

drowsing bathers. We who know  
nothing of infinity – expelled

from her mothering drumbeat  
undulations – return homesick

to the stronger heart,  
welcomed by transparent

arms, terrible  
and familiar.

## All The Trees

All the trees stand bare  
and whispering –

*rain my love, wind my worship.*

Mamaw swore  
at the end of days there'd  
come a fire to scour the earth –

*...lay out your angel suit  
and Sunday shoes...*

I tested her corpse like bread  
from a steel drawer – stale and sour  
under my fingerbones.

*...to climb them golden  
stairs in twos...*

We are the Gods now,  
naked as the trees.  
Swingin' the world –

*...by it's starved hind legs,  
any goddamn which  
way we please...*

The light bringers are dead.

Stars moan in their  
charnel house –

*Sky where I lay my head,  
darkness my deliverance.*

## Ground God

Ground God Ground God

how can we be cold to this world,  
yet walk up and down in you?

Blood-trailed coyote-eyed derelicts of  
lotus and rolled away stones, we are  
your bastard progeny. If all things  
are imbued with spirit, so too are us lovers and us  
murdered ones;

so too are we who strip the dead,  
so too the stiff clothes piled in the corner.

And I think there is a knowing shared by birds  
who work the body dumps,  
an intimacy with bones and breasts  
and the whites of ringless  
fingers.

I think formaldehyde must laugh like a waterfall as it  
swells the alleyways and vacant municipalities  
of our astonished hearts.

We raped ones, we piss-stained exiled  
are emanations too, trying by our own light  
to get back home.

## Enter Love

Enter love dumbly, enter love blind –

Nothing you have ever held or owned  
will you find.

You cannot prepare, don't ask where  
when or how.

It has always been so, it is always  
now.

Make yourself a bed of air,  
the hours few, the chances  
rare.

World of wordless mercury,  
devour and so be devoured.

Light speed the savage days – enter  
love as jaguar, enter love as prey.

## What He Did To Her Body

Washed her feet,  
dreaming of another  
whore.

Stripped the feathers,  
boiled down the broth.

Tied off a vein  
in her thigh, named it  
“faithful”.

Trophied her hair,  
erased her face –  
glided in

graceful and low  
over Babylon.

All the way there,  
took her all the way  
there.

## Porn Shoot In Reseda

Soon you will tire of her mouth  
as you will of all mouths — something  
has come into you, something known  
only to wintertime crows.

Its shadow sears these warehouse  
walls. Pantomimed by shaved apes, it  
sings through the hips and shoulders  
of all the lewd young acrobats.

Soon you will tire of all mothers  
and all gardens — something has taken  
you up in its talons, beyond searchlights  
and blistered causeways.

Invisible along Ventura,  
ghosted at morning, untraceable at noon —  
it is one with the yellow malignancy  
of this night.

## The Red Women of Corte Madera Mall

I love women in the afternoon, before the sun has taken them. Unmade girls from unmade beds, deific in their uselessness, brown Cholas down from Vallejo for the day, scouring the malls with impervious dolls' eyes; these eyes that would indict me after orgasm, as if I had torn something loose from their souls. And what about the white girls from the diamond hills? These diamond white gulls clustered in sullen consultation around fake fountains, inviolable and insolent, unfucked and unaccounted for, closer to the blindfold and the ditch than they might know. Because the heart needs a screen for its infinite showings, all that is in me plays across their skins. This one's hair, rat's-nested and coarse like a girl I knew last summer; that one holds her shoulders stiff like an earlier twin of mine who cannot now be called a love, but someone I stumbled down a dark road with. I could tell you that somewhere in my arousals I have known the carnivorous mouths of black girls from across the bay, ever hungry and virulent, seeking my expulsion from this world. And red women too, who specialize in obsolete dances from past lives, circling mute around my bed, copulating the air. These remind me of dazed housewives who troll along this strip like agents of their own demise, scanning shop windows for the lost red women of themselves. So maybe all my loves are dismembered, to be found scattered again and again among the necklines and tattooed smalls of mall girls' backs; gestures and signs and lilt in the voice I thought so sacred to some space and time are here perennial as dandelions – inestimable as our friend the dirt.

## Bone Girls

Carla —

*...was the first to open me...tore  
the worm from the dead ground...spat me out  
on a side street...spun around cold with the same  
finality as the actress who stabbed Janet Leigh  
in the shower...leaving me there to bleed pearls  
down Slaughterhouse Lane...this was a hog  
town where soon the sows would come  
squealing to market...*

Vanessa —

*...worshiped at my cock's alter...hair  
the look and smell of wheat gone bad...I must  
have been seed for some wilderness inside her...later,  
she would marry the Notary Public and die of leukemia  
"with her boots on", tending her brood of blonde chicks  
and forsythias to the finish line...I think when we are all  
gone up Neruda's violet river we will see her waving  
from the shore, dressed like Mrs. Death...*

Lucille —

*...is still out there circling...even though I  
buried her "dog deep", which is to say deeper than  
the dogs might dig...she left some kind of poison shrapnel  
in me which is row-boating straight to my heart as we  
speak...let me get busy and brand the bitch's name  
in burnt black letters on a plaque around my sorry  
neck like they used to do back in Tombstone  
before the railroads ruined it all...*

## We Gardeners

Hard to keep the wives in their rooms, they  
wander the halls, hungry for the touch of  
dead husbands.

Just look how we come built for loss;  
born in this fire sale, poised for the shoe to fall –

me and you – yes, I think it's raining other  
shoes.

Double beds divide like cells, the garbage man sings  
“Yellow Rose of Texas”.

We go on, we go off – God knows or doesn't know –  
suing up for rapture, test-driving solitude.

Swing the screen doors open wide; baboons play  
in the chandeliers.

Look at us smeared in our butcher's aprons,  
geniuses of desire.

See how we pull our sun hats low,  
we gardeners of each other.

## Fatherless Noon

Let us dream together, Brothers,  
in that space where the soul spins  
free of all gravity and malice.

Put down your prayers —  
your wasp hatred  
is no good here.

We are going beyond all knowing  
on the sky-wide stairs leading  
everywhere and nowhere.

Come with me dream Brothers,  
I am as heavy and as light as you.  
My heart, too

has been torn from its cage and  
cooked down slow where they  
stir the bones.

My hands, too  
have been outstretched  
in the Fatherless noon.

Fine that I should meet you here,  
let us ask or give no more  
directions —

watch and learn  
from stillness how it is  
we might proceed.

## Directions

Down the dirt lane, past the woman  
with the chickens, into the green air  
softly, softly.

There where the beach turns white;  
whalebone dust and probably  
stars.

Washed away in some low places,  
still accessible by donkey or  
mule.

These were called sorrow trees,  
look for shell casings or anything  
shiny.

Once was a sign said Resurrection  
just before town, but the town's  
gone too.

From the top of the hill,  
that slaughterhouse smell, then  
laughter from across the lake.

Unearthed with his plow, they were  
dressed for sacrifice — possibly  
Brother and Sister.

You'll know it when you pass  
through desert, from the radiance  
and the babies cryin'.

## Necropolitan

In the forest of myself,  
it was decided not to trust  
the ground.

I'll take last communion with buzzards  
and flies, the true maestros of dust  
to dust.

Let sun and rain do what sun and rain  
do best; maggots and their kin  
may do the rest.

If it would not be too much fuss, Fed-Ex  
my thighbones to Tibet, to sanctify illicit  
prayer with thighbone-flute duets.

Use my skull as Yorick's double in a  
prison play some day – but you see –

Norteños on death row I-D with  
“Waiting for Godot”.

## Stupid Soul

Stupid soul, how deaf you are  
to the breathing trees, to the  
laughing hills – I might as  
well talk to the river,  
who never betrays  
or repeats herself.

Bumblebee mind, how blind  
how blind to the calculus of  
summer mornings – yours is  
the house where God lives,  
yet you thrash against  
skull's window.

Idiot mouth, idiot mouth,  
running your ceaseless marathon –  
why aren't you busy rousing my cock  
from his miserable cock-dream delirium?  
Even in sleep, he lunges and thrusts  
like a lost horse thirsting for you.

I would rather dance with the wind –  
whose arms play no favorites, whose lips  
stray up and down my skin with such  
high and perfect eloquence. Yes,  
I think I would rather dance  
with the wind.

## Wintering In Northern California

The trees are dressed like drowned sailors' wives. Just in time for Carmel, the known world drops off into it's opposite.

You will meet a pockmarked girl from Merced or some such town – don't linger here, the Devil is real. Each night he folds his slick black wings in tight around this place. Purge your heart of impurities. Push on to the mountains, push on before dark.

The Miwoks called this the top of the sky. They climbed up to sleep with the Mother of the moon and stars. Lay the bones of the dead in clean white rows along the river. Do not whisper their names until that time of year when crows eat the heads off purple flowers and everyone cries together.

Icy limbs sing songs of the wind, songs of ribcage and skull. Songs of toothless, fingerless brides – those with no footprints, there by the river.

## What Do We Say To The Drunken Sailors?

This world is drill pressed –  
the hills flown in from  
Uranian sweatshops. They  
rise acquiescent as dancing bears,  
gestapoed lame by sidewalk vendors.  
“*A climbed hill is a tamed hill*”, so  
profess the casinoed Cherokee.

Turn your backs on the sharkless water.

Learn the crude choreography of this club-  
foot ballet; the ones and zeros of  
stasis and love. Spend yourselves  
out on each other.

Come home rip the shrouds  
off your swimming pools, bow down in  
the sugar-mapled monasteries  
of nowheresville.

Kiss and make up to every moth around the  
porch light – “*whoever you’ve saved is yours  
always, whoever you’ve killed is always  
yours*” – thus spoke the methamphetaminated  
Iroquois.

This world is hemmed with  
nine-headed hydra and cliff diving swine.

Come home attend to the  
cannibals next door. Raise seven babies  
with snappin’ black eyes – bow to their  
psychopathologies and joys.

## Black Horses

Black horses  
standing against  
the green hills are  
not to be taken for  
anything like  
your hands,

anymore than  
the hours and the days  
could be said to contain  
your history.

You are not stars,  
because even the stars  
are their own  
facsimiles.

But a case could be made  
for dust and bones, for  
armless and legless  
air,

an argument for howls  
without wolves, gods in  
the spent persimmon  
trees.

## Long Light

Yes

long light  
is here

it catches  
in all our guilty

hands

After the suicide  
party disbands

it spills across  
the seasick greens

of broken television  
screens

Yes my dear  
long light

is here

## Deathbed Zen

No poem, no poet  
no more leather  
mask –

bring a skull to the  
new year's parade.

How to tell time  
in spook city?

Already sundown,  
already morning.

Arms around the wind;  
my perfect other,

stinking of  
corpses.

Where is the girl  
who threw back her hair

and howled at god's  
empty house?

Welcome to bone river,  
let's get undressed –

naked as silence  
and darkness.

Runaway home,  
moon-burned child;

someone has stolen the locks  
and the doors.

Shells of blue flies  
litter the floor;

yesterday, hungry  
and shrill.

Here's where I stood  
when she told me the joke;

sweep clean my grave  
and laugh.

Headless armless  
footless ones – come

dance at my wedding, I'm  
sworn to the princess  
of worms.

*There*

*...the roadblock girls are mixed up in his dreams...his little sisters who ran laughing under the summer spray of the garden hose are one with the dead roadblock girls...his rifle is a garden hose...blood roses and the summer squeals of terror and delight...he wants to get back in the shit...he and his brand new titanium hooves of doom...“for I am the meanest motherfucker in the valley”...*

## Stolen Shoes

The shoes are missing –  
the shoes from the feet  
are absent, Brother.

The hats have flown south,  
but the heads too have torn  
loose and sit nestled in  
the duct-taped arms

of their own headless bodies.  
The eyes in the lounging heads  
of all the sprawled and

headless ones

are looking for their  
stolen shoes...

*...but somewhere there are  
storerooms for all things...vice grips and  
buckets of fresh fingernails...groomless  
brides...false floors...there is even a  
room called "the quiet room" where  
most of the screaming gets done...lately  
there has been a run on plastic  
flowers...if you follow them  
they will spirit you through  
funerals...weddings...wakes  
...memorials and back again  
to the sailor's braid in a  
burned girl's hair...there  
is also a tongue room  
for severed tongues who  
will not be silenced...they  
flip-flop across the stainless  
steel like spilled and  
ravenous angelfish...*

## In Country

In this failed state of locusts and bile  
I am a man of good standing –

the MC of lice and Zyklon-B

amputeed tots spit my name with hard  
plosives and early seeds of lust not yet  
having mastered the true syntax of  
perversion

across the black-tarred cowboy plains  
couches  
fold out into graves the power lines  
sing their cancerous doo-dahs

a congress of mice and baboons  
have convened they are drafting  
a course for your future a new

quantum gospel of anesthesia  
and denial the final prohibition  
of all that issues freely from

the luminous bodies of your progeny

God's blood brothers are here to deliver  
us now so rejoice and keep watch on your

neighbors keep watch and report all  
transgressions to me I am the maitre d'  
of Treblikna and Palookaville

here to usher you  
dumbly down – dumbly

dumbly down.

## Interrogation

...baptize me while I watch from the ceiling...that's not my shit-piss cocktail choking the drain...

...the water is my bed...the water swells my head...returned to the summer I found you opening a fish's white belly – “what will become of her babies?”...we eat the fish and fuck like the condemned...the water swells my head...the water is my perfect lover...

...hang me by my ankles...beat my fish-white belly...cocktail of teeth and vomit...I sang in the missing boys' choir...policed up all the golden leaves...tried to be a father and a brother and a son...the air is water...the water is blood...

...drove her to school through the golden-leaved swirl...blew out the candles...looked windward and turned the wheel...toes curled over the abyss, I am your betrothed...

...naked windowless room, small as the universe...take away all that I was or will ever be...drain in the floor, my glory river...

## Maybe It Is Bestial

Maybe it is bestial  
and chews off its own  
hind leg to crawl wild-

eyed from the trap.

What then, if it steals  
down out of the hills

and stumbles  
the white road like

a soldier's wife  
clawing the air  
for news?

What if nighttime  
is only the shadow  
of its wings

and noontime is  
someone up yonder's  
greased fryin' pan?

Suppose it is virulent  
and spreads like chicken-  
pox all through the

little ones' beds?

Where are your nine  
kinds of angels  
now,

and who has a song  
for the shot-gunned

sheet people, those  
piling up like

dolls in a doll  
factory –

who among us  
has honey left in

our hearts?

## Watching The Bodies

...she sits on the edge of the bed...sweat down the steps of her spine...stone voices in a stone room...his like a wasp in her skull...hers from across the dark waters...

...the walls never shut their eyes...the streets hear all the stone words...the buildings hold the memories of the streets and the stone white walls...

...the doors are pulled through the windows...the windows melt into the floor...the holes of the missing doors are sealed with stones...

...she curls in the corner watching...herself on the bed with him...the stone walls watch her watching herself...

...light darker than darkness...darkness behind the white stones...voices without bodies...bodies with voiceless bones...she sits on the edge of the bed...

...sweat down the steps of her spine...watching herself in the corner...watching the bodies watch her...

## In The Green Kitchen

...throw up a sheet and put on a show — our hero  
arrives with his cobra coiled he's your son my brother  
her stand-in for daddy now his face has been sanded away  
the walls are a crime scene of grease and failed marriages  
once this was a green kitchen where onions boiled  
a hundred years...

...she thinks she might be dreaming but comes-to  
in a vomit green room reverberating with the scalding  
jeers of a bullfight gone wrong in the corner  
waits a blood-smeared plastic tarp  
what's that you're cooking?...

...cut and paste from her high school yearbook —  
“...so much for vacant blondes...a girl of Himalayan silences  
ruinously tender...would give you the last meat hook in the deep-  
freeze of her soul...sure to be among *los desapareados*  
after the empire falls...”

...let's not forget our zero-faced leading man — if you want details  
I'll give you a baboon's methedrine heart jumping in its cage arctic  
eyes if there must be eyes undertaker's make-up over lesions  
but it's all about the snake dance now...

...listen to the walls — best way to kill a chicken is to seize the neck  
and twist till the head comes off in your hands think of sunflowers or risen  
christ time was you loved completely “*without boundaries*” as someone  
once mouthed in a bland French movie before all this  
chitchat of cockfights and cobras  
and baboons and bulls...

## Dance Lessons

She convulses  
divinely, so I been  
told –

mass-graved ‘n drill-holed, host  
to the stun-gun and rose. Get up on  
yer toes, son

and step to her ‘lectroshock minstrel  
show –

frocked in tabascoed black burlap,  
blood-spit every rhyme/crime

you know or don’t  
know.

Pyramid scheme your hema-  
tomaed pelts high ‘n tight like

doomed cheerleaders on game  
night under the blue thumbs-up  
rubber gloves of deranged

purple majesties’ wet  
dreams.

Perp-waltz that ply-  
wood shoe-shine  
box ‘n twirl

yer partner’s  
murderous skirts  
do-see-do –

lighter than you  
suppose, this bitch-  
world.

## Black Vans

If I'm picked up  
I won't talk about  
the rain and how it  
deifies you. I won't  
discuss the island  
where king I was  
once in your eyes.  
I would never reveal  
conspiracies of stars  
called down around  
your shoulders. Don't  
ask me the difference  
between gardenias  
and your hands. I'll  
stand mute on the  
aimless lightening  
bug stupidity of you  
and all your summer  
girls. Oh Jesus of the  
road that won't hold  
still beneath my feet –  
which way down from  
Skull Mountain?

## Trigonometry Of Folded Flags

The maggot ringmaster is here  
again with his ravenous apprentices

your gangrened arms grace their menu  
linoleum singsong of morphine nurses

dovetailing Black & Deckered skulls  
and these with what happened

roadside that day a million  
klicks ago that day

tried for the kingdom grew wings  
set the sky ablaze danced close and slow

beyond all knowing fingers and tongue ran  
ahead while you followed shrill days in the

burning your father's kills leered down off  
walls she came hard in your arms came

apart in your arms past all knowing  
you fall euthanized

press a button love's bedside  
in rorschach-green scrubs she's your

guide final escort confessor mother queen  
savior and bride press a button the road

comes apart tuscaloosa damascus  
virginia tombstone santa fe

hug the dirt shamed under  
God's bare feet.

*Six Cadences*

## Murder School Cadence

The kids are all at murder school  
The daddies are all at war

The moms are stirring heartbreak stew  
And spilling it on the floor

The crows have all been scare-crowed  
The lions, lion-tamed

The wild's gone out of wilderness  
Unnamable's been named

Nobody left to torture  
Untie the hangman's noose

Turn off the drills and cattle prods  
And let the guard dogs loose

No ground to dig the holes in  
No bars to seal the jails

No hands to hold the crosses still  
Or hammer home the nails

Cause the kids are all at kill school  
The daddies are all at war

The moms are stirring heartbreak stew  
And spilling it on the floor

## Necktie Party Cadence

I got a ring she's made of fire  
Thirteen stars and a moon's desire

Ain't found a girl could sport her yet  
Ain't found a girl whose finger fits

Two little Jacks and Aces high  
Believe I'm about to bet the sky

If I should lose, I'll boil in hell  
Go on put up my soul for bail

Find me a big stout gallows tree  
One that'll bear my sins for me

One that'll bloom when I soil the ground  
One you can see all the way from town

I got a ring shot full of flame  
Carved with a favorite Angel's name

Ain't found a whore could hold her gaze  
Not should I wait till the end of days

Find me a big stout gallows tree  
One that'll bear my sins for me

One that'll bloom when I soil the ground  
One you can see all the way from town

## Hogcallin' Cadence

Call the hogs to suppertime  
Call the hogs to tea

Call the hogs to slaughter  
For the good of you and me

The chickens wear disguises  
The rats wear suits and ties

Even the cats, imagine that  
Are known to have their spies

We must be oh so careful now  
We must be so discrete

Jaws'n paws would join the cause  
Of anyone throwing meat

Let's razorwire the coastlines  
Round up the moon and stars

That goes for dogs and even frogs  
Especially those in jars

So call the hogs to cocktails  
To toast'n jam and tea

Call us all to slaughter  
Just to keep the barnyard free

## Jesus Cadence

Mothered by dust n'  
Orphaned by God

Don't need Jesus  
For a lightnin' rod

Don't need a Buddha  
With a shit-eatin' grin

Don't need a hell  
Cause I already been

Won't fly to heaven  
Cause I'd feel like a slave

Rather stay put  
'Tween the sky and the grave

Rather get drunk  
On a young girl's sweat

Build roadside bombs  
From the alphabet

Dip my ladle  
In the devil's well

Cause I know where he lives  
But I swore not to tell

Now I got me a ticket  
Where the dead boys trod

So I don't need Jesus  
For no lightnin' rod

## Footless Cadence

Footless Joe works at Wal-Mart now  
Labels the jars and sweeps up the peels

Everyone says he's hell on wheels  
Way to go, Footless Joe

Armless Mary still moans for her man  
Crosses herself with her toes at Mass

His Holiness says this too shall pass  
It's temporary, Armless Mary

Eyeless Jim sees better than ever  
Into the black of every soul

He's set for life on the Government dole  
So it's not so dim for Eyeless Jim

Headless John wants his head sewn back on  
He used it with care, for lovesong and prayer

Won't be long till the heads are all gone  
Headless John, Headless John

## Angel Cadence

I wish I lived down Angel Street  
Near the Angels' Lost n' Found

Where the sky stays open all night long  
And the dead rise from the ground

Where fresh killed soldiers come to rest  
In houses made of bones

And make their beds with murdered girls  
Who hate to sleep alone

I'd fill the town with skeletons  
And skeletons' children too

Skeleton cats and skeleton dogs  
For skeleton me and you

We'd play jawbone pianos  
And beat our skulls like drums

And bang on ribcage xylophones  
Till the bone police vans come

Yes I wish I lived down Angel Street  
Where the Angels grow their wings

Where there's room enough for everyone  
From old winos to kings

*Don Juan The Cowboy*

## Selling Coffins

She opens the mainsail of her hair to the wind machine — this is the part where she stumbles barefoot through a deadhorse town that is any town, calling his name.

A stranger appears, selling coffins in a town that is over-spilling with coffins. The cowboy Don Juan is the love interest, but soon they will eat his liver. Turn up the rain machine, let the soldiers mingle with the Indians for now...let them move their mouths as if they were trading horses...let the sun burn a crease through the breakaway mountains...help will arrive in the form of a stranger selling coffins.

Build a big fire. Night comes down like God flipped a switch. There have been rumors of a ghost dance causing all this pestilence. Round up the ones who are not out hunting...if she floats, she's a witch...if she sinks, she's gone home to Jesus.

Build a big fire.

The town suffers from a malignancy of lies. No one wants to be sheriff anymore. A dog is elected mayor. Boothill is booming...get them in the ground before the crows eat their eyes.

She would have gone with Don Juan the cowboy but God intervened. Now she kneels in a cell while they test the trapdoor. Morning comes like a ripped off blindfold.

The dam breaks over her dancing legs — this is the part when someone drops a rope down from heaven or whatever. Sing me a cowboy dirge. Let the horses come home from the smallpox hills...extinguish the stars...help will arrive.

## Don Juan In Shadow Valley

A dry summer with no promise of rain — the cowboy Don Juan cleans his rifle, steps to the road and calls for his mare...a girl from town appears, wearing his horse's head.

The townsfolk take turns playing hangin' judge...everyone denounces everyone...soon they are fresh out of rope and lumber...half the town must take a rain-check on the other half's demise...they fight under a red sky for who gets first dibs on the jailhouse.

The horsehead girl will show Don Juan to shadow valley. He rides her for many moons down mainstreet while the town plays itself on a loop...where is the angel of our deliverance?

All it takes is one snake, and everyone crawls on their bellies. The hanged ones' kids form a gauntlet around our hero and horse-girl...they drag listless fingers across their necks, doin' the old slit-throat pantomime...put a kettle on to boil.

Black wings circle down out of a red sky — this must be shadow valley, where we take on the spirits of those we devour. Let's ask the cannibal children or the snake with the swollen middle...let's ask the black wings.

Enough of Don Juan the cowboy to go around; the kids sleep it off while birds and flies take turns. Don's head drowns on a sharpened stick...his bones are in Bone River...horse-girl was neither a horse nor a girl...it is a dry summer with no promise of rain.

*Bone River*

I am where the bones all go; after the dancing, after love's  
lightning, emptied of marrow, clean of desire, stone-white

or bride-white, black from the numbered days, stripped  
of all blame and prestige –

I am a river of bones like these.

In my bending are thin hips of blind girls swept up in vans,  
dismembered with an awful care, strewn then here and there

in tributaries and turns – stop awhile in silence friend, stop awhile  
and learn. Do not mistake my voice for theirs; I have no mouth

or ending, but these lotus girls have seen things, these girls with  
sightless eyes, with ice-bit fingers have surmised the final

catechism of false smiles...last hellos...last goodbyes –  
the tearing and the rending and the flies.

Stop awhile beside me now, the bones are very wise.

After the lowering down, after the bowing and singer  
and song, the red light refracted, rejoined and refracted;

blackface of sky thrown back into sky, trees thrown  
back at the trees, lamb-white or skull-white I swell to  
your knees –

I am a river of bones like these.

Green rise the hills; green keep the lawns of  
Caesar, green the killing places, green the faces  
lost in my lulls.

I who was not joined with you in the quickening  
of water with other water am so forever  
joined with you.

Quiet now be still, not brave, not  
trembling – come into yourself and  
so wade into me.

Yes, I held the lotus on my face for him to read,  
he under the tree, and was taken up by another

for the washing of the feet; not tender or severe,  
but with a fullness, an entirety – complete – so neither  
there nor here.

Yes, I have death's ear.

Carried the singing head downstream and cradle  
still the disappeared. Stand beside me on the wet grass

or above me on the footbridge, with the others  
on the footbridge – take a listen, take a listen to the

sobs of recognition. Yes to the barefoot marching into  
frozen woods, yes to the shovels, yes to the ditch,  
yes to the undressing,

to the prayers and scalding jeers; gone beyond all bad or good –  
neither there nor here. What could we ever know of such things?

Born, you and me out of darkness and rain...how to explain?  
It is always yes, always and finally yes and yes. Quiet now,  
not shrill –

It is finished and unfinished.

I was not on the dry hill, neither  
worshiped nor despised – I was

somewhere larger still, gathering  
somewhere larger still, acquitted of  
fame and atrocities –

I am a river of bones like these.

# Epilogue

## The Forgotten

The forgotten boy lived with the forgotten girl  
in the forgotten house roles were called up yonder  
the sky burned the ground coughed up her swollen dead  
something like a lake of fire appeared but none of us

could verify this having never witnessed flaming estuaries  
or goose-stepping saints let alone anything resembling precariously  
low-swung chariots etc. but these were soon forgotten too in the  
wake/non-wake that is all wakes of

void (or the deep) upon whose lackluster face moved  
darkness trailing her newborn darling      zero

thus repeating the surreptitious gentrification of  
nothingness till before you could say *jehosaphat*  
it was time again for letting there be light  
and the raising of forgettable new

houses for future soon to be forgotten  
boys and girls.

## A User's Guide To Grieving

Raw taters make great  
silencers shoved lovingly over  
your muzzle-flash rain-  
coat all splatter bone frags'  
remembrance gray matter

Rats your natural hazmat  
crew immaculate souls razor  
minded renshi-toothed tithe  
for them and they in kind  
come back on you

Make room down Shinbone  
Avenue "do you take...?" "I do..."  
"till death...?" "yes..." bachelors  
bathed in lap-dancers' goo deferred  
for awhile from Shinbone Aisle

Wisconsin once-were wives lay out your  
death-blossom grooms-stripped-bare wasted  
away in mortaritaville fetch in the corn breast-  
wean your stillborn should butcher knives  
fail whetstone obsidian

Hell overspills her uterine  
shores she won't be contained learn  
her whirlpools sweet nothings her mouth  
around yours Allah drunk-drives this  
sculls 'n stripes meridian

## Achilles Lays Up With His String Of Whores

Achilles keeps boys so blonde  
and fey, even the sun stands  
out of their way.

Our women hold gray days  
in summer for late gatherings of  
flowers without names.

Shapeless and numberless, they  
browse fly-thick landfills; aprons  
stuffed like crematoriums with  
blossom and bloom.

Achilles combs out his horse's  
mane, rinsing the stiff black  
blood with rain.

The dirt, in perfect deference, asks  
no questions. Her hair will soon  
be your hair, her hair will  
soon be mine.

Gray days hold our women  
for late flowerings in summers  
without names.

Achilles lays up with his string  
of whores — bored with war,  
bored with war.

*Blood Is Its Own Secret River*

Because blood is its own secret  
river, it flows where it will. It may  
spill from your laughing table as you  
drink to the permanence of love,  
but it's only the butcher next door —

the runoff from slaughtered things  
too many and too few to be counted.

Generous and fearless, blood is  
its own offering. Because it rides  
the shoulders of rain, you might wake  
to find it dried black and dull around  
the rose-garden. This would not be a

time for tearing your hair or apologies —  
not with so much blood in the trees.

Put on instead your terrible wings,  
blood is the thing that cures and endures.  
Because it has found its own language,  
it needs no sign or sacrament. This  
would not be a time for counting sins

or calculations of worth — blood has arrived to  
dress the world for burial and birth.

Because it is its own source, it redeems  
and incriminates equally, finally and clearly.  
Right here is the place to begin where love ends —  
stripped of blood and clothed in blood,  
the singers are numberless,

the song is sung from shower to sewer  
to rose-garden.

Because it is clandestine, blood  
infiltrates other rivers, and these with  
red tides of the universe. If you look closely  
and far enough away, you will see all rivers  
as blood rivers — the dead stars' reflections

smell of bedrooms and butcher shops, too many  
and too few to be counted.