

THE NEXT STEPS ARE ONLY BREATHING

by

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ABSTRACT

The Next Steps Are Only Breathing

By Reggie Douglas Townley

The Next Steps are Only Breathing is a novel set in Central Idaho and Nevada. The work centers around Candy Bear, a lot lizard, or truck stop prostitute. The novel opens with Candy Bear at rock bottom, and subsequent chapters explore her life story, a story of family, home, and extreme loss, paralleled with her living within and rising from the tragic circumstances in which she finds herself trapped. A note on the figures. These are part of an ongoing collaborative project, and will include illustrations. I have been using stock images from the web as place holders, these have been removed to avoid any issues of copyright.

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he comes to see the immensity of the mechanism in which he is caught, the immense fragility of his own flying – composed as it is of these ceaselessly passing shadows carried backward by the very motion that devours them, his motion, his asking.

Anne Carson NOX

PART ONE

We never take a good look at it unless we lose it—unless we choke, drown, or suffocate. Then all of a sudden breath becomes important.

Ayya Khema

Chapter 1:

Candy Bear

Candy Bear the Lot Lizard* wakes in sand and brush debris against the base of a rabbitbush*, her body a tangle of limbs, her skin a pale shade of blue. An empty vibration waits just beyond grasping because she's too cold to shiver but something in her still wants to shake. There's some hidden part of her that wants to stay alive. Far within, a distant warmth lingers; to stir and keep the surge of blood moving along its course, out along the spreading arterial webwork, the slow resistant seep through capillaries, and back through veins to her heart. Her eyes crack open. They're swollen almost shut but she can see light through a blur and the thin limbs of the shrub criss-cross hazy lines through clouded vision. Against seemingly infinite weight she lifts her hand over her face to shade her eyes and adjust to the darkness cupped in her palm. There are cars; tirehiss on pavement and the halting airwish of their passing. Trucks. The freeway. An engine comes to life close enough to shake her space. Slowly she allows more light in, a slow dawning to prevent blinding, then moves her leg, bends her knee, and it takes some thaw

* Lot Lizard: A truck stop prostitute. Some dwell in cheap apartments or motels. Many are homeless. In Candy Bear's case, she is homeless.

* See Figure 1.

Figure 1: Common Rabbitbush (*Chrysothamnus nauseosus*)

General: Erect, deciduous shrub, usually 20 – 60 cm tall, sometimes over 1 meter, densely branched, often flat topped; flexible branches covered with grey hairs, much like the soft thin felt of an apricot's skin, left to fall to the ground, amongst grasses that have been let go, to seed and dry in the sun, near a house long neglected, paint peeling from weathered siding long left to the elements, each second passed within a moment of unbearable loss.

Leaves; alternate, linear, 3-6 cm long, about 1 mm wide, grey-velvet much the same as the stems.

Flowerheads: small yellow heads with five disced florets, dense clusters of them that glow bright in the sun, sometimes stinging eyes tired from all day on the trail, guiding cattle from high meadows into desert, but when caught in the right kind of light, softens the gaze.

Fruits: Linear and covered in hair. Indicative of the overall animal nature of this species, as if the plant may shift and uproot itself. Always at the ready.

Where found: Dry, open sites; plains to montane; from the southern plains of British Columbia and Alberta to New Mexico.

Sometimes referred to, or at least by one person of note, as greasewood, though this is incorrect. Possibly a regional reference, but unconfirmed.

Varied species in genus:

C. parryi, *C. viscidiflorus*, *Tetradymia canescens* (of the *Tetradymia* genus, but of the Asterceae family, and heavily resembling the animal like nature of the rabbitbush in general.

Rabbitbush was once used in the curing of hides, the smoke curling from the flames rising up from their branches into the hides hung above. The meadows around carried the trill of children at play. It wasn't long until their voices were silenced.

work to move muscle and erode the bruise ache spread across her body. Her skin is frigid bare, legs exposed to wind by cutoff jeans. Half numb fingers crawl across her face and come back sticky and she smells blood and looks at her hands and her fingerprints are smeared red. She touches her face again and winces.

The night comes back to her.

She let them beat her for a gram of crystal and a baggie of cross tops* and they just kept going. They held her down and razor cut her face and beat her with tire chains until there were white flashes and it went to where she doesn't remember.

* Cross Tops: Cheap amphetamine pills, usually Benzedrine, popular with truckers, as well drivers of IROC Z's and nineteen seventies models of the Chevrolet Camaro. Use was particularly high in the 1980's, and into the early 90's. Sometimes also called bennies, and often packaged in foil pill containers, as they were quasi legal. Some folks buy in bulk.

This is the tenth time in her life she has been left for dead.

Candy Bear reaches into her jean jacket pocket and the baggie of cross tops is crumpled inside amongst a mixture of lint and sand. She fingers the polyethylene, floats the little pills around, moved by the pressure of her fingers as if separated by a thin layer of gel. The gram of crystal is gone but a small roll of bills has taken its place. She unrolls it slowly. Fifteen in ones. She pops three cross tops in her mouth, swallows, and gags. White fire tears through her ribs and she wipes tears from her cheeks, the denim sleeve further opening her wounds. Her mouth is sticky dry so she chews them to a powder that sticks her tongue to the roof of her mouth. Candy Bear rolls onto her side and looks along the ground at the dry red and gold cheat grass* waving gently in the breeze. Through the base of the rabbitbush she makes out the truck stop across the scrubby lot. Beyond a patch of asphalt, sliding doors open and shut. She thinks how she is nothing and itches at

Figure 2: Drooping Brome, also Cheat Grass (*Bromus tectorum*)

General: Annual Bunchgrass, autumn germination, overwintering as a seedling, flowers in the spring or early summer. Typically reaches 40–90 cm tall, though plants as small as 2.5 cm may produce seed. Self-fertile, increasing its numbers and choking out all life in its path. Invasive, spreading upon the ground, rooting itself in the soil until it

* See Figure 2.

becomes the only surviving species. The landscape changes, native shrubs and forbs are slowly replaced, the seed works its way into the skin of a calf, into the venous pathway, the heart stops.

Leaves: long, narrow

Flowerheads: barbed florets adhere to fur, clothing, encouraging the spread of seed, invading the organism as carrier

Distribution: Native to Eastern Europe. Widespread in North America from Mexico to Canada. Invasive.

her chin, opens a slash that releases blood in a slow seep. Droplets fall to the sand and spread slow small circles amongst the grains, billions of years, stone worn to powder grit supporting stunted bristles of vegetation; stones transfiguring slowly to dust.

The speed needs to get past mouth and tongue to bloodstream, so she pulls herself up into the stream of the loud rushing world, a fog of noise, everything frozen in a strange state of stillness despite all the movement pulsing into her. Candy Bear limps across the scrub brush lot. Thorns prick at her shins and the scratches pinken as she pulls her jean jacket close, "CANDY BEAR" bedazzled in red across the back in rhinestones that somehow held on through the night and flash in the sun, sparkling on the denim backdrop that blurs as a softened patch in the blending of bright blue sky and shining desert gold. She crosses the blacktop, the sliding doors open, and she limps through the convenience store, her black cowboy boots scuffing the linoleum. To avoid the mutilation crossing their path, a woman pushes her child out of the way, a hand pressing upon the

boy's head to jerk his body into motion. Candy Bear walks down a long hallway into the bathroom and drinks from the sink to wash down the sticky mouthful of paste, pops five more pills. Her face is coated in a thin red film as if she were dyed in the skin for a permanent sideshow, the tint of blood almost indelible to her being.

She goes back into the store and grabs a bag of Fritos, a roll of duct tape, a bag of cotton balls, a twin pack of ibuprofen, a bottle of MD 20/20, and a bean burrito. The clerk pauses before scanning her collection. He considers calling the cops but instead opts to get her wraith-like form taken care of and out the door as soon as possible. He does not need the hassle with a kid at home and two more jobs besides this one just to maybe someday make something happen and get out of there, out of that little town lost on the way to nothing.

With a dollar twenty eight left, Candy Bear returns to the bathroom. Water runs pink in the basin and she spreads foaming antibacterial soap on the cuts, streams of water rinsing the soap away as rivulets off her cheeks, and pats the moisture away with wadded paper towels clutched in her shaking hands. The burrito grease smell fills the bathroom. Cotton balls interweave their strands with the slow ooze rising from the gashes: two under the eye, two across each cheek, two on her forehead, and one across the chin. She covers the matted down mess with strips of duct tape pressed down tight. Band aids won't do it and gauze is too expensive and she doesn't think they have gauze at the truck stop anyway. Candy Bear munches on her burrito and limps out.

The woman with child is now in the hall and presses the child against her. “Fuck. Give me a break,” she says, and holds the child’s face into her belly, hoping he doesn’t remember what he sees long into his years.

Candy Bear nods and tries to wink her eye through swollen lids, cocks her head in a failed attempt at sass, walks through the sliding doors, sits on the bench out front by the pay phone, and eats. She knows where she is. She’s figured it out, a truck stop on the freeway east of Rupert, Idaho, close to where I-84 heads south to Salt Lake.

The light slowly ebbs in its hurt. She cracks the plastic on the bottle of Mad Dog to wash down the burrito. Her body writhes into each movement.

More pills.

Cloudless sky.

Smell of diesel and gasoline.

A thin kid maybe twenty in a Jack in the Box uniform walks up and itches behind his ear, a twitch of rage and irritation guiding sparks down each sinew. He leans against the ice machine and his hips flex the metal, not from the weight but the pressing. The payphone rings and he picks up the receiver with a jerk.

“Dude, what’s up?” he says. Hissing of a breakline. The boy fidgets in place as he listens to the other side of the line, telling him they won’t be meeting him at the time they said, again, and that it will be more. “What the fuck, dude?” he says. He listens for awhile and the skin of his palm squeaks against the plastic receiver. “All right. Half hour. I’ll be

here.” He hangs up the phone and looks at Candy Bear, who stares at him with a slight trembling bauble in her head.

“Here,” she says, and holds out her hand with three pills. “Sometimes, sometimes you got to help a new friend. You a friend?”

The kid looks at her. “What the fuck happened to your face?” He looks at the pills and bites his lower lip.

“Whatever, whatever. Don’t worry about that,” she says. “Just take these hon, okay, okay?”

“Thanks,” he says and takes them from her. He tosses them in his mouth and swallows them dry. Candy Bear’s shaky hand offers up the bottle of Mad Dog and he takes a long pull followed by a sharp breath, like coming up for air. He wipes the corners of his mouth with his wrist. “Really, thanks,” he says.

“No sweat, no sweat at all,” Candy Bear says. “Half hour’s a long time sometimes.”

“Yeah, no shit,” he says. “Just want to get through fucking work, I swear. Then I’ll be good.” He leans back against the ice machine and lights a cigarette. His face softens. “You want one?”

“No thanks, honey,” she says, “Don’t smoke thanks.”

“You don’t?” he says.

“No.”

He half smiles and slicks his hair back with his hat in his hand. Pits of acne scarring shadow his face and a sore festers on his lower lip. “So really, what happened to you?”

“It’s hazy. Yeah, yeah. Hazy.” Candy Bear writhes her arms slightly with her speaking. Words intermittently catch in her throatflesh.

“Come on. You can tell me. We don’t know nothing about each other and I bet you’re moving on, right?”

“Right. Right. I’m always moving, moving along, always moving on. Just truckers, honey. It happens sometimes. Sometimes.”

“Dude, that’s fucked up.”

Candy Bear shrugs and twitches her head. Her tangled hair falls on her shoulders in wiry strands and mats.

“No, I don’t know what the hell happened but you don’t look all right. You ain’t all right.”

“Well, yeah whatever. Honey, I probably ought to split, honey. They’ll call the cops. They’ll call the cops. Hospital. Hospital. I don’t want to fuck your shit up too.”

“Yeah, I don’t know. You don’t really have to worry about me. I can cover my own ass just like anyone. Can I help you at all?” Part of him thinks for a second he’s capable of doing some saving, but so far he barely knows how to feed himself much less help someone out of their bottom out.

“Not much to do. I’ll heal. I’ll heal.”

“Shit man, whatever. Dude, that’s totally fucked,” the kid says. “You sure you don’t need anything?”

“Nah, I’m good,” Candy Bear holds up the bottle and pats the baggie in her breast pocket. “They at least left me with a little something. A little something.”

“All right, I guess. Thanks for the speed, dude.”

“Sure, honey, no problem,” Candy Bear gets up and limps into the truck lot. She waves at the boy as he drags his cigarette and places his free hand on the ice cooler. He nods his head upward goodbye to her.

Semis sit with their trailers glowing in the sun. They all seem deserted, a strange graveyard, for a few moments. But then it all changes and she sees into them as what she knows them to be. She knows within some are sleeping men taking a rest on their way to anywhere possible. Some are watching TV in their bunks. Some are with girls like her, making the trade, lying across their bodies, pressing into them, consuming them as if in the act there was something of a hope for completion. Through the sea of trucks, the intermittent chatter of engine start crawls across like bird calls through a forest, the far end, close by, calling each other, echoing. She wonders if she can hitch a ride somewhere, anywhere. It’s time to head south, before the frost sets in deep and the grass no longer warms in the sun, before the snow lays its blanket across everything and easy shelter becomes scarce. But now she just needs to lie down, get the strength up to work it out. Past the end of the truck lot she crosses the fence and heads for the creek and a stand of cottonwoods. She finds an open bed of leaves that have warmed in the sun, possibly the last of the year, and nestles in. She takes the bottle of shit wine out of her pocket,

swigs, and finally is warm enough to shiver. She shakes and moves her body into the dried leaves, body and decay intermingling. They crumble beneath her weight and radiate their heat into her, through her clothes, skin, muscle, and bone. She settles beyond the network of roots and soil, beyond bedrock, through a thousand suns burning, beyond the cool rush of streams and the fields of grain on the flats back home, wires and sparks, the rush of her life over and over and over.

Candy Bear sips Mad Dog on waking a few hours later. The sun is setting and she rises to avoid the cold overtaking her. Lights are on at the truck stop and she walks toward the glow. The orange against the western sky pulls her back into memory and image she's long ago disconnected and placed in compartments that sometimes shatter and allow their cargo to surface. She buries them back. A rush of cool air hits her from a lonely distance that seems so familiar, she tries to avoid its touch, avoid feeling where it arose, so far off but still a place that could be pressed back into if she tried. Maybe back home, maybe back that far, maybe it's a wind she's touched before, that had brushed across her cheeks back home, gone around the world a thousand times and back to blow across her body now;

horizon of the Snake River plain,

distant hills recede in purple mist,

mountains

north and south,

the expanse west rolling slow curves,

infinite fold onto fold onto fold.

all transfigured in golden orangeglow

Everything gives her need to still her hands from shaking too violently. Twenty of her thirty-five years spent in this cycle. She is looking for a ride out of Idaho. The first frost has passed. It is time to head south.

Chapter 2:***Hank***

Hank Hawkins the Third pulls off the pavement to head up to the sagebrush flat up top of the high field of the old ranch. It's the middle of the night and good and dark. His headlights illuminate the gravel road and sagebrush, and he cracks a beer from the case that sits on the seat next to him. He rolls down the window and hook shots his empty into the pickup bed. He wonders if it's maybe sacrilegious or something tossing a can back there with his dead father all bundled up in blankets, but figures his dad would do the same.

Chapter 3:

Harley

We called her Candy Girl back then.

She was in the long grass out near the fence to the back woodland, the white fence. The yard always like a meadow because we let the grass go long, so yard and pasture and woodland seemed to bleed together into one thing, wildness and dwelling intermingled. Violets grew in scattered bunches. Candy played around out back by the fence there and I could see her back turned. It hadn't been long since her tenth birthday. I was thirteen. She wore her favorite flower print dress with jeans on under, the way it always was. We couldn't ever get her out of that dress, barely even to wash it. I walked up behind her and tickled under her arms and she giggled, then turned nasty.

"Leave me alone, Harley," she squealed.

"Why for?" I said

"Cause I want you to."

"What's the big deal?"

"Just go away and leave me alone." She curled forward and I could see she was hiding something that reflected a quick flash of sunlight, some sort of glass. I peeked around and saw it was a mason jar, but she pulled it into her chest and waved me off before I could see what was in it. "I told you leave me alone!" she yelled. She picked up the jar and tucked it under her arm and ran for the back shed.

“Hey you little pecker,” I said, but let her go on. I needed to go out and change the sprinklers on the alfalfa field across the creek, so I watched her disappear around the corner and walked across the yard, out the front gate, and on down the road that dropped away and crossed the creek, the peaks above the high range cutting a glow of bright white. I stepped over one foot at a time the old railroad tie laid across the creek since I could remember, and it wobbled under my boots as I got it to balance just right, like always, the water rushing against the grassy banks beneath my feet as I stepped onto dry land. I stopped and looked at the pool downstream and could see a trout in the shade of some willows, it’s tail slowly curling in the current, feeling its way in the water, just a pitch above stillness.

I shut the sump* off at the far corner of the field and crossed over, the alfalfa knee high on my pant legs. I crossed along and came to the last sprinkler heads still dripping from left over pressure. I got hold of the end pipe and undid the clamp. I could feel the bottled up movement against my hand, just a little layer of cold metal between me and all that water. You could feel the pressure as always when you loosened the joint and it all let out from a few hundred feet of pipe, and it was almost like you felt the release of pressure, felt it let go, like a muscle give way, like a flush of air went out of you for a second and all went loose, spreading in a fan across the alfalfa and flowing down the ruts of the dirt road.

* See Figure 3.

Figure 3: Sump Pump

An irrigation pump for artesian wells, often to prevent flooding, but also used for irrigation wells in high desert areas where farming practices are used that require more than surface water can provide. Heartblood of earth sapped. The wells run dry when the faults shift.

I walked off the distance to change the target, an old 2-4-D* lid spray painted orange. I twisted the target onto the fence with a piece of rusted wire and broke down the joints of pipe till I got to the main line and started moving all the pipe down to the next section. I got the end plug back in and went and turned on the sump. Forty-five minutes. A new record. No blow outs either.

When I got back to the yard, I looked around for Candy and couldn't find her. With how she'd been headed out behind the old beat up wooden shed where all the hornets nested, I figured she must've taken her jar of whatever into the trees off the corner of the back pasture.

“Hey Candy Girl!” I hollered into the trees. The grass was long as all hell and the place was choked with weeds and underbrush. I stepped over the fence into the little tangled woodland and followed one of the worn down trails Candy'd kept using since I outgrew all the fort building we used to do. She wasn't around the stick and mud forts all twisted up around the trees, woven into spiral shapes interlinking with the branches. “Hey pecker! What the hell!” I hollered. I checked all the forts, inside each little crevice we'd made, all the ones she'd made since I stopped. They were all empty and I sat in one for a minute to watch the light cross from the trees and through the grass. I could smell that old familiar smell of disturbed earth, where Candy had dug in to add to the fort walls. Fresh mud was there with twigs poking out. I touched the wall and held my hand to my face. It

* 2-4-D An herbicide used commonly in alfalfa farming. Also a known carcinogen.

was a good thing to remember, that feeling of life we had shared, as if of one mind, until mine started to shift away as hers grew deeper in our old way of seeing things.

I headed back to the house. She never really went in till dinner unless mom called her, but I thought I'd check anyway. When I crossed the fence I heard something in the old shed. I couldn't see anything really through the window other than shadowy movement because of the years of dust that gave it the look of frost. I didn't want to go in because we never went in there and I was pissed off I even needed to. I didn't know who had gone in there last. It was off limits. I'd never even gone in, had been tempted to sneak in a couple times but never quite got myself to do it. I'd once come close, come close to pushing the door open, but that tingling feeling made my chest quiver, and I just knew there was something beyond that old cracked wood door that would mean the end of me, that I'd be sucked beyond and into the depths of the earth, so I ran off. It was full of hornets and spiders and god knows what else and was all overgrown like the weeds were trying to consume it into the earth. I went around the shed to where the door was facing the woodland and the grass was all beat up like someone had been using it. I opened the door and Candy had her back to me, fiddling with something I couldn't see. I could just see her shoulders and elbows at work on something.

She looked back at me and a quick startle shot through her.

“What the hell are you doing in here?” I said. “Get on the hell out. You're gonna get hurt.” I reached in to grab her by the arm and she pulled away from me, her back to the wall.

“Harley, no,” she said. Her voice was flat and she pressed herself into the wall as if she wanted to fade off into it. I stepped inside and the floorboards creaked under my boots. It seemed like things had been put to purpose, which I didn’t expect. I’d always thought the place would be all fallen apart but it wasn’t. Then I noticed all the jars.

“Candy,” I said. I looked at her.

“I told you leave me alone.”

All lined up along the benches nailed to the wall and the sills of the windows were mason jars alive with buzzing. It was arranged where every other jar had a hornets nest inside with the hornets crawling around, their wings slapping against the glass when they tried to fly. All the other jars looked real strange and I stepped close and got a look at them and they were lined in foil and had twisted wires sticking into them that shot off sparks. The smell of the air was strange, the usual old musty oily smell of buildings long abandoned and left to rot, letting off the creosote stink they’d long ago been soaked with, age and decay, but also the thin hot smell of wires and burnt dust. Candy stood silent in the corner, watching me, watching the jars.

“Candy,” I said. I tried to stay calm but my voice was shaky. “Candy girl, honey, what the hell is all this.”

“They all buzz,” she said. Her eyes were focused, only not on one point but the whole room.

“They all buzz?” I said.

“They all buzz,” she said.

“What?”

“The jars, the yella jackets. They all buzz.”

“Okay, honey, I see that. But what the hell are you doing here? What are these?”

“They’re my jars.”

“Honey?”

“They’re my jars. I made em.”

“Girl, you’re gonna have me all fucked up and dead of fright too early. What in hell are you doing this for?”

“To see.”

“See what?”

“The inside.”

I caught on that and paused. I didn’t know what to do with it. I faltered and had to get myself back together to even know how to talk. We’d always talked about what was going on inside of everything, but this felt different, distant, and I didn’t know if the wrong feeling it gave me inside was because of me or because of Candy. My head got hot and the air turned thick and foggy in front of me.

“What if dad catches you out here? You know what he always said about this place.”

“So?”

“Damn it. He always told us stay out of here,” I yelled at her and she kept still.

“Cause it has secrets.”

“What? No, cause it’s dangerous and old and half fallen down.”

“Then why don’t he tear it down, if it’s just gonna fall down? Why keep it?”

“Ah damn it, girl!” I looked around at the jars and walked out with the door open behind me. I took a handkerchief out of my back pocket and wiped sweat off my forehead and went inside the house and got some lemonade from the fridge. Mom and dad had gone into town and left me out there with the kid again, always needed someone with her and sometimes they just didn’t want her in town, wanted to move around without the stares. People had started to act funny toward her and as she got older what seemed normal for a young girl started to seem strange. Our folks left me with her because we understood each other, but it was getting to where she seemed more and more foreign to me too. We’d had a way of speaking all our own, but it had gotten to where I couldn’t hear it but still didn’t know how to be like mom and dad either. I needed a new way of moving in the world and I hadn’t found it yet. Maybe Hank would have known a way to help me, but he was off at college. I needed him right then to figure out how to do this. He knew how to be a big brother and I didn’t. Even if I could never be the same again, maybe I could figure out how to move on, figure out a place in the world. I was starting to see myself as an empty space in it all, something never meant to be.

Chapter 4:

Candy Bear

Rising from the mud. I evolved.

I reached into the ground I had saturated with a five gallon bucket from the creek. Five trips soaked the earth enough so I could set to work on walls for a new fort. I dug in, bringing up the wetted earth and piling the mud and intertangled roots of grass in a circle, flattening the exposed earth to make a floor. I mixed the mud and sod with twigs and packed a base wall, interweaved willow branches upward in a spiral, and made a mud and grass mixture to coat the inside walls to the top, where I left an opening for light to pour down. At rare times when the sun cut through the canopy directly above and hit just right, the entire floor would light up, but most of the time a small circle of light would move slowly about the ground, the only perception of change that created by memory of where it was before.

From outside I heard a low whir and followed the sound into the shadowy light. I already knew the sound so well, the quiver shaking through my ribs. At the base of a Russian Olive,* their movement traced the air. I had a jar with me, and inched up to the wasp nest built up just below a tangle of grasses that encased the interlayering of wasp paper. I set the jar near the nest and sat down, my hips settling into the earth with my

* See Figure 4.

folded legs. I watched the nest lightly. I did not stare. Their movement around the nest was like that of orbit. They buzzed around the entry and disappeared. Reappeared.

Figure 4: Russian Olive (*Elaeagnus angustifolia* L.)

Leaf: Alternate, simple, 1 to 3 inches long, 1/2 inch wide. Dull green to almost gray and distinctly scaly above, silvery and scaly below.

Flower: Bell-shaped, 3/8 to 5/8 inch long, very fragrant, lacking petals, silvery or whitish. Appearing in spring.

Fruit: Berry-like fruit, silver to reddish brown, 1/2 inch long, edible, sweet but dry, maturing in late summer.

Twig: Young branches silver and scaly, may bear thorns. Later shiny light brown color; small buds working their way to adulthood, whipped by the winds and sand, silvery-brown and rounded with four scales.

Bark: Smooth and gray when young, irregularly ridged and furrowed as they mature.

Form: A shrub or small tree to 40 feet, rounded in outline. Often used to calm strong winds that sweep across open plains, causing all other residents to wilt away as if in fear. Protector, invader. Displaces native species and contributes to fragmentation, spreading without check, choking out all others.

I watched and waited until one entered the open jar and settled in as I threaded the lid closed upon the jar and tucked it under my arm. I ran toward the edge of the woodland, toward the grassy area near the back shed, and sat the jar out in the light so I could watch the wasp in the sun. I opened the lid quickly and placed a small piece of tissue paper from

my pocket into the jar for the wasp to create a new nest with. He waved his wings slowly, absorbing the sun. Harley tried to tickle me but I ran off before he could see. He was beyond ever being ready to see again. He'd crossed over to a space that clouded him from me. I ran to the shed and placed the jar on the walls amongst the others, let this new arrival become part of the work at hand. I was nearly where I could find out what the next step was, find out what all this was for. I was learning. I was listening. All the buzz together was working on me and waiting to tell. I knew I couldn't tell anyone yet because I didn't know enough, and Harley was leaving it all behind anyway, and he was the one who could have been closest. But he was crossing over to their world, leaving the mud and sticks behind for something else entirely rather than connecting it to something higher so we could move on to the next step. To him it was all play. But I stayed with it and learned from my hands in the earth and made the next connection, the next transformation with a different order of being, connecting heaven and earth through glass and fire. The transformation wasn't ready to reveal and now Harley was crossing over from our world. Ours was no longer our own. The veil had been lifted and if we weren't careful they could peer into an existence we had once had as our own secret space of work still so deeply connected with the world of dream.

In my dreams I saw lightning behind glass, smelled rain on the air and the distilled mists of sage and aspen leaf, the bed of the aspen grove a blanket of gold coins that gave underfoot like some strange mating of paper and skin. Those turned yellow to red matched the sunset and from that the insect made its hole in the leaves and the hum and buzz of lightning under glass mated with the glow of the sun.

There was no way to explain it to my parents and have them understand it. It had been a children's secret all along and now I had no one to share it with, and felt even then in these small losses that it would result in losing Harley forever if I wasn't careful, if I didn't reveal what I was finding carefully, and I was finding more and more over time the erosion of what we'd been born with, wearing away the connections between waking and dream, taking out the bridges, or, erecting walls between the coexisting streams. The states of dream and waking aren't separate*. They are coemergent, but I was running up against the collective agreement of favoring the waking as real and not informed by dream, and to encapsulate the dreamworld strictly in sleep. Over time I watched Harley fall victim in complete disintegration and be lost completely in the fight. I almost lost too, let life take me under its wave, doing my best to destroy my feelings so I didn't feel the ongoing erosion occur. For most it was a slackening, a slow dull loss of faculties into old age. For me it was a tear in the fabric of being. The force had the pain of breaking, a pain even greater than fist or club.

The dreams kept coming for years. Then, over time, I saw how I could make it happen. The lightning behind glass became sparks at the edge of foil and soon jars enmeshed in a vast spiralic coil of paper and the blur of wasp wings, then I found myself in the night on horseback, on Hobbes, my palomino gelding that dad and Hank had finished from greenbroke. I'd woken up and found myself one hour into the two hour ride up into the high fields. It was a half-moon but I could see the rest of the disc in shadow.

* See Figure 5.

Figure 5: Deep time in our dreamworlds*Patriarchy's flood*

Conception: dreamworld interpenetrates waking reality. Dream and sleep and waking bleed together as a stream transcend units of time (constructs of rationality).

Rationality: projection onto dreamworld equivalent to invading force, projection of totalitarianism as units of time, regimes invade our inner renderings of reality. Rather than a stream of seeing, feeling, tasting, units of work and commerce meter and count us as if we are pocket change. Arms of a watch replace our seeing tree limbs as our limbs. Breathing, eating, shitting bodies replaced by steel beams, expected to live up to their constructions. Our inventions become our benchmarks.

Questions for further research: Is sleep not valued because we aren't working, making money?

Can we figure out how to make money in sleep? Would that satisfy commerce? Is the first step learning to make money in pajamas?

Pilot test in progress.

Hobbes went on as if he knew the way, knew where we were going and why. His head bobbed as he walked, hooves breaking the brush with each step. There were quick darts of movement and their quickly lengthening and disappearing shadows amongst the tall brush. As I became more conscious, I turned and opened my canteen bag for some water, and next to the bottle of ice I'd gotten from the freezer in my sleep, there were two jars and a length of foil. I reined Hobbes to a stop and held the jars up to the moonlight. One was empty and inside the other was a wasp and its nest. It worked its way into the holes within the paper matrix of its world. I put both jars back in the canteen bag and kicked Hobbes softly into motion. I tracked back through the patterns of waking, those strange fragments flashing like atmospheric re-entry, to find what it was in my dreams that found me there, that moved me through catching and saddling Hobbes and riding across the creek, the flats, and over the saddle toward the high fields. Flashes of sparks behind glass and foil, the same but something new, stone circles, the upper flats of the high field. I knew what I was looking for then, let my conscious world sync up with my inward volition. I continued on, guiding Hobbes along a course I'd followed since I could first ride.

We stopped at a creek, where we'd dropped down into a ravine. Hobbes lowered his head to drink and splashed his snout in the pool, then settled in to sip. He raised his head and looked down the creek. He flipped his lips at some bunch grass on the bank before grabbing hold and bringing it up by the root. I kicked him across the creek, still tossing his head and munching the strands of grass as his hooves splashed through the stream and we ascended the opposite bank. We followed an old jeep trail up the hillside, up through an aspen grove that whispered the tinkling of its leaves on the light breeze.

Past the grove the trail turned into switchbacks that we followed until we topped out onto the flats. The jeep trail curved off to the left and I turned Hobbes into the big sagebrush. The canopy of the brush pulled at my dress as I crossed through it until it slowly faded and dwindled to thin windswept grass entirely. We soon came to the middle of the flat and the rows of stone circles laid into the dirt, stones long ago brought from the peaks above us. As to who laid them I've never known, but I've felt they had been there from a time before anyone you can connect to, even by long ancestral line in that place. We always knew not to tell anyone about it, anyone outside of family. Most the circles were maybe two feet circumference, except for the three in the middle. I took off Hobbes' bit and let him graze freely. I pulled out the jars and foil and zipped the cante bag shut. Hobbes munched at the stunted grass and I walked toward the center three circles and lay one jar in each of the circles to the side of the largest center one, then lay down in the center with the strip of foil laid across my forehead like a wash rag and descended into messages, sank through them as into a bed filled with pillows aflash with light and dark, interplay of wingbeat and clear air, matrix of wingbeat and blur.

Chapter 5:

Hank

Hank pulls off the gravel road to one of the gates to the high field. The new owners, Californians who keep it as a hunting preserve, have padlocked the gate. Hank takes a hammer from under the seat and uses the claw end to break the lock. He drags the barbed wire gate through the thin layer of mud and pulls the truck through, splashing through pools left by the day's rain. He cuts the lights and closes the gate, sticking the tine of the padlock back together as if locked, though he has to prop the butt of it against the fence post to keep the look of it being closed.

He uses the moonlight to drive the road that he still knows by feel, even with the time away, time in which so much else has eroded. So much gone wrong and the land taken from them long ago, but the sense of it is still right there in him. He keeps on slow so his dad won't unroll from the bundle. He lowers the window for the sweet smell of the sage and the cold air on his face, the scent thick and wet and cool in his lungs.

Chapter 6:

Harley

I kept it to myself. What I'd seen Candy doing. Her and I'd always been up to stuff together, so I should have understood, but I didn't. We'd always been one of the same stream, but something was growing a wall up in between us. I didn't know if it was me or her. It just felt like something was shifting in the world where it didn't make sense to me in the way it had before, something about the air shifted an off tone, a tightening in the light that made it seem just off away, too far for my reach. Seeing Candy in the shed bothered me, like she'd gone on further in the vein we'd always known, and I hadn't. What was worse was the look she gave me, that she didn't want me to know it, that she didn't trust me anymore. I remembered, but it seemed so far away, even if it was only a year or two. I'd see her on the playground across the fence, stiff armed in the middle of the field, while all the rest of the kids played normal kid stuff. She was doing something else. Wasn't against play, she was just tuning in on something, and the other kids knew it. It was like there was an invisible barrier around her that everyone could feel, but no one could see, except maybe Candy. But it didn't bother her like it did me. Though I couldn't help moving on from it, like it was a force beyond my control, a stream carrying me away, I wanted something to help me connect back to it all, at least be able to be around Candy without that discomfort.

That year my English teacher was Mr. Daggett, and he was a help, even if he'd barely last the year, same as me. All the kids called him Daggett the faggot, geniuses. I

never knew whether he was gay or not but it didn't bother me anyhow. He read us poems. He was not tough. He did not talk football. He didn't stand a chance. All the other teachers at least talked football. There was something about Mr. Daggett that helped, maybe his being so disconnected like I felt. Maybe it was the poems he read. Wordsworth spoke to me, all those lines about the living breath and heartbeat of nature. Streams speaking to us, teaching us what their songs meant. I knew that language when I listened to the creek, when I felt the water in the irrigation line, all that living, that movement of everything, a pulse. And it reminded me of me and Candy, what we seemed to speak to each other without words. We just made things up out of nothing. I remembered it but somehow the places in me that felt it got less and less, like the work of being alive blotted out corners I'd gone into before but couldn't find anymore. Something was falling away, like the banks of the creek when the flash floods hit, but slower. A slow lazy decay that made areas of dull blackness in me. The poems Mr. Daggett read made me feel some chance of closing the gap, or maybe getting at an understanding of it. Maybe the words would come to bring what had been disfigured back together.

I sat on a bench at the edge of the baseball field during lunch one day, reading lines from a book of poems Mr. Daggett lent me. The sun hit the page and brought the words to my eyes strange and cutting, cutting through the fog for a moment to let me see life connect together again, or at least feel the hope of it. I couldn't help the sensation that something was being lost to me, maybe more than I thought, but there seemed a chance there could be something to hold onto.

“Hey, dickface!” A hand knocked the book from my hands and onto the ground. I picked it up. It was Jasper Thompson. His family had the ranch two places down the creek from us.

“Why’d you do that for?” I said, and picked the book up. He sat on the bench next to me, straw hat on his head with brown rings around the band, a mixture of sweat, dust, and alfalfa, the arms of his tan cowboy shirt rolled up to the elbow.

“What the fuck you reading that shit for?”

“Just reading, that’s all.”

“Shit man, I tell you what, I need to get some fuck on or something. Shit.”

“Yeah, a little something would be nice.” I wanted him to leave. I guess we were friends. I didn’t really care either way. Most folks I could take or leave.

“Fucking hot. Damn. Might have to go fishing Saturday at the reservoir. Get a swim in too. Bet there be some girls with some big old titties out waterskiing.”

“Damn it, I bet your right. Don’t know. Water might still be cold. Ain’t summer yet.”

“Got to shoot me down, don’t you? Sad sack. Might be right. Another few weeks though. Hell, even if it is too cold, they might be out there anyway. Bet they’ll be nipping out, too.”

“Probably so.”

“Bet your ass.” Jasper scuffed his boot on the ground and tapped his palm on the bench. He looked at me sideways and reached into his pocket for a pack of sunflower

seeds, tossed a few in his mouth, and cracked the shells. He looked at the book on my lap. “Where’d you get that anyway?” He cocked his head to looked at the spine, “Ro-man-tic po-et-ry of, the nine-teenth, century. What the hell *are* you reading that for?” He grabbed it from me and thumbed through it.

“Just reading.”

“Romantic poetry. What the hell? Shit, Harley, might be wrong about you. Maybe you are trying to get some pussy like the rest of us. Taking the soft route though, that’s good.”

“It ain’t romantic like that kind of romantic. Different meaning.”

“Where’d you get it?”

I hesitated, for a moment thinking if I stayed still and quiet long enough he’d just forget about it and give me shit about something else. “Mr. Daggett let me borrow it.”

“Daggett? Really.”

“Yeah. He saw I liked some of them Wordsworth poems he had us read.”

“Bunch of bullshit. Didn’t understand a fucking word of it. Bunch a English bullshit.”

“Whatever. Anyway. I’m just reading it, that’s all.”

Jasper looked at me sideways again, then held his chin up, looking down and sideways. “You faggin Daggett the faggot?”

“No. Fuck you. I ain’t no fag.” I took the book back from him.

“Ah shit, that’s got to be what’s going on. You’re getting your ass checked by that son of a bitch, wherever the fuck he’s from.”

“That ain’t it, Jasper. Get the fuck off it.”

“Why you so jumpy about it?”

“Why you so set on it?”

“No reason, Harley.” He chewed and spat. He looked at me as he cracked the seeds, wiped spit from the edge of his mouth. “No reason, just curious is all, just passing time I guess.”

The bell rang and Jasper tucked the sunflower seeds back in his back pocket. He brushed his hands off and stood up.

“Enjoy that book there, Harley. Guess I’ll see you when I see you.”

“I guess, Jasper,” I said, and walked the other way inside. I went to my locker and got my books for math class. I put the poems at the top shelf out of sight.

Chapter 7:***Candy Bear***

She knows in her state that sitting in the all night diner drinking coffee and waiting for an interested driver to say something is out of the question, so she walks the lot instead, looking for a cab with a light on. Diesel smell sits thick in the air. Her gait catches from the bruises on her legs and her boots scuff the gravel. She taps on the door of a cab with a faint glow of TV light coming from the window. A shape moves to the window and a hand waves her off. She steps back down and keeps walking. Engines idle. Some are silent. The air is still. The winds have calmed for the time and the lot has fallen to a hushed whirl of hidden activity. Another glow of TV light and she taps the door. A face appears in the window and she comes up the steps as the door opens for her. She slides across the front seat as he backs away toward the sleeping compartment.

“How much?” His voice is surprisingly soft, his face in shadow, the only light in the cab a small lamp glowing behind him.

“Depends on, depends on what we do.”

“I’m too fucking tired to do much. I’ll throw a couple beers in. Hell, all the beer you want. Blowjob’s all I got the wind for.”

“Twenty five then, twenty five will be fine.”

“That cause you’re all fucked up?”

“Doesn’t help.”

“Fuck girl, I’ll give you fifty then. I’m not hurtin.”

“Thanks. Where, where you heading after this.”

He sits down on the bed and guides her along with him by the hand. “Hauling to Montana then on to Calgary. You need a ride somewhere?”

“Yeah, but not North.” She slips her boots off.

“Getting cold.”

“Yeah, yeah.”

“If you’re still stuck here on my way back, I’ll take you to LA.”

“I hope to hell to be good, good and out of here by tomorrow.” She sits down on the mattress next to him.

“Damn right. Good luck. You can sleep in here tonight too if you want.”

“Thank you. Thank you. What’s your name, sugar?”

“Sugar.”

“Seriously?”

He brushes her hair back behind her ear, puts a hand on her knee. “Not on my birth certificate, but that’s what my mom always called me and it stuck.”

“Sticky like sugar. Thanks, Sugar.”

“Bet your ass. You need to see a doctor? There’s a cheap clinic in town, pretty sure.”

“I got this one, this one.” She runs her fingers over the duct tape slowly, then places her hand on his thigh. “Cowboy doctoring.”

“Some cowboy.”

“Born and bred.”

“More like a space cadet.” He takes her hand in his and kisses it.

“That too. That too.”

“I don’t want to know, do I?”

“Probably not you don’t. No.”

Chapter 8:

Harley

When I finally told mom and dad about the shed, I felt like I was killing the last of the special thing Candy and I had. All that was dead right then and I was its destroyer. I told them what I saw with the wasps and the wires, then we went out to the shed with Candy pulling on our sleeves yelling for us not to go, that it was fine, that it was hers and we wouldn't know what it was and wouldn't understand so we just shouldn't look. She screamed and cried and it hurt with each step, that feeling of being a traitor to your sister.

When we got inside, dad just looked at all the jars, rocking back and forth on his heels in silence. The hum of the room overtook the air and space around us. You couldn't tell what was electricity and what was insect. It all washed together as one sound, the room glowing orange with the sunset.

“Candy Girl,” he said. “I don't even want to know.”

Her chin started to shake. Dad turned to go to the door and bumped her slightly as he walked by and tears trickled down her cheek. I didn't know what to say so I just laid my hand on her shoulder. I felt sick for telling. I didn't understand but I figured they for sure wouldn't. Maybe it was that thing of catching someone, and you're almost fourteen and high on being bigger. I maybe just felt pissed for knowing, and not knowing what to do with it and not understanding.

Mom left and I walked out behind her. She seemed small, like the world was wilting her away. Candy stayed behind and I looked back as I walked out and she just

stared at the floor with her hands shaking as I shut the door. Mom and dad walked across the yard toward the house.

“What are you guys gonna do?” I said.

“About what?” Dad said. Mom kept walking away. Her head was down but she didn’t stop, just kept going on.

“About what she’s up to in there.”

“We got bigger worries. I don’t really even want to think about that.”

“What do you mean?”

“Harley,” Dad stopped and turned to me. He scratched his head and looked at the ground. He looked up at me and held his mouth open, the words heavy in him. “Nothing, I’m going in to bed.”

I was surprised by him. Something seemed all wrong to me about the whole thing, that even if there was nothing wrong it would lead to something wrong. Either way it seemed like a thing worth heading off, and I couldn’t place what could be a bigger worry than Candy bugging out and speaking messages to insects. I kicked at the ground and watched dad walk into the house.

The moon was full as it crept over the horizon as the light faded to dusk. I could never sleep with the moon like that and couldn’t for sure right then, so I went for a walk up the road toward the stock pond. Soft whispers of night hawks swooping carried on above me, the blade-like curves of their wings catching the faint light and moving together seemingly as one unit, the whistle and wing beat of bats, their forms streaking

across the moonlight in short rushes of irresolute wobbling, faintly darker than the blackening sky beyond them. I walked down to the edge of the pond and sat on one of the buckets we'd set out as a seat for when we fished for the rainbows dad had planted in there years before. Water splashed and gurgled as they jumped for the mayflies that hummed all around, their wings little wisps as soft and thin as paper fluttering against my skin. They were all alive and tingling with the kind of alive I'd been reading about, that had sparked in me something, hope maybe, that I could feel again. And right for a second maybe I knew a little of what Candy was saying, like maybe even if I didn't hear it I knew what she was getting at. I reached down to the soft wet ground at my feet and got a handful of mud and grass. I rolled it into a ball and played with it, like the mud bricks we packed together to make fort walls. The mud wetted my fingers, got in between my prints, to where there was no divide between me and the mud. I got it back then, hit the mark of it. I tried to know her again.

Chapter 9:***Candy Bear***

Candy steps from the cab into the crisp early air, the horizon's glow opening onto the hills. She needs a decent meal and walks into town, swallowing pills as she walks. Her baggie is getting low. As it brightens more and more, autumn brightness pierces through molten sharp. Each step scuffs, kicking gravel along in front of her on the pavement. Even with a night of sleep and pills she is still tired, a deep exhaustion, the exhaustion of all things laid into one body; laid as lattice work, as interwoven strands, the warp and weft of eternal fatigue, settled in heavy and breathing its wheeze breath within each interlayered section of bone, each thread of muscle. She drags her body through the morning, new found internal heat radiating stink around her space, against the coolness, a thick and palpable stench; days of dust and sweat caked on her body. The highway leads into the little collection of buildings on the main drag, old crumbling brick buildings, most the windows boarded with sheets of plywood. Stale smelling trash collected at the meeting of foundation and sidewalk. The front door of a taqueria is propped open with a sign board in Spanish. She stumbles in and walks to the counter, dings the bell by the register, and an old woman comes out and holds her hand to her mouth, freezes in her step.

She lowers her hand. "What can I help you with?" she says.

"Tacos. Tacos. Couple three of them."

"What kind of meat?"

Candy Bear scans the sign with the meats listed, her vision blurring and clearing, blurring and clearing.

“One pollo, two, two carne asada, one adobada, adobada.”

“Okay honey,” she says, then breathes oh fuck to herself as she walks to the back to fix the tacos. There is no one else in the taqueria. The cook, her nephew, has gone for a walk and left her enough meat fixed to cover for him. He has lived with her four years since her sister died and left him with her at age fourteen. She wants a life for him beyond all this. She scatters meat warming on the edge of the grill onto tortillas and spoons sauce over it, then brings the tacos steaming on a paper plate and sets them in front of Candy Bear.

“Thanks. Thanks. Thanks.” Candy says, each time the words catching. She drops a five on the counter and steps out into the street and finds a wooden bench to sit on. The steam hits her nose and she brings the first to her mouth and the taste cuts through the veils between her and the world for just a moment, as it contacts her tongue the rich taste cuts through and she drops the plate in her lap and weeps into her hands. The tears clean the dust from her eyes, dust that seems collected from years of closing away, pushing the world to arm’s length.

Chapter 10:

Harley

Pretty quick we joined up with her mission. We didn't know how Candy did it, but somehow she'd discovered something much like the experiments from the dawn of electricity that harnessed static electricity through friction. Dad had run what was going on by Hank when he was visiting and he took a look at the shed. Candy stayed inside because she was hot as hell at us for intruding, said we didn't know what it was so we should leave it alone. He said they looked like the jars she had were old Leyden jars* .

"They were lined with foil just like these," he said. "I seen some experiments like this when I had to take physics. Still don't get why they made me take physics for ag science, but whatever." He turned the jar in his hands.

"I just don't know what to make of this, Hank," Mom said. She stroked the back of Dad's shirt while he stood there with his lips pursed. "I mean, it's not really like she's doing anything wrong. It's just strange."

"Harley, you know what this is about?" Dad said.

"Don't look at me. I don't know a damn thing."

"Okay, okay, that's fine."

"Do we just let her do it? Help her out?" Mom said.

* See Figure 6.

Figure 6: Leyden Jar

Early capacitor where jars were lined with electric foil, often with a wire inserted in the top middle, through which electromagnets applied their energy to the jar, emitting sparks within the jar. Jars were often filled with water, and there was controversy whether the water contained the electrical charge of the glass.

Simultaneous invention: 1745, invented simultaneously by Ewald Georg von Kleist and Pieter van Musschenbroek, dreamworld reach from the ether, manifestation of material being through the deep turnings of a larger mind.

“I don’t see the hurt in it, Mom,” Hank said. “Where’s she getting the charge for it? I don’t see an electromagnet or anything. That’s how these things work.”

“Ain’t no power out here,” Dad said.

“That’s weird. Still, there’s usually something you got to do to get these things active. I know they did something with them way back when, used friction or something to get a spark.”

I shifted on my feet. “She don’t use nothing.”

“What? I thought you said you didn’t know nothing about it,” Dad said.

“I asked her what it was about when I caught her. It’s more of what we used to do as kids.”

“What’s that?”

“I really don’t know no more. I just know it’s something to do with the bugs. She’s making something happen between them and the foil and the air. There ain’t nothing about this like what you expect of it.”

“Well, I was damned impressed to see her figure it out, but you’re saying something impossible.”

“Maybe.” I looked at him, then at the floor. I wanted to explain it to him but I couldn’t. I couldn’t connect with it enough to form the words.

We tried to keep her from talking to people about it. Nothing wrong really with what she was doing, my folks figured after the initial confusion. Still, she was my sister, and my folks dealt with it cause she was their daughter, but little towns have a way with

kids like her. No way they would treat her right if she started chattering about messages from insects and electrical storms inside a jar. We started to help her, dad the most.

One night we were sitting in the living room watching TV. I was reading a Coleridge book Mr. Daggett had given me, and Dad had a box of mason jars next to him that he was lining with foil and laying upside down on the metal TV tray in front of him, one at a time. Candy would come in every time he'd covered the top of the tray with jars, like clockwork, fill a box with them, and disappear again. Ronald Reagan was on the TV, speaking with sad eyes and solemn voice about the communist threat in Central America. There was a falseness about his eyes, a performance of feeling.

“That sonofabitch is why we’re in this mess,” dad said. He rested a jar softly on the tray. His eyes seemed to drift beyond the TV.

“The president?” I said.

“Yep,” he said.

“What do you mean, dad?”

His face snapped, like he'd left the room for a moment and just found himself back in it. “Oh, nothing. Never mind. Just thinking out loud. Change the channel, see if the game’s on, will you?” He said.

I turned the dial on the old TV and fiddled with the rabbit ears until the reception cleared from static and the 49ers were playing. I didn’t really pay attention because of what dad said. I kept thinking about the president.

“Dad.”

“Look at that defense!” He pointed at the screen as Ronnie Lott blitzed through and sacked the quarterback for a fumble. “How about that.” He went back to the jar he was working on, pressing the foil against the glass carefully.

“Dad, what about the president? I don’t know what you’re talking about.”

“Really, nothing.”

“Come on, dad. I don’t know what you’ve been hiding from me, but you don’t need to.”

He sat the jar down and leaned his elbows on the tray. He put his hands over his face and ran his fingers back through his hair. “Well, damn it. Son. I don’t know how to say this, but you’re old enough. Your sister’s outside, right?” He looked around the corner. He worked his jaw back and forth and his face turned red. “You know a few years back when we had the flats planted in wheat?”

“Yeah, we had the combine* back then.”

“I know. Thing is,” he stopped. He sat back and rubbed the stubble on his chin.

“What?” I put my book down on the coffee table and sat up.

“Harley, shit. Well, you’re brother will be coming back next month cause a all this, to help out some.”

“He ain’t done though.”

“I know. Listen. I know this won’t make much sense. It’s complicated.”

* See Figure 7.

Figure 7: The Combine Harvester

General: Agent of landscape deconstruction, both natural and psychoemotional

Mechanism: Stripdown of ecotone, laid flat as an unending expanse.

Noted Studies: Steinbeck, John. *The Grapes of Wrath* 1939

Examines evidence of ecological and social fragmentation resulting from the homogenization of small plot farms. Natural borders between farms, provided by small streams and or fence rows (themselves projected boundaries by patriarchal notions of property ownership) resulted in vast wastelands and massive extirpation of working class individuals in favor of large tract farming by machinery. Slowly even human labor in the operation of said machinery is being replaced in industrial agriculture.

“I think I can handle it all right, dad. I’m not retarded.”

“Yeah,” he said. He started to line another jar, this one with gold foil. “So, the deal is, that wheat we had planted, Reagan had this deal with the USSR.”

“The communists.”

“Yeah.”

“Why in the hell would he do that?”

“Fuck if I know. He set up a deal through the ag department. If everyone planted wheat there’d be a big payoff when we delivered, cause he’d set up a deal to supply wheat to the Russians.”

“Okay.”

He took a breath. Beads of sweat collected on his brow. “It seemed like a good idea. The payoffs looked good. We had a loan to pay off, and it would have paid it, and any equipment we bought, like the combine, we could’ve wrote all that off and had it all paid for as part of the deal, expenses plus the pay out per bushel.”

“Uh, okay?” I didn’t know what it meant. It all seemed like a twisted mess of lies and bullshit to me.

“That son of a bitch backed out. The mother fucker left us holding the bag. A lot of farmers all over had to sell out, Harley.” he sat the jar down he was working on. I could see the edges of his eyes glisten. He looked at me and sat his hand on the tray in front of him. He bit his lower lip.

“Dad. What’s going on?”

Candy skipped in with a box and started filling it with the jars. “You’re slowing down daddy! Keep up!”

“Sure, hon,” he said. He reached down for another jar.

I didn’t ask him to say any more. We just sat there looking at each other and I knew everything was going to change and I didn’t know exactly how, but that it wouldn’t

be long until we never saw our home again. I took my book and went upstairs. I lay on the bed and stared at the ceiling for a long time before I could sleep. I could hear Candy going in and out of the house, skipping across the gravel road to the shop, and after awhile back again. A light breeze waved the branch of the elm in the yard so the tip of a limb just barely scratched against the wall, the ghost of the breeze in the scratching, the breeze moving the branches and passing on, the sound pushing into me, the wall and the tree separating me from the breeze, or what I knew of it. I knew it was there but couldn't hear the breeze itself, a phantom only indicated to me by things in my life I soon enough would never hear again. One day, it would not be those elms, it would not be that wall. It would not be that bed in that room.

When I woke up it was bright, they'd let me sleep in late. I got dressed and went outside. Candy and dad were unhooking the suspension springs from the old grain truck out front of the shop.

"What are you guys doing?" I said.

"You'll see," Candy said. She ran into the shop, dragging one of the heavy springs behind her. I squatted down and looked at my dad.

"Hey, Harley," he said.

"What's up dad?"

"Hell if I know. She liked the look of these. They're shot anyway. Been bottoming out. Besides, this hunk a shit's too old to sell anyway."

“Right.”

“Here, take this.” Dad let the spring from the rear suspension down into his hands and I reached for it, let him pass its weight to me and I strained with it as I carried it into the shop for Candy. She had her back turned to me and was fiddling around with a galvanized steel box, a long rectangular one that looked like a feed trough but wasn't. I looked inside and she had all of the glass jars lined across the bottom and fit in place with rubber gaskets. They were wired together in a rats nest of random wires she'd found in the shop and rusted ones she'd culled from the hillsides, built up over time of old fences torn up and spread through the brush.

“Candy, when did you do all this?”

“I stayed up aaallll last night.” She let out a giggle. Her eyes were swimming

“Oh.” I set the spring down on the ground. “Where the hell'd you come up with this box?”

“Daddy welded it from scrap metal that was in the back of the shop.”

“I never seen it.”

“It was just back in there with a bunch of other junk. Help me with this, will you, Harley?”

“What you need?”

“Help me put this on here.” She pointed to a flat piece of metal on the ground with bolts on all four corners and two along the side. We turned the box over and mated

the matching holes. Candy took a socket wrench and tightened nuts down onto the bolts from where they stuck out.

“Harley, could you get these on good and tight for me?”

I torqued them on for her. There were four holes across the top of the box. I looked in and there were chambers inside that angled down toward the middle.

“Thanks, Harley,” she said. “You can go now. I gotta fix up the springs.” I heard dad walk in and turned around. He had two more of the springs in his hands. He had a strange look in his eyes, like he was moved by a plan beyond his control or say.

“What is this, Candy?” I said.

“You’ll see, Harley. This is gonna be the big one!”

Chapter 11:

Candy

I found out how to make earthquakes. They were ready, I thought.

I put the last jar in place and could feel the talking together of glass and steel. Dad and Harley lifted the box onto a small trailer that we hooked up to the little pick up. The air shifted with it as the pickup pulled out into the yard.

“Okay, honey, where we need to go with this?” Daddy said.

“Let’s cross the creek with it! Out there, since you cut the alfalfa the field will work perfect. I just need it to be touching the ground.”

“Touching the ground?” He looked at me sideways, then to the gravel at his feet. Mom walked across the gravel drive and leaned against the tailgate of the pick up, looking at the box. She was wearing a blue and white checker pattern dress, an apron tied around her waist.

“Yeah. Touching the ground. Can’t really explain to you why. I just know it.”

“All right. Harley, you can drive, Candy, you and I can ride in the back so your mom can ride in the cab. That fine with you, Vivian?”

“I’d like to ride with Candy Girl in the back. I don’t have to have the cab.” She ran a hand through her red hair and I noticed streaks of grey I hadn’t seen before. Her eyes were worried, but I couldn’t contain myself, the way kids notice things but go

forward, only to think on and regret somehow later, the kind of things that eat on you in a way you can't quite put a finger on.

“Yes! Ride in back with me, Mommy!” We climbed into the back and Dad got in the passenger seat. Harley started the truck and took it down the road across the creek. Two large trout swam away in the pool as the truck's wave swept over them, their dark shapes flowing upstream into the shadows of cattails. A cloudless sky, the truck bumping softly across the field, Harley taking it slow so not to crack any of the jars. Even if he didn't understand or like what I was up to, he did all he could to respect what I cared about, to respect the things he was losing touch with. For him it must have been like a funeral.

Harley looked back at me in the rear view mirror, and for a moment I saw that sameness resurface and he stopped the truck, right in its intended place, without my telling him to stop. We all got out and leaned the trailer back to let the back edge of the box rest on the ground and let it down slowly as Harley pulled the trailer away. The box shone in the sun and I placed my hands in its center, the hum growing upward through my arms and out the soles of my feet.

“Harley,” I said, but he'd already headed the truck toward the edge of the field, like I was thinking.

Lightning in the jars pulsed as a heartbeat through me and then back into the ground. The box sunk into the earth and the ground started to shake, then my vision went white and I felt the inner heat of the sun throb within me and when I came back everyone was laying on the ground unconscious, their breath slow and steady, a slumber of peace,

the box only pulsing, the ground falling back to an active kind of stillness, a low whirl of charged readiness. The lights on the truck were glowing and fading with the pulse, growing and fading in brightness as the box came back to a steady-state.*

* Not entirely unprecedented. See Figure 8.

Figure 8: Nikola Tesla and the Earthquake Machine

Appocrypha

Unofficial/Documentation Dubious: surface of use of resonance to destabilize earth's crust use of operatic performance shake to objects until dismantled.

A glass shatters by the vocal chords of a soprano [destruction by nodules] {throat cancer} (dreams from disney films or old movies from cable TV at my grandmother's, could have been TNT network, daydream image bleed together, and it could have been a tenor) grandmother has lost her memory, personality remains intact, though, fearful.

The ground moves and

Electrical storms sent through the earth (human influence on tectonics) [hands shake when muscles are taken to edge, love interferes with landscape, fragmentation and reconstruction]

Unofficial tales of Nikola Tesla speak of an earthquake machine he took about. A box that would cause the earth to move. Some say he used it to project electricity through the earth itself.

Chapter 12:

Hank

The truck bumps along through the night and Hank finds the small spur that leads up to the stone circles. His grandfather, Henry the First, had found it years back, when he'd been riding close to the spur road gathering the cows and calves one fall. There was almost nothing to indicate what it was, but grandpa Henry had a feeling about it, something about it seemed like he needed to respect the spot, and said one day he wanted it to be his final resting place. Henry Jr. had wanted the same.

Hank hits a rock and his dad slides across the bed. He shines his flashlight back and the old man is still wrapped up safe and sound. He hits the gas and the right front tire goes into a deep rut. The motor stalls out and comes to a stop. He takes a sip of beer and starts the truck again, but the wheels spin free in the mud and fail to catch.

“Fuck it,” he says, and gets out. “It’s taken damn long enough to get out, I may as well pack the old fart. He ain’t that big.”

Chapter 13:

Harley

I'd got up early to change the pipe on the upper pasture when I saw dust on the road, coming down toward our place from the county road that came up the valley from the highway. Dust rose faintly in the dawn light, and at the head of the cloud a speck of black that got bigger, but stayed black as it grew. The dust settled in behind and three black cars in a row appeared from the cloud and came around the bend a mile off. They stopped at the front of the house, at the door we didn't ever use, the front one, so I knew it wasn't anyone who'd know us. Anyone else used the back. I was muttering Coleridge's "The Nightingale," because Mr. Daggett was having me memorize it as part of my final project that was due at the end of the week. "A melancholy Bird? O idle thought! In nature there is nothing melancholy." I'd been working on it in chunks. Sometimes two lines sometimes three, and paced it to my step as I lay the pipe. I was matching my record times and beating them in the mornings, but when I'd change pipe after school I found myself slowing, feeling the work more, feeling it deeper, and finding new discoveries within it. I laid in the last length of pipe and turned the sump back on. The water pressure sang against the metal and the sprinklers started up, then the pressure went out and I knew it, a blow out. I ran back and turned the pump off, and watched the fountain of water at the corner pipe go back down. I had an extra joint in the little pickup I'd drove up to the field, and I grabbed it just in case it was only a joint and not the pipe split open. Down below at the house, the three cars were barely visible below the elm trees.

I got to the where the water was still flooding out, cutting through the turf and creating a mud hole, and saw how I had lucked out. It was just the joint that had blown, and it all went back into place as it should, and when I turned the pump back on I could hear the pipe singing again with the pressure. When I made it back to the house, the cars were gone. A faint hint of dust was still in the air, and my dad was working on one of the tractors in the shop. I asked him if he could give me a ride up to the bus in a minute and went to the house to change into dry clothes. Mom had made corn bread and I had a piece with some milk. I muttered lines of Coleridge between bites.

“Poems?” Mom said. I hadn’t heard her behind me where I stood at the counter.

“Yeah. How’d you know?”

“I had a teacher have me memorize things when I was about your age. I kept some of them up in here with me.” She pointed to her head and smiled. “I can still recite a little Shakespeare.”

“That’s great, mom. We read Hamlet.”

“You like it?”

“Yeah. I did.”

“I always did, dark though.”

I nodded. All that darkness made sense to me. I gave mom a hug and ran in to where Candy was in her room and tossed a rolled up sock at her and ran back out the front door. Dad had the pickup started and I hopped in. Candy got in, papers pouring out

of her book bag, and crawled across me for the middle seat. Her dress was starting to smell. About half way down the road I asked Dad what the cars had been there for.

“Nothing. Nothing really,” he said.

“Who were they?”

He kept driving and looked at me from the side and down at Candy. She was twisting and untwisting a piece of foil. “Daddy doesn’t want to talk about it,” she said.

PART 2

The dust blows forward, and the dust blows back

Don Van Vliet, aka Captain Beefheart

Chapter 1:

Candy Bear

The world moved me all along to tell its unseen story, what it speaks into each of us through the seen and unseen world, every living being breathing and speaking each other into existence. Each tree rooted to the ground contracting deep into the roots, limbs expanding toward sky pregnant with ocean's distillation

at once a condensed and spreading

wave over desert, a

glow to the west lighting the gray

white expanding.

Each inch of pavement an incision

through the interconnection of stone, root, and dust.

The story was ever on the tip of my tongue, but caught in my throat, stopped from release, no emergence toward fruition in word. Sound and movement and blood between everything, and that doesn't even begin in the telling, the speaking to life of something that has to be felt in muscle, that has to be moved into living.

It got to where I was alone in it all by my own doing. Everything broken and cut up. Nothing fit together and made a whole anymore. I wanted to put the whole world back together but didn't know what I could do or what I'd have to do so I could be let to. I tried to make the connections from when I was a kid but nobody understood it. They

tried their best and some things worked, some things didn't. But it wasn't like you could show anyone else when the final connection was in your head. I guess a person makes their own patterns and somehow it makes sense to them. Each person just tries to make a world that works, maybe nothing perfect, but at the very least sufficient. Maybe that's all you can hope for in the end. We all do our best to try and I felt willing most of the time. But things would have to crumble and fall before anything new could be made. The city had live through its slow destruction before a new foundation could be built.

Chapter 2:

Harley

The bank foreclosed on the place. We sold off everything sellable along with the ranch to go toward the debt. It went for a piddling amount, a steal just to pay off the remainder, for the bank to get what they felt was theirs. Hank quit college to come back and help, and we were able to keep the welding set up so he could keep in work with the Vo tech certificate he got when he was in High School. It looked no use to him anyway without the ranch to come help on, to put what he learned to purpose, and we all had to work to keep food on the table. Mom told him not to quit but he wouldn't hear it. We moved into a trailer park in Arco, by the highway just west of town. There wasn't anything in that shithole of a place. It was on the edge of nothingness. No water. The river went underground and left a shadowy skeleton of a riverbed snaking through the desert, nothing but lava rock and cheat grass and stunted brush hanging on wherever it could. It was a godforsaken middle point of nothing. The mountains to the north were obscured by the close hills that also hid the INEL* to the east. To the south was the expanse of the Snake River Plain, but you'd never know it, the horizon always a faint haze so it looked like a flat expanse of emptiness forever extending southward, never breaking. To the west was Craters of the Moon*, but you couldn't see any of that from

* See Figure 9.

* See Figure 10.

Figure 9: First four nuclear powered lightbulbs at INEL

INEL, or Idaho National Engineering Laboratory (now INL, or Idaho National Laboratory)

Established 1949

(2,300 km²)

Parcel of desert in central Idaho east of Arco, the first township or city entirely run by nuclear power. A large swath of apportioned for nuclear research, power generation, and naval proving experiments. At one point called the Idaho Nuclear Engineering Laboratory, then for a short time the name was changed to INEEL (Idaho National Engineering and Environmental Laboratory), but, most of the populace smelled a PR rat, and this was abandoned.

Why they smelled a rat:

The INL has long dumped toxic waste into unlined pits above the Snake River Aquifer, which supplies water to roughly 300,000 people. Nuclear waste from the Navy, reactors around the world, including debris from Three Mile Island, toxic waste from nuclear fuel storage pools, and various waste that violates other states toxic waste storage regulations is warmly welcomed here. Radioactive material has been found in multiple tests of the aquifer.

The only fatal reactor accident in US history occurred here. All six killed were buried in lead coffins due to extensive plutonium contamination.

Figure 10: Photo of accident site (Image Removed)

Arco's celebration: When the Navy chose the site as their Nuclear proving ground, citizens danced in the street. Households emptied as families poured out onto the sidewalks in a spontaneous torchlight parade, a celebration never since seen in that portion of the country. There would be something to sustain them, something that could make them thrive. The struggle would be over. A photo of three of committee planning leaders in *The Post Register* held was headed "Wreathed in Atomic Smiles."

town really. It was a just a hole of nothing, in nothing. There had been something of it once. Back when the INEL had a Navy station on site, it was crawling with bars, most of them with brothels up top. Some of the old whores ended up staying around, but there was nothing for them. So, they became the saddest type of homeless you can be, rough gals, leathery and tanned by the sun and wind that whipped even more lonely down the valley, the same wind from home but more lost, more estranged from its source in the peaks. The wind seemed to blow on the people in the town like an exposed nerve, folks that were little more than leftovers. The Navy had left and all there were remnants. Four or five of nearly a hundred remained, and two of those left shaken and falling apart. Everything seemed a shadow, even in stark burning daylight. Everything was burnt out and used up, falling down.

The trailer was the same. It was one of those beat up tin looking piece of shit singlewides from the late sixties. Someone had built a plywood mudroom onto the outside. The linoleum bowed where it either had lost its base with age, or had never been stuck down properly to begin with. We went from a white farm house built by my grandfather's own hands to this, cast off by uncaring and uninvested hands. Dad bought a small travel trailer for Hank to live in, and Candy and I shared the biggest bedroom. Our folks took the other since they only needed one bed in there. The place was surrounded with scrubby juniper bushes and overhung to near strangling with scraggly elm trees not old enough to take a place in the sky, awkward teenager trees overgrown and gangly much like I was. I hadn't felt that way at home. I felt a part of my world, a part of the ground that held me up. In Arco I was alone, naked, out of place. It wasn't something

Figure 11: Location: 43.42N, 113.50W, Elevation: 6576 ft (2005 m)

General: Large dormant cinder cone field southwest of Arco.

Ancient fields of lava extend, almost black with the right light.

Economic use:

Tourism: Unexploited for extractive industries since there is nothing economic to remove from it.

like I was a hillbilly amongst the city folk. Arco wasn't any bigger than Mackay. It was that everything seemed all stirred wrong. Nothing struck right. Nothing seemed at home, everything displaced and randomly thrown together. The centerpiece of the town was the park, where smack in the middle was the head of a submarine numbered 666 on the side. The number was a coincidence. Either way, sure it was a leftover from the navy, so made sense if you knew the story, but nothing was more out of place in that shithole than the thought of a submarine rising from the lava fields.

Chapter 3:

Candy Bear

Jesus Freak Charlie's white Peterbuilt idles near the edge of the lot, a sea of trucks extending toward the pumps around the cafe and store. On the grill a large white cross glows bright, a cluster of small round lights wired to crossed metal bars. On the door, TRUCKIN' FOR JESUS is scrolled in blue cursive lettering. Jesus Freak Charlie is part of a Christian underground of truckers who, though saved by the grace of god, take whatever salvage or smuggling load they can, and breathe lines of crystal like so much air.

Candy Bear and Jesus Freak Charlie stand on the driver's side of his truck. Candy leans back against the trailer of the truck next to his, watches Charlie take a drag.

"What you been up to C Bear?" He says.

"Fuck, fucking for money."

Jesus Freak Charlie stamps his cigarette out and lights another. "Well, bless that cunt in Jesus' name, amen," he says.

"Amen. Amen."

Ain't that the beauty of America kid? The god blessed red white and blue, Keystone beer, and cheap pussy just about every stop."

Candy Bear itches at the duct tape on her face. "Can. Can I get a ride?" she says.

"Sure shit," Charlie says. "Where to?"

“South. Arizona, or maybe Albuquerque. South.”

“Getting cold up here, ain’t it?”

“Yeah. Yeah. Freezing.”

“I’m going to Caldwell first, heading to Reno, then Fresno. California might be just fine.”

“No good.”

“Why for?”

“No good, just no good.”

“Would be nice to have your little ass in the seat next to mine all that way.”

“Nope.” She sees flashes of alleys, and the time a makeshift mystic dressed as a pharaoh tried to ritually disembowel her in his small apartment above a Korean laundry in L.A., and managed to slice her belly three inches before she wrestled herself free and ended up, among other things, biting his tongue out.

“Oh come on. I want that little pussy on me all the time. Come on down with me for the long haul.”

“Could, could I hitch with you to Nevada?”

“How far?”

“Winnemucca. I can cut back out to Salt Lake or something. Something. Not too far out of the way.”

“That’s disappointing.”

“Bad things happen in California, Charlie. So this is what you get. Make as many stops as you like. Do whatever you want. Whatever you, want. Well, for the ride we can fuck wherever however, anything weird and we’ll, we’ll have to figure out something, extra.”

He grips his chin with his fingers, thinking on it. “Fisting?” He holds a palm open in question.

“A quarter paper each go, or twenty five, twenty five if you don’t have any on you.”

“Oh I got it. Sure, fair enough. I’ll just give you an eight ball and see what we get to.”

“Okay.”

“What’s with the tape?”

“Got, got fucked up.”

“Makes my dick hard.”

“It would, wouldn’t it.”

They stay that night in Charlie’s truck. Candy is anxious to get on the road but knows another night won’t last forever.

“Is this really okay with you?” Jesus Freak Charlie goes soft, his voice gentle. He strokes her shoulder. He is thin, naked, and bones poke through his chest. Aluminum makes soft empty popping sounds under his grip as he drinks from his beer.

“What, what do you mean?”

“I don’t know.”

“Having a good book, good book moment?”

“Yeah, maybe. You know, all that don’t cast your seed into the dust stuff.” He looks down at his belly, a tuft of black hair rising from the middle of his chest.

“What’s that, Genesis?”

“Yeah.”

“Well you, you ain’t a Jew, and I’m sure JC popped a few hot ones into Mary Magdalene.”

“Shut your mouth, cunt.”

“Hey, hey.”

“Fuck, just give it here.”

He cuts the lamp out and Candy Bear moves closer. Beams of light shine through the windows from the parking lot. Charlie moves on top of her and pulls the sheet up over his back like a curtain, cutting the low light into a faint backdrop glow through the fabric. She lets him in and he is done quickly.

“That all you need?” She says.

“We’ll go again in the morning,” he says, “and like you said, we’ll make a lot of stops.”

Candy Bear brushes his shoulder with her hand absentmindedly. “Yeah,” she says, and Jesus Freak Charlie cracks another beer and turns on the DVD player and puts on *The Muppets Tonight*. Candy Bear’s face itches but she doesn’t want to pull the tape to check her wounds in front of him. She asks him if he has aspirin. He gives her three hydrocodones and a can of Rainier.

“These were so damned cheap up in Washington that I bought a dozen cases. I like it cause it’s sweet.”

“Sweet, yeah,” Candy Bear says. She swallows the pills down and guzzles the beer to back them. They watch Peter Sellers dressed as an old west preacher beating a marching band bass drum, with a Muppet band around him singing and playing horns.

“Goodnight now,” Charlie says.

“Night.” Candy Bear breathes deeply.

Breath opens chest,

stretched tissue between ribs

distant vapor leaving in cloud.

Laughter softens, fades.

Charlie bumps her and the world comes louder and he brushes hair from her eyes. The sound of Kermit the Frog’s voice disperses, faint.

Her body dissolves into the throb of heartflesh,

lights and bells in her vision,

lights within bells,

and saucers laid out, with milk for the barn cats. They gather around in a swarm, hair tangled and skin pock marked with mange and open sores. They lap at the milk from saucers Candy took from the china cabinet by the dining room table, milk she pours into saucers between gathered heads, splashes of milk landing as spots on fur. She empties a large jar of fresh whole milk that breaks through the layer of cream at the top, milk from the Hill place down the road, from their Jersey cow that they keep in the pasture off the side of their house, that always switches her tail around at the flies and licks Candy's hands, wrapping her long tongue around her entire wrist, and lets her scratch her chin, the cow's eyes rolling back, breathing out the sweet smell of hay rotting between big yellow teeth. The Hill place, with the big old concrete grain silo. Candy sneaks in during a rain storm and is hit with the thick smell of sweet stale corn dust, the silo a year empty, ever since the bank took the Hill place away like they're going to take her family's away. She looks up at the tube of concrete leading to the faint light at the top coming through the vents, where steel cross ribs support the rounded metal top. Tapping droplets so distant and so high on the metal roof draw her gaze, imagining what kind of lights she could have glowing in it, what kind of sparks she could make if she had enough wires! The tapping increases until it becomes a roar of hail and she sees the complex of coils and wires and the blue flames and sparks swirling around the cylinder. The hail

softens again and she runs home in the rain and finds her mother gathering the saucers on the step. The porch light is on her back and Candy can't see the darkened face.

“What are you, a salamander?” Her mother says, strands of hair swirling around her head, glowing thin filaments in the light.

“Yes, a rag doll salamander mommy!” Candy says.

“Get in the house.”

Chapter 4:*Candy*

It was so good to have Hank back. Even if we couldn't be home, even if it wasn't safe to create my inventions anymore. It was good to have him. At least we had that. Harley had started to act so strange to me. Sometimes he was the old Harley I knew, sometimes he seemed like he didn't know how to talk to me, like he didn't know what to say or how to say it, like he moved to say something but the action of it couldn't happen. He was lost in there somewhere. Hank was Hank. He was the same, and he tried to help Harley out. He showed him how to do some small engine work so they could work together and make some cash on the side, besides just having to work. After a couple years Harley lost patience with it, and when he turned fifteen and he could get a job permit, he got a job at the feed store instead. I would go out to Hank's trailer after school and he'd give me a soda from his fridge and put some whiskey in a glass with his.

"How was school, kid?"

"Nobody gets anything."

"Did they ever?"

"No, but they also didn't make anything of me back home."

"Maybe some time they won't make anything of you here."

"Maybe, I hope." I played with a set of nested dolls of cats that Hank kept on his table for me to play with.

“What do they make of you?”

“They don’t know what to make of me. A fool maybe.”

“Do you feel made a fool of?”

“Yeah. That’s as close to what I feel. Foreign. Not wanted. Strange.” I lifted the last doll shell to get to the small one in the middle, a red cat with a black tail. I made her dance on the table.

“Only you can let them make you feel you’re something. Let them act how they want. You believe them and it’s your problem. There ain’t nothing wrong with you, honey.”

“Tell Harley that. He don’t know how to talk to me either.”

“Harley’s all shocked by all this shit that’s happened. Maybe some of the stuff you did was strange. That doesn’t make anything wrong with you. You and what you do aren’t entirely the same, can be, sometimes. He loves you but he’s just all mixed up right now. His nose is all in books, trying to figure it all out. Shit, he don’t know how to talk to me neither. Like this here, me talking to you about how you’re thinking. He’d be cussing and yelling at me, or get all uncomfortable and walk off with a breath almost like a growl. So I been trying to stay pretty hands off.”

“It still don’t make it feel good. He used to play along with me.” I put her back in her place, and slowly reversed order, placing each shell over the other.

“Might be the problem. You two are growing up different from each other. He might feel he played into something that wasn’t him.”

“But it was.”

“For a while. He grew up some, though, started getting his own different way of thinking, and you were always kind of the idea one weren’t you?”

“Not at first. It seemed for a long time we were almost like the same person, thought the same thoughts, ideas just growing between us, moving between us like the same breath. I don’t know who came up with them. I never really knew any gap between my mind and his.”

“But he changed. I see it. I wonder. I wonder what it’s about, the change.”

“After a while it seemed like Harley was a step behind. Like he didn’t see what I was getting at until he thought about it. Then he just stayed around the corrals, more and more all the time just going along and working with Dad.”

“That’s the growing up thing. It was time for him to move on and do the work. I did it too.”

“But it seems like he started losing his thinking my way before that. Did I steal a part of him?”

“I don’t know about that. Maybe he just gave it over to you.” Hank filled his glass again and poured me some more soda. “Here, have a little splash of this.” He let a little whisky trickle in. “Don’t tell.”

“I won’t.” I smiled at him.

“He taught it to you in a way, then you went with it different than him. You made it an art of your own.”

“I wish he hadn’t lost it for me to have it.”

“Might not have been for him forever. He’ll find something kid. We all do, and sometimes we have to lose things that mattered to us in order to find that special thing.”

“What’s for you?”

“Figuring it out. That’s about all some of us can do. Keep looking.”

“How do you know Harley will find it, then?”

“I got to know he will. Makes me keep thinking I will, too.”

I placed the largest doll shell over the others, a yellow cat with a pink face smiling back at me, all whole.

Chapter 5:

Harley

Just like everything else, the high school in Arco wasn't for shit. Everyone seemed just one off, sketchy, left behind from something. I didn't want to talk to a damned soul and kept to it. I took the back corner of every class, did the home work as the teachers talked on about what I already knew, and went to sleep. Fifty minute classes were only thirty for me, then nap time or at the very least I could just look at the dark of the desk and feel my breath in the space I'd created, watch the reflection of the crack of light from the laminate desktop. After a while of bugging me about it, the teachers left me alone, dropping off one by one because I was turning in B work without listening to a word. Some of them said I could do better if I was engaged, but gave it up when I paid no mind. Even English class wasn't for shit cause the teacher was usually drunk and I'm pretty sure was also semi-illiterate. I had to find reading on my own. I did my best to stay invisible, and went to the riverbed at lunch and pitched lava rocks out onto lava rocks, all the ground made up of rising lava rock mounds crumbled together and sharp, crumbled into shifting linkages that cut your hand if you weren't careful, stunted brush growing in patches, holding on to any flowering up of soil they could root to.

Candy got it the worst I knew. I could see it sometimes across the fence at the middle school, how they treated her. She wanted to talk to the other kids. Tried to. They'd just walk away and leave her there to herself. We'd walk together sometimes all the way out to home. We could take the bus, it was three miles, but sometimes we just

needed to walk the day off. Those days of walking together taught me things about her, and how she each day seemed to get further from me and what I knew of her all the time. She didn't act the same. Got weirder. Maybe I was the one off. Maybe both. I didn't know what the hell. We were both out of place, but I was the one that didn't know how to talk. She kept at it, being her own self, even if it didn't make a damn bit of sense. We would walk off our days together though, both of us out of place, sweating it out in the heat of day.

Chapter 6:*Candy*

Harley started to scare me with his darkness.

On our way home from school, he muttered to himself and kicked gravel along in front of him as he walked. The locust trees that grew along the highway were a deep dark green and waved back and forth, the sun cutting bright. I was lit up with excitement, loaded up with the feeling that I could still get back what we had lost, that I could cut through the muddled darkness between us, and that if I could get Harley on board it would give me the strength to try for it, get back to my work, no matter the circumstances.

“Harley, okay, so the circles out home, I think I can make them. Don’t know if they’ll talk to me or not.”

“Talk to you? What?” He scuffed his boots on the ground and watched his feet as he walked.

“You know, wires. That’s where I got them.”

“What the hell you talking about. That damned box?”

“Yeah, it came from somewhere, you know.”

“Circles?”

“Yeah, up in the high field.”

“Those are just old shepherd’s stone placings is all. Just lonely guys out there fucking off. Had to do something with their time.” He spat on the ground and I stopped for a second. I watched how he walked ahead of me, his head sunk down and drawn in. If he’d been a turtle, he would have sucked into his shell. I wouldn’t let him just blow me off like that. I caught up to him.

“That’s what you think. You just never really looked at them.”

“What are they then?”

“Well, I don’t know who put them there, I never met them personally. They just had things to say if you look right. There was a pattern.”

“What fucking pattern, Candy? Jesus, that was how long ago now? What the fuck are you beating on that for anyway?” He kicked a footfull of gravel ahead of him, sending it scattering across the pavement.

“Come on, Harley, give it a chance. We’ll have to just sneak up there some time after you get a car so you can see.”

“I don’t want no fucking car.”

“Sure, you will. Maybe get Hank to take us. He’d be game for it.” I kicked gravel at his boots.

“Hey, damn it.” He bit his lower lips, missing that I was playing. “Hank don’t want no part of this shit.”

“He might. He’s game for about anything. You used to be.”

“I was game for a lot of things. That’s what kids are, game.”

“What kind of game are you talking about, Harley?”

“The kind that get hunted. The kind that get killed.”

Chapter 7:*Harley*

I got into AP English, not sure how, as a Junior even, a year early, just showed up and did the work, nothing special. Mr. Gerard was a fucking disappointment. He'd come in reeking of whiskey. It was a mystery how he kept his damn job, but I guess whoever has the fortitude or lack of self-respect to teach in that little fuck hole for years and years just got to keep their spot by default. It had been like this with most the teachers there in Arco, and with that, and life, and everything, I felt I needed poems even more all the time. I read out of Wordsworth's *The Prelude*, every day. The opening lines were a comfort and torture:

Oh there is blessing in this gentle breeze
That blows from the green fields from the clouds
And from the sky: beats against my cheek,
And seems half-conscious of the joy it gives.
O welcome Messenger! O welcome Friend!
A captive greets thee, coming from a house
Of bondage, from yon City's walls set free,
A prison where he hath been long immured.

Each day that prison enclosed me more than ever. What Wordsworth talked of was long gone for me, that freeing from a self-created hell. Reading him made me feel like I should see freedom, beauty, and peace underlying everything, I tried for it, the words guiding me to reach back into what I used to feel, what I think Candy still felt. It

was lost to me, but I tried to find it in the crumbled piles of rubble spread over the dead land, nothing breathing, a dead and frozen skeleton of the earth as it had once bled its living upon the surface.

I reread Hamlet. That everything gone away, everything taken apart feeling he felt, seemed to make more sense to me. Wordsworth filled me with longing for what I lost. Hamlet helped me sink into it. I was home in his betrayed feelings, betrayal far greater than betrayal by the people in your life. I knew my family didn't betray me, at least not on purpose. It was a bigger betrayal than that, betrayal by the world, by the stars and our rotten stink of a civilization, this fucking American lie consuming everything around, corroding it, dismantling and poisoning everything, every particle, every breath, a parasite feeding and feeding and feeding.

I'd been torn from my home. I knew that earth, that dirt, and belonged in it. There was no damn purpose in being lost amongst the burnt dead hills, amongst the people that all looked dead on their feet, and I couldn't go back even as much as I remembered the stream that cut through the valley, the hills and the peaks above that were mine to be with, the vertigo swirl when you rode slow in an aspen grove and let it drift you, drift your eyes until you spun and saw something mysterious and true. Something like the glimpse of the beginning of life, the spiraling breath we came from, what we rose up from out of the soil. I should have felt that everywhere. To Wordsworth it was everywhere, but I couldn't feel it, like I was dead to what the land might say, like maybe I'd been so torn apart I'd lost the way of looking around me to see something that could speak back life's sense, all that Candy and I spoke to as kids. And now I couldn't even speak to her.

I slept through every class till I could head out, math especially. The more the formulas built the more they lost me. Candy did all right with that. She was beyond it all, but could fit those kind of things together like nothing. They all made my head swirl the bad way, made the world feel distant and strange and hateful, something mechanical made to destroy everything in its path, that some could use for good but most used for evil. Their formulas. Their formulas. Cutting us up, cutting us to pieces. The ranch sold and dissected into plots. Everything torn apart. The atom split. Machines were made to destroy us. Dismantle us, dismantle my sister. If it didn't grow from the ground, it would kill us. Waste sunk under the desert to poison the downstream. We are all going to die.

Chapter 8:

Candy Bear and the Time of Change

One ape eats the world. This is how it happened.

We took charge and entered the countryside. Took charge of that car and set off north of town, K.P.'s Grandma's old LTD, that old beige Ford that had somehow turned pink from the sun, years and years in the sun out there in the desert. K.P. and I stole her car again and headed out. I was fourteen and he was eighteen. We hit old Ronald Miller's gas station because he'd always sell us beer and we headed out, trying to make as many good nights out of our time before K.P. was done with Arco and headed into the Army in a couple months. We kept toward Mackay and I cracked cans for K.P. and I both. He reached over and brushed the hair from my eyes.

"All right, Candy," he said. "What do you want to talk about?"

"Thomas Edison."

"Again?"

"Yes, again."

"Why you hung up on all that Tesla and Edison shit? They're old and dead as fuck."

"It still matters." I pulled myself up cross legged in the seat and took a drink. "I know what Tesla was trying to say. Those inventions, they're all saying something. He had a language."

“Oh yeah, what was he saying?”

“You gotta know where to start and you gotta listen to me. You don’t even know the basics, you gotta feel the messages through the machines, they’re like, what decodes the information and stuff. It’s not like, like, I haven’t figured out how to translate it to plain English, but I know it.”

“How you know it? You speak machine?” He nudged my shoulder.

“I don’t know. It’s like you feel it. That’s how you know it. It gets real to you then, when you feel it. I mean, there’s formulas too, but he didn’t really go off that stuff so much, put them together for other scientists to understand, but that doesn’t really help for most cause that’s a whole other language to learn all its own, and doesn’t really even get you anywhere near the heart of it all anyway.”

“You think you’re fucking special or something?” He looked at me sideways.

I paused and took in his look. Dark. A flash of anger I hadn’t seen in him before. “No,” I said. “Not more than anyone else. It’s just something I know and no one else does.”

“Chosen then.”

“For that, sure. You’re chosen for something.”

“Shit,” K.P. laughed. “Don’t know for what.”

“You’ll feel it. You just got to learn what it’s telling you, or how anyway. You’ll know when you learn it. I guess it will learn you.”

“That’ll learn ya.”

“Yeah. Yeah I guess.” I felt a pressing into my chest. Hands over hands on my sternum. I took a deep breath to loosen the feel of it. “You got me all off track with what was on my mind.”

“Sorry, dear, carry on.”

“No. No, that’s okay.”

We parked below the reservoir and walked down the gravel path and crossed the creek bridge, the creek seeping through the dam, the big earth dam that looked like a scree slope with the grove of trees surrounding the seep where the creek bubbled out, I think a leak naturalized over time. We crossed rush of stream and walked out on the fishing platform, an old wooden deck, and looked at the big pool beneath the spillway. Trout mouthed at the surface, huge ones always fat on bugs that would just tap on anything else you offered but wouldn’t take. It was too early in the year for the fishing season to open and the trout were lazy in the cold, cold water. We wrapped our cans with fishing line from the little tackle box under K.P.’s truck seat and threw white marabou crappie jigs in just for the hell of it and the trout tapped at the tails of the jigs but never bit, set them spinning in small curls of white. We crawled onto the exposed spillway and let the jigs dead drift in the falling stream and into the pool, the trout floating around them. I imagined them blinking dumbly if they had eyelids. They circled the jigs, nosed them, and lazily tailed away.

“Damn,” K.P. said. “I could almost snag the sons of bitches.”

“Nah, don’t do that,” I said. “They’ll take em if it’s worth it. Besides, that’s so mean.”

“Yeah, I guess.” He pulled off his Mariners cap really quick and put it on me. I smiled at him and he flipped the bill down hard on my nose and tickled at my sides.

“Stop!” I said. I almost slipped off the edge and he grabbed me.

“You okay?”

“Sure, sure, hey let’s go up inside the dam.” I popped his hat back on his head and led the way up the ledge toward the spillway.

Claws of exposed rebar hung out from the cement. Five vents opened out*, one big tube in the middle and two small ones to each side. With the water low, only the large middle spout let the stream fall to the pool below, so we crawled up into one of the small tubes and followed it up at a stoop to where it bent to meet the big main channel, about twenty or thirty feet around. We sat and watched the stream of water coming from a darkness deep within the dam, a blackness that hid the source inside. Outside glowed a circle of brightness and our eyes adjusted to see the red willows and trees around the river and the hillside downstream and the pines of the far ridge. The steel of the tubes was rusted and corroded, just like the fishing boats in the marina when my folks took me to the coast. It made me think decay was always kind of the same wherever you go, even if maybe there wasn’t the salt air involved, just the water and the cold*. K.P. held my arm and we watched the water pass. Two small birds landed across from us, one in shadow, one on the other side of the light’s line cast on the wall, blue feathers shining on a base

* See Figure 12.

* See Figure 13.

Figure 12: Mackay Dam: Earthen structure built 1927

Location: Mackay, Idaho

Construction: Primitive embankment dam, earth fill construction. Layered earth and stone, filled into canyon wall, rudimentary spillway often overflowed in high water years, slow erosion, the scaffolding lets loose.

Safety risk: Priority one high risk. Rudimentary construction in a high activity fault region.

Many casualties expected.

Flood threatens the town in every moment.

The water stopped but still moving, lying in wait.

of gray. Their chirps echoed into the darkness then broke up in the faint roar of the stream, carried down and out of the spillway, into the light below the dam. K.P. tossed his empty beer can into the channel and it bounced on the waves of current and dropped out of sight, to slowly make its way across the pool below, down the stream, to become entangled in willow branches and slowly rust, to one day be found by someone along the river who finds this rusted old beer can and thinks for a moment of someone way back when who threw it down, who thinks of us sitting inside the dam that day maybe, but in the shapes we take in their mind.

Slowly the line of light crept toward the outlet of the tunnel and it darkened inside. We made out and I gave K.P. a hand job. We'd never had sex, I'd never had it at all. He came on my hand and wrist and I rinsed the stickiness off in the stream, scrubbing my skin with the layer of rust. We made our way out of the tube and K.P. helped me down along the big slab and across the exposed rebar and we crawled back onto the platform. We got to the car and drank more beer. K.P. felt sleepy so he napped and I lay my head on his chest. I stroked up and down his side with my hand, feeling the soft flannel. He smelled like chewing tobacco and hay. I could feel his heart beat and the pulse of his veins. I could feel through to his capillaries and the sparks of electricity moving through his nerves, the fire and pulse that moved each breath through his body, pulling the air in and bringing it to each cell. I kept there listening to his breath and then the last light glowed bright red, and I slipped out from his sleeping grip and stepped out of the truck, shutting the door quietly behind me and walked back down the trail to the platform above the pool. I listened the water crashing below with my eyes closed, the

Figure 13: Decay

A species of disintegration, often a result of natural elements, sometimes enhanced by human encroachment, often associated with or attached to human loss, impermanence of man-made objects, loved ones.

Sub species by selected climate type

Desert: Objects transformed to dust. Wooden objects dry, slowly powdered by wind. Metal objects rust slowly, largely remain dry, crumble to sand.

Humid Subtropical: Objects eaten by plant life, overgrown with invasive Kudzu vine in southern states, water permeates moss covered wood, saturates, in some cases preserves and transforms into matrix for new plant growth. Metal objects provide home for living rust, mixture of iron oxide and moss.

Oceanic: Combined factors of wind damage and water permeation. Wooden objects battered by windblown mist, squalls break down plank walls exposed to high wind, pillars soaked through untreated rot, mosses eat through walls. Metal objects fall to permeation of iron oxide, barnacles, sea life attaching as vessel for feeding through filtration of the passing current, combination of iron oxide and lichen forms, rust slowly dissolves into water.

Humid Continental, subtype dfa:

Characterized by high altitude snowpack over winter, hot summers.

Corrosion of metal objects over winter and during snow melt. Prone to high winds, particularly above treeline in alpine sub climate. Winds that slowly wear away

objects. With battling elements of moisture and heat, final decay could result in transformation to dust or dissolution in liquid matrix. Many pieces carried off by animals or human hand.

faintest mist touching my cheeks. I opened my eyes to the last rays of sun burning on the horizon, clear up on the scribbled edge of the canyon's ridge, I heard the honk of geese up above and looked for flight. There was none. I heard their call again and the slightest movement on the canyon wall and I could just make out two of them standing at the entrance to a small cave high up, sending their call out to the canyon, to what I didn't know. The light faded and the stars came out, and I listened to the water below and the full moon crept from over the other horizon. Gravel scuffed behind me and I turned around as K.P. came toward me down the trail.

“What the fuck, Candy?”

“What? I thought I'd go for a walk. You were sleeping and I wasn't tired.”

“Don't ever sneak off like that.”

“But you were asleep K.P.”

“So what?” He held one hand at his side and pointed a finger of his other hand toward me. “I heard you the first time and it don't matter. I want to know where you are.”

“Okay, okay, fine.”

“Good enough. Want to get out a here?”

“Sure.”

We walked back up the trail and K.P. started the car and wound along the rutted two track road toward the highway.

“What time is it you think?” I said.

“Ah, I don’t know. It’s good and dark.”

“Moon’s up,” I said. “It’s actually kind of bright out.”

“You know what I mean.”

“Yeah. Well into night.”

“Sure. Right.”

We got to the highway and he headed further on away from Mackay.

“May as well keep heading on. We got beer to drink.” K.P. cracked another can and handed it to me and cracked one for himself. We headed up along the highway with the reservoir below, shining in the moonlight, the moon’s disk reflecting solid somehow amongst waves of light cast by the ripple of the water’s surface. We went along and eventually the reservoir became distant and I could see the thinning end where the river fed its stream into the still water, where it flowed in cold down from the high country.

A stark outline of the peaks cast their etchings against the night sky, the snowfields glowing. K.P. turned off the highway onto one of the main gravel roads. Just a few more miles further and we could have turned off up to the old ranch. The car rocked and fishtailed at the sudden change to unstable ground. We passed through a grove of trees growing from the banks of a small creek and the lights of the car lit up the grated

road before us. Ripples of washboard road and each individual stone of the gravel sparked at us, lines of tall fencing parallel to the road shut us out and shut in the land by those who felt they possessed it. The grass of the meadows was cropped down tight in some of the fields, and on the edges grew long and the blades glowed a bright gold in the headlights. Roads criss-crossed and K.P. kept on across the river, hidden from our sight by thick masses of willows overgrowing and intermingling with each other. We cracked fresh beers and kept on. K.P. drove by the old road that led up to the pioneer cemetery and headed down toward the west side of the reservoir, down the road that wound around through more private ground and then dead ended at the Martin ranch.

“Where are we going, K.P.?” I said.

“Just wandering around,” he said. “Don’t really know, don’t really care.”

“Alright, fine,” I said. I held my hands together in my lap and looked out the window, the pressing in my chest came back. The gravel mounds of the quarry came into view.

“That not alright with you?” He looked at me cross.

“No, it’s fine. I just don’t see why this way.”

“Does there have to be a fucking point?”

“No. K.P. I was just wondering. We haven’t said anything in a while.”

“Just filling air then?”

“K.P.”

“Sorry.”

I looked at him and he took his eyes away, shameful, childlike, nervous. “It’s okay,” I said.

“Here, let’s pull off here.” K.P. pulled the car off in between the big mountains of gravel at the edge of the quarry. We got out and shut the doors. The wind blew cold in the open. It blew fast and you could feel snow in it, each crystal like grains of sand, like breath of the high mountains whispering across your cheek. It felt haunted. Everything around, all the plants, everything in the valley was stunted by the constant wind that blew down and caused everything in its path to shiver and shrink away.

“Here,” K.P. said, “let’s climb up this one.” He pointed at one of the big mountains of pea gravel that seemed identical reflections to the mountains behind them that glowed in the moonlight. They peaked out at the top like alps, and laid out like a mountain range, a row of three to either side of the car, and one clear at the end before it dropped off to the pits. K.P. started climbing, a beer foaming onto his pant leg, and reached back for my hand. I grabbed it but wouldn’t give him my weight. I slipped a little and he helped me up. We climbed, the gravel giving way every few steps, then we reached a bench where the gravel leveled out and there was a flat spot before the mountain went up again to a sharp peak. We stayed on the flat, which had settled and been hard packed with a little loose gravel on the top, and K.P. started kissing me and we fell against the upslope. K.P. unbuttoned my pants and I rolled on top of him. We tumbled off the slope and he slipped my pants down to my knees and took his own down too. I got one leg out and could feel the gravel on my skin as he pushed into me, the cold biting my skin like little pins. He grunted, his pelvis grinding into mine. I tried to move away and he held me down. I let him keep going and he pressed me into the gravel and it

pushed deeper against my skin and I could feel the cold seep into my muscles and his tearing push. He hugged in close against me and my arms fell in behind his back. He breathed heavy and said “I love you so much,” and ran his hands through my hair. I didn’t say anything back, just tried to breathe through the pain. He kept going until he was done and his breath was heavy against my neck. Shadow and moon interplayed alternations of darkness and light with the slow curving slopes of the gray mounds facing us. K.P.’s breath got louder and he moaned. His weight felt heavier on me and his hand slapped down next to me.

“K.P., you okay?” I said.

“Fine.” He touched my hand and I took it away to brush the hair out of my eyes.

K.P. pulled away from me and stood up. “You’re a fucking bitch!”

“What?” I said. I tried to reach for my jeans, the one leg still around my ankle.

“Fuck you,” he said.

“K.P.?”

“Fuck you, you’re a bitch. You’re just a stupid bitch!” He stumbled to his feet and took a handful of gravel and threw it at me. I held my palm over my face and the gravel scattered and stung the back of my hand.

“K.P.! What the hell is wrong with you?” I tried to get up and he ran at me. He picked me up and slammed me down and the hard packed gravel knocked the wind out of me. I tasted blood in my mouth and wheezed. I tried to turn to my knees to get up or crawl away and K.P. jumped on top of me and held my arms down.

“You’re just a bitch!” he was crying as he yelled.

“K.P. Stop it! Please!”

He turned his head and threw up on the gravel, but still held my arms down.

“Please get off of me! Please!” I kneed him between the legs and he fell over, screaming a roar beyond words, some strange amalgam of fear and rage. I pushed him off and got my jeans part way up as I tried to run. At the edge of the flat, I tripped and slid down the slope face down, riding on the outside layer that gave way. Where the slope met the next mound, I managed to crawl to my feet and pull my pants to my hips. K.P. was at the edge screaming and I ran, my feet slipping and sinking with each step. His voice echoed around me as he came down the slope but I didn’t look back. I reached solid ground and it was flat ahead of me with one ridge of gravel on the other side of a small inroad. I ran up the slope of the ridge and over the top. Below was a sagebrush flat and the valley spreading out before me, mountains illuminated fully by the moon and the lights of ranch houses glowing far ahead. Tall sage swept against me as I ran and K.P.’s screams slowly quieted into a murmur of hate. I flew over the stones at my feet as if suspended. I felt far away from K.P., far away from everything. I ran for the mountains. I wished I could run all the way home.

Chapter 9:***Candy Bear***

Light filters through gray billowing clouds over the desert south of Jordan Valley, Oregon, the colors of morning gone dull. The day before they'd woken up late and turned in early on the drive through Eastern Oregon, and Jesus Freak Charlie sprung for a motel, for a real shower, but when it was time to take it, he didn't let Candy Bear in.

"I want that stink," he said.

"What? What? Why?"

"It's like sleeping with the dead."

"Fuck you! Fuck you you fuck!"

"Just go get in the bed and I'll be there. Maybe my clean can rub off on you some."

Candy Bear huffed off to the bed and waited for him. He didn't towel off and let the water drip from his body onto hers, droplets that felt no different than his sweat. Now, as she watches the sun come up, she is hungry and irritated. A light dusting of snow scatters over the desert pastures, and they pass out of the valley into the uplands, snow clinging to the stunted sagebrush and lonely juniper trees that dot the landscape. She lets the miles pass and then as they drop down the winding road to the Owyhee river at Rome, the truck crawling down the wall of rim rock into the canyon, Candy finally speaks up.

“I don’t know why you couldn’t have just let me have a shower, Charlie. I don’t know why.”

“You’re getting paid in a ride and a fuck ton of crank. I get what I want out of it. No arguing.”

“I don’t know, between you keeping me up dry humping, dry, humping, and nothing to back it up and all the fucking crying, fucking crying, I don’t know if it’s worth it.”

“You little fucking twat. You want clean, fine.” Charlie pulls the truck to a stop at the bridge over the river, the brakes hissing, and grabs Candy Bear by the hair. “Come the fuck on, bitch!”

“Charlie, Charlie Charlie!” Candy Bear screams and tries to grab at the seats with her hands and feet, scratching at him.

“Come the fuck on!” Charlie pulls her out onto the pavement and drags her skin across the blacktop as she scratches with her heels for footing. He grabs her by the belt to lift her hips off the road and tosses her off the bridge into the river. Her breath goes out with the freezing water and she floats in the slow lazy current, lets go of her body, the fight gone from her. She only hopes that maybe she’ll end up on dry land, a game of chance at staying alive. Flashes of the dry riverbed in Arco, flashes of the cutting edge of stone. A twitch in her muscles awake to movement and she catches hold of a tree limb overhanging from the bank and pulls herself to the shallows. She lays in the cold water, catching her breath, then rises up. Charlie’s truck grunts across the bridge and past the few small buildings that comprise the town. Candy Bear battles her way through the

willows between her and the bank and crawls hand over hand to flat ground, stumbling toward the closest building, and walks in the front door, an open sign with red lettering in the front window. A burst of movement erupts as the door opens, Chinese hairless dogs and Pekingese scurrying about in front of her and surrounding her with their eyes. A large woman in a white dress stands in the middle of a room full of dolls.

“Oh, my goodness, honey, what did you get yourself into?”

“The river, the river,” Candy says. With shivering fingers she pulls a dollar out of her pocket. “Cof, Coffee?”

“This isn’t a cafe, dear, it’s a museum. Your coffee is free.”

Chapter 10:***Hank***

Hank cracks a beer from the six pack on the bench seat, turns off the headlights, and contemplates the darkness until the star's break through on his adjusting eyes. The soft breeze moves through the cab from window to window. Hank sips and breathes, sips and breathes. Up ahead on the spur a shadow moves and melts away into the rest of the darkness. Small shadows make their flickers, all evidence of the life lived around him, obscured from sight. They fade into the darkness and brush in much the way he watched his brother fade away from life, his memory left behind in every day after as a memory staining the backdrop. The beer trickles empty and Hank opens the door, leans the bench seat forward, and pulls out a small daypack. He slips in his last two beers, his water jug, and a bread sack full of deer jerky. He shuts the door and steps to the rear of the truck and opens the tailgate. He looks at the bundle of his father and slides the body along the floor, lowers himself and brings the bundle onto his right shoulder. Hank leaves the tailgate open and continues along his course on foot.

Chapter 11:***Candy Bear***

I was close, I thought. I could feel its pull reaching through the night. The high field. The scent of it shimmered down on me, or maybe only its memory. The pull was so close in me but my legs were so tired from running, and it was still miles. I could just feel it though, and I ran toward it as far as I could go before my legs gave out and I tumbled to my knees in the brush. I caught my breath and my focus and came to see that I didn't really know where I was. I'd been away long enough that I didn't know my way home anymore. I went north some more and crossed a dirt road and ran across an old pioneer's graveyard overgrown with brush to where it looked as if the earth were swallowing the headstones back in, masses so broken down over time they barely betrayed the shapes they once were. I'd been there before, and I wasn't as close to home as I thought. Sometimes feelings transcend space. My heartbeat had settled enough that I could think a little more straight. Even if I could make it, I'd probably die doing it, or soon after. I headed back toward the highway, working my way down out of the sage to hit the road K.P. and I used to cross the valley. We'd come far in the LTD. It seemed so much more on foot, through the brush and rocky ground. I walked in the tall grass along the side of the road, my fingers pinching at the seed heads as I passed, and the high elk fences* seemed to loom over me, and trap me in the space of the road, keeping me out with the

* See Figure 14.

Figure 14: Elk Fence

Construction: Woven wire, topped with strands of barbed wire.

Purpose: To prevent degradation of grasses by elk herds upon grazing properties

Results: Large scale landscape fragmentation, interruption of migration and feeding routes of varied fauna. Psychological and political fragmentation in varied spheres.

Political and Cultural motivations: Pressures of industrial food system force maximization of profit loss relationship at any cost, and despite all collateral damage or long term ill effects on ecosystem. Fragmentation of large patches of landscape encouraged by economic pressure, often times by systems of corporate meat production. Reliance upon sustainable food sources in production and consumption locales discouraged. Also related to psychological-political-cultural control mechanisms, related to international borders that discourage permeability. Often traceable to historical mechanisms of wartime defense such as the castle mote. In urban environments exemplified in the gated community. Life becomes a fortress, keeping the undesirables out.

elk, and the cattle inside, keeping perceived outsiders from their precious territory, even though they were the invaders. We'd never done fences like that at our place. What came

and went came and went. We kept the cattle in and let the rest be in and out the best they could. I jogged in small bursts to keep warm against the push of the cold wind, enough to warm up but not enough to sweat.

I heard a motor and looked back at the road coming from the south. The driver was out of control, so I knew it was K.P. The LTD was coming fast, lights roving back and forth along the road. I came to a run again and headed toward the river, looking back as the lights met the east-west road and headed my way, beyond the rise, their glow illuminating the horizon like a false sunrise, cut by shadows that crept across the headlight path. I made it into the willows by the river and squatted down amongst them as the headlights came to form. The car swerved and skidded along the fence, sparks shot. K.P. righted his path back onto the road and the tires shuddered across the bridge. The tail lights disappeared and the engine quieted as it went on. I wiped tears away from my face with the sleeve of my hoodie and stumbled out. My legs felt like spent rubber bands and my feet stung with each step upon the gravel road. The river rushed under the bridge and it's coolness was fresher than the cold of the wind, somehow. I stumbled up to the ranch house between the willows and the highway. The house was dark and I rang the doorbell twice before my legs went out and I slid down the door. I curled up on the mat and pulled my hood tight over my head as the porch light came on.

Chapter 12:*Harley*

I sat with Hank by his trailer and watched him take apart a lawn mower carburetor, watched him work the valves back and forth like a metal heart. Open shut. Open shut. Open shut.

“Hey bud, you want to hand me that jackknife over there?”

I handed him the knife, laid open on the stool next to me, and he scraped the grime away from a clogged gasket, then dug it out, dry and broken down.

“That ought to get it, just got to put her back together.” He reached into his tool box and slipped a new gasket into place. “You all right, bud?”

“Yeah, fine.”

“You’re just quiet.”

“Do I need to talk?”

“No. Just wondering.”

“Don’t know what’s wrong with being quiet.”

“Not a damn thing.” He wiped grease off his hand with a red shop rag. “Sorry, just worry about a guy getting too hung up in his head is all. Traps up in there if you let them get you.”

“Ain’t got no traps, Hank.”

“Okay, sorry.”

“It’s fine.”

I didn’t know how to say any of what was in my head, couldn’t begin to articulate it. Every god damn thing was just fucked up. Candy had gone to that house clear out above the reservoir, and they’d found the LTD wrecked out in the woods and K.P. passed out against a tree a hundred yards away. Candy didn’t say a damn thing about why they’d been separated. I knew damn well something was up but couldn’t get it out of her, knew they’d been out there fucking and something had gone off but she wouldn’t say and I didn’t know why. Even after she’d settled down there was nothing, she just shut off, said K.P. was a fucker was all. The sheriff said she was all babble when they went out and got her, tearing her hair out and crying, a mess. By the time we got to her she’d shut off like a valve closing, but I knew what a closed valve did when what it stopped didn’t have anywhere to go. K.P. did a couple nights in jail before they let him off like it was no foul. Typical bullshit cause his daddy played football with the judge and he was going to go in the army and be some sort of hero somewhere.

“Been making you read a lot in school?” Hank said.

“I guess.”

“That’s good.”

“Yeah, a bunch a horse shit though. I got to find my own stuff far as finding anything worth reading.”

Hank nodded. “Got to find your own way of things sometimes.”

Moths flashed their wings around the porch light and I scuffed my boot on the concrete.

“I miss home, Harley.”

“Yep, me too. All the time.”

“I mean. We ain’t dead, so it could be worse. I just don’t get sometimes why it happened. You know, been a few years but I feel like it just happened. Seems so damned close and makes no damn sense.”

“Can’t seem to get nowhere here.”

“Yeah.”

“Just seems all a waste of everything. Everything.” I leaned forward in my chair and put my chin in my hands, felt like I was going to throw up. Hank looked at me and put the carburetor down on the bench in front of him. I bent over looking at the concrete and thought everything seemed that hard, everything a concrete wall around us, a barrier between me and everything, everyone, first seeing it fall apart back home between me and Candy and thinking I was just changing, going over to my folks’ side. But then I got over there and found they weren’t there either, like they’d gone back somewhere else toward Candy, some limbo I’d blown past, some hazy place where I couldn’t tell what they were to talk to anymore. It started where I still had dad to look to until we came to Arco, then him and mom got more where they seemed further and further away. But it wasn’t their fault, the wall was something with me. I was closing off Candy first, then them. Hank I could be with some but there was the wall there too. The wall was following me around and breaking me off from everyone, indiscriminate barriers rising

up around me, the same barrier, just different players on the other side. No one was coming in. No one. And nothing was letting go, not a damn thing giving an inch. I couldn't see a living breath around me, couldn't see the living stuff that had to be all around. The dead thing was me. The dead thing was my seeing of it, and sometimes I wanted to break it all, others I just wanted to shut off what light was left, so it would finally stop tormenting me for good.

Hank brushed his hands on his pants and put his hand on my forearm. "It ain't forever though, bud. It ain't forever."

I pulled my arm away and settled back into myself. "Yeah, Hank. What the hell is?"

Chapter 13:

Candy

I went to the party with Bobby. After he heard what happened with K.P., it was a month before he asked me out, then him and his friends beat K.P. behind the grain elevator. They ran a spike under the skin on his back, cracked some ribs, and snapped all the fingers in his right hand. He had to go to the hospital. I didn't mind so much. We went to the party, at Bobby's sister's place in Howe, the house just as beaten down as the town itself, busted out windows, and walls spray painted a tangle of Day-Glo. We were hairspraying the brick around the old fireplace and lighting it, the blue flames passing over in waves, crawling across the brick like a neon ocean before they disappeared. Bobby kissed me and then we went to the bathroom.

"I only got a little, let's just do it in here. Hold on." He leaned out the open door. "Roger, hey man, get in here."

"All right, dude." Roger sat down on the edge of the tub and pulled his long brown hair into a pony tail with one of the pink scrunchies that sat on the edge of the sink.

"We gonna smoke a joint?" I said.

"Nah, here, just a sec, she's got a bulb around here so we won't have to screw out that one above the sink." Bobby opened the cupboard under the sink and took out a light bulb missing its guts. He tapped yellowish powder out of a small baggie.

“Is that crank?”

“Yeah.”

“You’ve never done it?” Roger said.

“No.”

“Nice.” He slapped his thigh and jack hammered his knee, tapping his heel on the linoleum.

Bobby held a straw into the opening and let the flame of his lighter run gently over the bottom of the bulb. Smoke filled the chamber and he sucked it through the straw. He passed it to me and I did the same. The taste was light, like chemical air, it could have been sweet but was bitter at the same time. Sweet for its lightness maybe, so bitter it changed over to sweet, a strange trick of polarity. He tapped some more in and we hit it until his baggy was empty.

“You all right?” Bobby said.

“Yeah, yeah, shit yeah, I’m fine. Fuck. Fucking fantastic.” I said.

“That was a lot for you, little girl!” Roger said. He bumped me on the shoulder.

“Don’t call me that, Roger.”

“What?”

“Little girl.”

“What’s the big deal?” He chewed the tip of his pony tail.

“Nothing if you don’t call me that.”

“Fuck, man. What the fuck is this shit, Bobby? Bitch is getting all fucking shitty.”

“Guess she doesn’t like it, dude. Whatever.” Bobby put the bulb back under the sink.

“Oh, thanks for sticking up, pussy.” I slapped his knee.

“Hey, fuck, bitch. I was.”

“You don’t have to. I got it anyway. Fuck you guys.”

“You sure you’re all right?” Bobby said. “That was a lot. I’m geeking a bit. It could fuck you up. Just let me know if you can’t breathe or anything, okay.”

“Got it. Thanks.”

We went out into the living room and sprayed more hairspray torch blasts in the air and drank beer. Two guys were taking hits from a gravity bong in the sink and a few guys were watching a porno on the TV and laughing, watching a girl get fucked by five guys.

“Fuck this, I’m going for a walk,” I said.

“Candy, hey. Hold on okay. Just breathe a little.” Bobby held his hands on my shoulders and looked into my eyes. I shrugged him away.

“No, I need to walk. My legs just want to move.”

“Fine, okay.” He held his hands in the air. “I’ll catch you later.”

“Whatever. See ya.”

I headed into the night, back toward Arco. It was twenty miles away and I didn't care. I walked along the side of the road, and the night quieted as I got away from the house, the sky a deep blackness cut with pins of stars. The empty highway stretched for miles ahead of me, seeming to get longer as I went forward, extending further with each step. I walked for an hour before I saw a single car that blinked its lights at me and went on. My heart beat fast and my legs moved me into dark again, the stars sharp spears cutting through the night,

each one its own small sphere of density,

or pools of bloodlight,

each a galaxy unto itself manifested as a point of light

millions of years in reaching my eyes, mingling with the light of the moon. Each shadow touched my feet as much as my feet penetrated shadow. They weren't separate, not by any stretch. One. Shadowlightsole. No interpenetrating because there was no veil to cross.

Waving grasses glanced the sheets of membrane surrounding my heart.

Membranes sing together the song of reed on lips,

hollowed chest to let the light in.

The light that was always there ever lost in

the wreckage. All told I'd lost everything and the losses would only pile up whether I liked it or not. As life piled up the loss piled up each upon the other until I was all wasted space nothing left, nothing to hold onto, because there never was a handhold to

grasp. That was illusion. Every bit of it. It was all a vast expanse with all of us floating in it as a spectacle of desperation reaching toward each other but missing, each grasp failing, our aim untrue.

Each light of the valley, each a star itself if seen wrong or maybe not wrong, maybe only bending askew. How quiet they breathe, the little children in their cradles,* none of them knowing what they were or what they could be, all of them small, like me, nothing all of it. We all are. We are what? We are what? What we intersect the fibers between us radiant and woven skin to skin, bone to bone. Lights on the highway flowing by, then dark again. One slowed but moved on. Tempted but not enough to stop in his path to wherever.

* stolen from "The Sleepers" by Walt Whitman

Chapter 14:***Candy Bear***

Candy Bear shivers in front of the baseboard heater in the guest room of the small house attached to the back of the museum, wrapped in a pink robe. One of the hairless dogs shivers in front of her in seeming mimicry, tufts of hair quivering at the end of its movement.

“Honey, you stay here as long as you want okay?” Darla’s voice comes from the other room. She walks in carefully with a tray of coffee and cookies.

“Sure. Sure. Thanks.” Candy Bear takes one of the cups and a cookie.

“How’d you end up in the river?”

“Ch. Charlie.”

“Who’s this Charlie character?”

“Trucker.”

“Oh dear, dear. I just don’t know what to make of the world sometimes. I suppose it might be good that only a little of it steps through my door.” Darla sits on a wooden chair by the dresser. She has a soft face and questioning eyes.

“Right, right, right. It’s something else, some other world in here.”

“I try to make my world my own. Like I said though, feel free to stay here as long as you want. Stay the night if you need. I could use the company.”

“No. No. I mean, thanks, but I really can’t,” Candy Bear says.

“You sure?”

“I got to get on the road.”

“Well, all right. If that’s what you think you want. Your clothes should be dry in about half an hour.”

“It is. It is what, what I want. You got, got a bathroom?”

“Oh, of course, dear, that way.” Darla guides her into the hallway, and points to a door. Candy Bear pulls the robe tighter, a Pekinese pulling at the dangling belt. She moves the dog away slowly with her foot as she closes the door. Candy Bear breathes deeply and leans her hands on the windowsill. She looks through the trees toward a line of houses across a small patch of yard. Candy sits to the toilet and almost falls, the seat lower to the floor than she expects. She looks around the room and sees that everything is built low to the ground. The sink is just a little more than knee high over the green carpet on the floor. She bends forward and gasps for breath. A dog scratches at the bottom of the door and a second one joins it, their snouts breathing beneath the crack. Candy Bear finishes on the toilet and goes to splash cold water on her face, crouching down far to get to the basin. The water splashes off the duct tape and runs down, brings the heat of her skin beneath closer to her attention, the itch crawling over her face, a burn moving toward her neck.

Footfalls come to the hallway. “You okay in there, honey?” Darla says.

“Fine. I’ll be right out. Fine.”

“Okay. Let me know if you need anything. I’ll just be in the office.”

Candy Bear dries her hands and steps into the hall. The two dogs are looking up at her. She hears Darla chattering to something and walks down the hallway to the office.

Darla strokes the head of a parrot and it nips at her.

“Nutsack!” The bird yells. He shudders his green body feathers and shakes his head.

“Not the friendliest fellow, but I love him, the kind of strange love of something left to you.”

“Fuckers!” The bird yells.

“He wasn’t, wasn’t always yours?” Candy steps carefully into the room.

“No, he was my husbands. His name’s Dotty.”

“Fuckers!” The bird turns his gray head upside down.

“Bill had tourettes, and for whatever reason that’s what Dotty gravitated to. I’m trying to teach him a more friendly vocabulary so I can have him in the front.”

“Cock! Ass!”

“He gets lonely back here.”

“I’m sure, sure,” Candy says. “How long, how long ago did you, you lose him?”

“It’s been five years.”

“That’s not, long.”

“Not long enough to not think of him every day.”

“I’m sorry, sorry. So, what kind of parrot is Dotty?”

“Amazon orange winged.”

“He is beautiful.” Candy moves toward him and he waddles back and forth on his perch.

“I don’t know if he’ll let you touch him or not, but you can try.” Darla taps Dotty on the chest and he hops onto her finger.

“My cock is on fire!” He flaps his wings.

Candy reaches her hand out to him and he lets her stroke the back of his neck, his head cocked, small brown eyes glinting at her. “Listen, Darla, I, I should probably go.”

“I know. They should be done in just a few minutes. Have some more coffee, will you. That pot’s almost done and I hate to waste it. Not many people come in here and I don’t need anymore. And at least get yourself all the way warm before you head back out on your mission.”

“Thank, thank you.”

“Help!” Dotty screeches.

“Of course. If you’re coming through again, hopefully on better circumstances, don’t hesitate to stop. Go on, check the dryer. They might be okay now.”

Candy Bear checks them and they have dried. She dresses and goes back to the office to say goodbye. Darla has gone into the front of the museum. She is dusting the face of a ceramic doll. All of them are immaculate, signs that they are cared for attentively. “How long was I in the bathroom?” Candy Bear says.

“Half hour.”

“Really?”

“You were pretty freaked out I guess. You might have checked out for a few minutes.”

“Why didn’t you just get my clothes for me right away?”

“I know I can be a bit much but forgive me, okay. Here, take this, too.” She points to a coat she has folded across the back of a chair next to her and Candy Bear picks it up.

“Darla, thanks. Thank, thank you. I’m sorry I got testy.”

“It’s okay, honey, I don’t blame you. Good luck with life.”

Candy walks away and the dogs follow her through the museum, dolls piled on tables, their eyes upon her, staring circles of glass. She shuts the door behind her and takes a breath. She crosses the highway, puts her hand out to hitch a ride. Cars pass, more and more coming on as the sun warms the chill of the desert. Candy limps down the highway to pass some time. Finally, a pick up pulls along the side of the highway, it’s tires crackling in the gravel. She slowly and stiffly crawls into the back with the cow dogs.

Chapter 15:***Hank***

On foot the road seems to go on longer but he knows each fold, each curve, even if he's used to it on horseback or in a pickup. He laughs to himself thinking of how much he's taken for granted horses doing the carrying and now he is getting a taste of their work. The weight gets lighter with the thought of it. "Hell, so I'm a horse tonight. I'm just a horse."

He thinks of Candy on horseback, how she moved together with them seamlessly. He almost never saw her spur them, and half the time she'd ride barefoot no matter how many times they tried to keep her in boots and spurs. The horses listened to her though, without even the slightest hint of reining, they'd stop in place if she needed. Until things fell apart, the world seemed to tune to her that way. It seemed like the world bent an ear to her, that it moved to her in conversation. Only humans seemed to have the problem understanding.

Chapter 16:***Candy Bear***

I turned fifteen.

Dad took us out to Mrs. Peter's Pizza and Ice Cream. My Best friend Steph came, and she took me to the bathroom to give me a birthday quarter paper. We bolt locked the door and chalked up lines on the edge of the sink. It was the really pure shit that had been going around, with a blue tint to it.

"Thanks, Steph, this shit's the best. You're the best."

"Always girl, always. So, has Bobby tried to call you?"

"No. No." Bobby and I had gone out for four or five months and I'd dumped him the week before.

"Really?"

"I told him his dick was too small. I wouldn't call me either."

"Was it?"

"No. Bobby just got boring. I was only hanging around him for free speed. I can suck anyone's dick for a line. So, I'll see how that goes."

"Yeah. Yeah. Not a damn thing wrong with that. A girl's got to know what she wants."

“Shit yeah,” I said. The door shook and we grabbed each other’s hands. “Check your watch,” I whispered. Steph looked at the time and smiled. Mrs. Peters was obsessive compulsive and cleaned the bathroom every hour on the hour, so it always smelled like bleach to the point of nearly gagging you. We watched the second hand go around on Steph’s watch and the door kept rattling, then Mrs. Peters knocked.

“I need to clean in there, right now.” Her voice was panicked and we held our hands to our mouths to keep from laughing. “Come on, please. Whoever’s in there, I need to clean it. Now.” With ten seconds left we whipped the door open and slipped by her. “You almost did it. You almost ruined everything,” she said.

“Sorry sorry sorry,” we said in unison. We locked arms and walked down the hallway and sat down at the table giggling.

“What is it?” Dad said.

“Oh, nothing. Just messing with Mrs. Peters.”

“That’s terrible,” Mom said. “Just terrible. That poor soul.”

Hank tucked his head down and laughed, and Harley did the same. Dad smiled and leaned back in his chair.

“Maybe, mom. I don’t know, I don’t know, I don’t know.” I itched at my face. Harley looked at me.

“Well, I guess it is hard to resist,” she stopped talking. Her mouth came open. “Oh, dear.” She grabbed her napkin and reached toward me.

“What what what, Mom?”

“Your nose is bleeding.”

Chapter 17:

Harley

It was toward the end of the day and I was beat. I'd started working full time at the feed store over summer. It was hard work but beat hell out of being in school. I'd been tempted to do what Hank said and just do small engine work at home. I could work when I wanted and make almost as good of money, but I just couldn't stand staying around home any more than I had to.

Last job that day was loading the back of old Buck Wheeler's truck with sacks of grain.

"Got to keep my old mare and the colt fed their extra. The other three dickhead's do all right most on hay and grass." Buck leaned back and forth on his boot heels. He was a tough, thin old man, with a slight hump in his back from long days on the trail and lots of times getting bucked off.

"Sure enough, sir. Sure enough."

"She's gettin old, might not have her bred again, chicken feed her I guess."

"How long you had her? How old?"

"Oh, I guess she'd be twenty-three now. Twenty-three long ones too. Been giving me colts since she was five." He looked off like he was telling the story as much to the air around as he was to me. "Rode her just a couple years, broke her pretty good and finished by the time she was three, but only give her two years regular riding before I figured she

was just so so of a saddle horse. Good blood line though. I usually make a little off the colts. Now just have her, the stud, and then two geldings to ride.”

“Used to have a bigger herd?”

“Yeah, till I lost the ranch. Had to move into a place with just the three small pastures. Keeps me busy enough.”

“Lost our place, too.”

“It’s a hell of a deal. I make do though. Hell on you being so young. I got to live it a long time. Got to enjoy the place a long while. You got yourself robbed having to leave so young. I was about worn out. Hate to not be home, but I was gettin busted up and the boy was a worthless drunk. I couldn’t of kept it up even if I didn’t lose the place. I’m sorry, son. Something will come around for you. It’s a long life. Don’t think your ship has sunk already.” He patted me on the knee. I looked at my feet.

“I haven’t.”

“The hell you haven’t. I can see it. I don’t blame you a bit.

“I haven’t.”

“All right, all right. I’ll mind my business.”

“Sorry. I didn’t mean to be testy.

“Why in hell wouldn’t you be testy? World kicked you in the teeth. It just ain’t forever okay. Don’t get to thinking it is. It just seems like you do.”

“Thanks, Mr. Wheeler. Here’s your invoice. Mel can just charge it to your account.”

He slipped the invoice in his shirt pocket. “You have a good night. Go get your pecker wet. That will make you see the world different.”

“Jesus. We’ll see what I can do.”

I waved him on and even had to admit to myself for a second that he made me feel a little better. I sat on the loading platform with my legs dangling off. My sleeves were rolled up to the elbow but all the rest stuck to my skin, soaked from load after load. Across the road by the grain elevator, a little kid was leading a puppy on a leash. The puppy kept stopping and the kid would drag it a few inches then try to scoot it’s butt to get it to walk, then the pup waddled alongside him before it stopped and drug its feet again. It looked like I wasn’t the only one dragging ass with the world. I checked my watch and it was five, so I went in and timed out. I left out the front door and headed to Stinson’s drive in for a burger and a shake. I walked down the road past the park and that damned submarine head sticking up like some ingrown toenail of an eyesore and crossed over to the burger place. I got a bacon cheeseburger and a blackberry shake that I dipped my fries in. Around the corner from where I was sitting, a truck pulled up to one of the menu boards. A gravelly voice ordered and then I heard a soft voice speak to him and he grumbled back, “You’ll do what for me? Okay. I’ll give you fifty or a teener for that. We can see what else you could do.”

I heard the voice speak back to him and then feet shuffling and his door open and shut. Something seemed interesting about it so I leaned back and looked around the corner. Candy was in the passenger seat of the truck. The source of the gravelly voice was an old dude from town named Gus. I put my burger down in the tray and leaned my

chin in my hands, elbows pressing into the tabletop. I heard feet shuffle and a thank you and the truck pulled away. The engine became more distant, and it wasn't all I felt was going further and further away.

Chapter 18:***Candy Bear***

Gus wiped himself off with a towel. “Sorry about the pissin. I get there sometimes right after I come. Get any on you?” He offered the towel.

“No. No. I’m good. Good enough.” I stepped over the wet outer sheet spread on the floor and put my clothes on. I was still getting the feel for how it worked. I’d only done it for money three times.

“You want the fifty, or a the teener?” He held out a vial in one hand and a fifty in the other.

“I’ll just take the teener, cut to the chase. That’s what I’d get with the cash anyway.”

“If you need cash too, we could do twenty five and a quarter paper.”

“No worries. I don’t need the cash right now. I can get that later or tomorrow or whatever.” A breeze came in the open window and curled the sheet into the room. The sun was still bright outside and you could hear kids walking by on the sidewalk downstairs. Gus lived in a studio apartment. The kitchen was on the wall opposite from the bed. A beat up low backed brown couch sat along the window. “You like living here, Gus?”

“Places are places, I guess.” He laid the vial on the foot of the bed. “Be careful getting busted doing this around here. Folks will catch on. Might see about driving around to some other places. Keep moving.”

“Ain’t got a car. I’ve walked all night and about half the day from Howe once.”

“Girl, bullshit. That’s twenty miles out.”

“Well, guess why I did it! Jesus. I was so geeked out. That was my first time tweaking. I don’t plan on it again. It just happened.”

“I maybe could drive you around from time to time for a cut. Besides, you should be asking for more, nice young pussy like that. You’re charging like an old whore. Well, some of them.” He sat on the couch and leaned back. His long salt and pepper hair hung half in his face and he shook it away. He looked at me, his face blank.

“Maybe. Or, or maybe I can just handle it myself. I’m a big girl.”

“Not that big. Girls in prison’ll fuck you up.”

“I’d go to juvie.”

“Still, the same.”

“I got it. Really.”

“Don’t want any cut out?”

“Not if I don’t have to, and any more I’d be charging would just go to you.”

“True enough.” He sat forward on the couch. “Can I get you a soda or something?”

“Sure. I’ll take one with me if you don’t mind. I should head home.

I went out into the sun and drank the soda as I walked down the sidewalk toward the edge of town. I hitched a ride in the back of an old man’s truck so I didn’t have to slug out all the way in the heat. Some children played in the grass of the courtyard of the weekly rate motel across the street as I hopped into the bed. The old man’s truck had bad shocks, and we bounced rough down the highway. He dropped me off and I went inside the house and everyone was sitting down to eat.

“Sorry so late getting home,” I said.

“Don’t worry about it, honey,” Mom said. “But, maybe do you think you could just help me with dishes, and maybe help me fix dinner tomorrow? It would be a big help, and I like your help anyway.” She rested her hand on my shoulder and I tried not to quiver from it. I didn’t like being touched by someone who knew me so well right then, didn’t want something in me to tell her what I’d been doing. I held the shiver away and just felt her weight on me.

“Yeah. I’ll see what I can do. I think I can.”

“What you got, a hot date?” Harley’s eyes were dark. He wasn’t really joking.

“Harley.” Dad said.

“What?”

“Don’t be sharp.”

“Whatever. Shit.”

“Watch the language at dinner.”

Harley stabbed his fork into his steak and grabbed the bowl of mashed potatoes. He slapped a scoop on his plate and dropped the bowl in front of me as I sat. I looked at him and took the bowl. He cut his meat, scraping across the plate with his fork.

“How was work, Harley?” I said.

“Fine. Same as always.”

I watched his eyes. They made me think he hated what he saw.

“How was your thing?” He said.

“What do you mean?”

“You know what I mean.” He looked at me and put his fork into his mouth and drew it away. His eyes were dark. He’d grown thin.

“No, I don’t. I was at Steph’s today. We hiked up top of the number hill, up behind her place. Kind of didn’t do much.”

“Steph ain’t that much a friend to you.”

“Harley,” Mom said. She put her napkin down on the table, folded it. “That’s mean.”

“It ain’t mean if it’s true.”

“What’s this about, Harley?” Hank finally piped up. He’d just been watching us. Harley looked at him, his lips curled up slightly and his teeth showed through. I couldn’t tell it from a smile or scowl. He sat quietly with that face but breathing like he was about to say something, about to let out something big, something important. I knew he knew

but didn't know how. I guessed Gus was right about how easy it was to get busted.

Harley leaned forward toward Hank and opened his mouth.

“Nothin. I'm just joshing her a little. Saw her talking to a boy when I got off work and was getting a burger.”

“You already ate?” Mom said.

“I can still eat. I can always eat your cooking, mom. I get an appetite for it just thinking about it.”

Mom smiled at that and everyone let it go but me and Harley.

Chapter 19:*Harley*

I went to my room after dinner and read. I didn't give a fuck what right then. Words crept by like clouds burnt by a constant sun, every image dissolving to vapor as it hit. After a while Candy came in and sat on her bed on the other side of the room, her hands across her lap and her back hunched. Her eyes looked like death got scared into her.

“Harley. What did you see?”

I didn't look at her from my reading. “What were you doing?”

“What did you see?”

“You heard what I asked.”

“I asked first.”

“Fine.” I put the book down on my chest. “I saw you getting in a truck with some old guy. I don't know what to make of what you guys were saying right before. Fifty or a whatever.”

She sighed. “A teener.”

“Yeah, a teener. What the fuck's a teener?”

“Harley. I'll tell you the truth if you promise not to tell.” She brought her hands palm down on her knees and looked at me.

“That really depends on what the truth is.”

“Harley. Come on. You were always the one I could let in.”

“What good’s it done me? You let me in and I get fucked up.”

“You fuck yourself up over it. I ain’t fuckin you up.”

“Okay, what is it then? I promise.” I held my hand up like a court swearing in.

“Here.” She pulled out a little vial.

“Fuckin speed?”

“Yeah. Crank.”

“I seen it before. Who hasn’t? Even the fucking mormon kids are doing it.”

“You done it?”

“Nah. I don’t touch the shit. None of that shit. I thought they called it quarter paper.”

“Teeners you get more. You want to? It’s pretty fuckin rad.” She giggled.

“Nah. I’m fine. Anyway what the fuck was all that about?”

She paused and leaned back on her mattress, brought her legs up cross legged.

“His kid’s stupid. I’m teaching her pre algebra. He’s desperate.”

“Dope to take care of his dope?”

“Yeah.”

“Bullshit. Probably sucking his cock. Gus ain’t got no kid.”

She sat looking at me. Her chin quivered. “Can I turn out the light? I’m tired.”

“Thought that shit didn’t make you tired.”

“Please, Harley.”

“Go ahead, I don’t care.”

She shut out the light and we lay quietly. I looked at the ceiling as my eyes adjusted to the dark. Candy fiddled with herself, pulling at her clothes as she lay on top of the covers with her body out flat, arms straight to either side of her body. I watched her breathe. There was something different in it, something changed in the rise and fall, the bleed between of inhale and exhale. A shift had gone on somewhere in the last months, and she was different in the simplest of ways like that. There was something in it like my loss of feeling. She was breaking away from herself, pulling over a veil to the world. She’d given in like the rest of us. Light shifted in the room, the hint of headlights sneaking through the blinds, a fluttering of outside sounds. I tried to sink into my chest and settle my head to sleep, let my mind slow and drift away from my sister next to me, my parents and Hank in the living room, let all the world I lived in day to day fade off and give me space, give my mind space from itself. Piece by piece I tried to break it apart so there was nothing to hold my thoughts on. I closed my eyes and watched my head come off my body, slowly separating, the seeds of a dandelion, feeling what it would be like for all of this to be gone.

Chapter 20:

Candy Bear

The bar seemed like it was always in a state of near collapse, the white panels of the ceiling stained brown and sagging. Jeremy had me and Steph come down with him and Buddy that night. He and Buddy were the kind of friends who hung around us because usually if we struck out for the night, which happened every once and again, we'd fuck them for a line, or at least suck them off. Joe the bartender would let me and Steph hang in there even though we were only fifteen. I had on my favorite blue pjs, and Steph and I danced, her in her pink terry cloth pjs with footies, going for the cutes. I knew better. I knew I had a better shot wearing my light blue ones with the dark blue stripes, the ones that hugged down my hips, low enough to show my sacrum*, low enough that pubic hair would have shown if I didn't shave, and that's what got them, that bit of shape turned them on even more, the plunging lines of my abdomen leading down and out of sight.

Steph and I danced in the corner of the dance floor and Jeremy and Buddy got us drinks. There was a small riser for a stage, but I'd never seen anyone play on it. It was maybe room enough for one croaky old cowboy, but nobody wanted that. Sometimes the bar up in Mackay had those kind of guys. I liked them fine, something more real about them than the shit country on the juke box, pop ballads disguised by pedal steel. My

* Sacred bone, from the Latin; (*os*) *sacrum*, (*sacer*, *sacra*, *sacrum*, "sacred").

quarters went for AC/DC, of course. They were never my quarters, but I got the guys to play what I wanted. Steph and I did shots of whiskey and made out after each one. That got the guys too and they hollered at us and growled low whiskey grunt growls.

Buddy got a couple more shots and we downed them and Steph and I started kissing, then reached down each other's pjs and fingered each other. Steph got wet enough that she filled my palm. I licked my finger after I pulled out and took another shot from a tray. Earl, who was probably in his sixties, shook his shoulders at me and flicked out his tongue. I went up to him and grabbed his belt. I stuck my fingers in his face and he breathed in.

"That's nice, girlie. Can I get a whiff of yours?" He grunted into my ear and I pulled him to the door and into the cool night air. I wobbled a little on my feet from the whiskey and felt warm and soft even with the sand blowing through the air. I took Earl to the side of the bar and undid his pants.

"Holy shit, girlie, right here?"

I plunged his cock in my mouth and he almost pulled away, but I kept at him. He came fast and then zipped his pants. He was already sweating. I could see the beads appear as they caught the little bit of pale yellow light coming down from the streetlamp.

"Fuck, girl. What I owe you?"

"That's twenty five, Earl, unless you just want it as a preview. Then it's a freebie if we make a night of it.

"Sure enough, girl, still a hundred? Extra for freakiness?"

“Yeah.”

“Good enough, just got my social security check today.”

“All right, grandpa.” I nudged him.

“Hardy fuckin har girlie. Watch your fuckin mouth.”

“Sorry, Earl, won’t happen again. I respect my elders.”

“Not one more.”

“Okay, okay.”

I followed him to his white Cadillac, and when the door opened the smell of whiskey and cigarettes was thick and stale on the air. Earl turned on the radio and headed the car onto the highway, toward his place south of town. Fats Domino played and Earl hummed along to the tune, tapping his thumb on the wheel.

“Hey, girlie, when I was your age, this was our rock and roll, the real McCoy. Not that screamin shit that you like to play.”

“This stuff’s great Earl, but so’s the screamin shit, and hey, AC/DC’s almost oldies too now, you know?”

“Whatever you say. Classic rock they call that shit? Jesus.”

Earl pulled off the gravel road toward his trailer down on the edge of the lava floe. On the way, he stopped at Jerry Reicher’s old silver Airstream and gave a honk. Jerry poked his head out the door and Earl leaned out the window.

“Hey, Jer. Come on down the road will you? Bring some of that shit you been cookin up. I got a bottle of Jack at the house.”

Jerry gave a nod and shut the door. Earl pulled away and kept down the road another quarter of a mile to his trailer. Dust clouded up in front of the lights when he stopped, the clouds stroking across the lights like smoke, like ghosts.

We went inside and he turned the light on. The house had an oily feel to it, musty, stale cigarettes and whiskey heavy in the air to where they almost stuck to your skin. I slipped out of my pjs and sat on the couch, cushion crumbs sticking to my skin.

“Hold on, girlie.” Earl went to the fridge and grabbed the bottle of Jack from the freezer and a can of whipped cream from the fridge. He handed me the bottle and I took a pull as he sprayed the whipped cream on my nipples. He licked it off, slobbering on me with his sour breath as he stuck the nozzle inside of me and squirted. My hips jumped at the cold and he held me down. He worked his tongue into me and stuck a finger into my ass. Jerry walked in the door and sat an eight ball of peanut butter crank on the coffee table. He took off his pants and stood over me on the couch. I opened my mouth and he dipped his balls onto my tongue,

taste of old sweat.

He stuck his cock in my mouth and pushed to my throat and I gagged. He started pumping into me and farted. Vomit came up and onto my cheeks. I heard Earl laugh and he squirted more whipped cream into me. I could barely breath with Jerry going at it on me. He pulled out and came on my face, then sprayed diarrhea all over my chest. I puked on the floor and Earl chalked up lines on the coffee table glass. I dry heaved, shook the

fog from my vision, snorted a line, and headed toward the bathroom to take a shower or at least find a towel.

“Stop right there, honey. We ain’t through with you.”

“Earl.” I held my hands to my chest. “Come on, please.”

“Get the fuck over here.”

I walked toward him slowly. Watery shit ran down my belly and onto my thighs. He pushed me down on the matted carpet and wiped the spray off my chest with his sleeve. He chalked a line between my breasts and tooted it with a hollowed out ball point pen, then took his pants down and tapped a pile onto his cock.

“One for me, one for you. Eat it off.”

I licked it off then went down on him. He pushed me back down on the couch and thrust into me, then turned over onto his back and told me to do the work. I ground down on him and tried not to cry, the tears welling just to the edge, so near the surface. I wanted to shower and see if there was mouthwash to get the puke taste out of my mouth, and maybe crawl out the window and run home. I heard Jerry spit behind me and he started to work something cold into my ass. I looked back and he was trying to push a Olde English forty bottle into me.

“No, Jerry!” I said. “No! What the fuck are you doing?”

“The hell.” He pressed his hand onto my back and Earl held my arms.

I tried to move and couldn’t budge from him, the tip of the bottle inside of me, the threads twisting in his grip. I took a breath. “At least get some baby oil or something,

then you can do whatever you want. Jerry, please.” My voice cracked. “Then you can do whatever you want, okay?”

“Shut the fuck up.” He pushed into me and I saw a white flash.

“No!” I screamed and tried to squirm away. He pushed again and it felt like fire. I struggled against him but he palmed the back of my head and pushed me onto Earl, who grabbed his hands around my neck. I felt the air go out and I tried to gasp. Earl’s face was red and went blurry to pink and Jerry tried to pump the bottle in and out but just went back and forth with me tight on it because it was just glass on skin. My face went numb, the air gone out, then another flash.

outside

sea of cold spikes

They were dragging me and my skin scraped across lava rocks and thorns. My hands and mouth were bound with duct tape and they drug me by the feet and the whole back side of my body felt rubbed raw to meat. They got me to the dry riverbed and tossed me down onto the lava rocks. Wetness of blood seeped all over me and a piercing ache shot through my bones when I hit. The stars shone clear as the blur subsided. Earl and Jerry’s outline went over the blanket of stars and an arm come down and there was a flash of light as a fist split my lip open. They ripped off the tape and I spit out teeth. I tried to scream but could only gargle blood. A boot hit me in the chest and my air went

out. There was just enough light to see Earl's foot come up to stomp my head. For a second I thought I might pray.

Chapter 21:***Candy Bear***

The border collie nestles into her belly and the red heeler leans off the side of the truck, sniffing at the cold windblow of the truck's speed. Candy Bear pulls a tarp over herself and the truck slows and comes back to a stop. The old man gets out.

"Sorry, I wasn't thinking." He reaches behind the seat and brings out a blanket and an old down vest. "Have these. It ought to hold you. Sorry, I'd let you up in the cab but I got a sick calf up there with me. You'll be cold, but she'll just die. Let me know if it ain't working out for you."

"Thanks. Thanks. Should be fine. Just fine." She puts the vest on over the jacket Darla gave her. It smells of sweat and old hay.

He nods and gets back in, pulls back onto the highway. The slight singing of wetness strikes up from the tires, from the melt off from the dusting of snow, a surprise early storm in the high desert, an early hint at what is to come in November. Candy Bear pulls the blanket over herself, and the tarp for a windbreak, then pulls the whole wrap over her head. The border collie pushes back in on her belly, his breath hot in the dark. She wraps both her hands around his head and rubs his temples as he groans and paws lazily at the side of her legs.

"Hey hey buddy buddy boy. You're about the softest, softest thing I've felt in awhile. The old man working you hard?" The dog licks the back of her hands and presses his head in her lap. His breathing and the rocking of the truck settling her deeper into the

movement forward through the desert. Even without seeing, she knows the rolling of hills and the mountains to the east and west. It all whips by as the speed increases, and sagebrush, the same sage that's always been around her all the time she's known, always that sage, always that tough, tangled, lichen covered branch against her skin as she runs through the hills around home, her skirt tangling as the limbs grab at her, tears in the fabric that bring it ever closer to falling apart, the sun burning through the heat, ticks crawling on her skin and the cool smell, and the rusted carcass of an old Ford Model T left in the ravine over the hill. She climbs in and sits on the spring and steel skeleton of the seat, and turns the steering wheel back and forth, back and forth, on the floorboard the bones of a human hand. She reaches through the broken out front window and places her palm on the rusted hood. The heat radiates in and she feels her skin redden, the heat moving up her wrist and spiraling up the forearm bones to her elbow and further, into her body, glowing warm.

The truck comes to a stop and the old man's boots scuff the ground as his body bumps against the side of the truck.

“Hey, you all right in there?”

Candy Bear pulls the bundle down to reveal her face. He looks at her like he hadn't noticed her wounds before. Candy Bear takes a breath. “Yeah, yeah. I'm good. We in McDermitt?”

“Yep. I thought you might want out here, I'm only going as far as the Res. My brother married an Indian girl. Well, they're both old farts now. I guess you never grow out of thinking of your siblings a certain age.”

“I believe, believe you. I know it. Yeah, might have a better time getting a ride from here, I guess so. I can just get out here.”

“Let me give you a hand, honey.” He reaches his hand out and she takes it. He is an even older man than she had noticed, his skin paper thin on long, thin, wiry muscles, veins dark blue and liver spots on the back of his hand. She hops down to the ground and stumbles, he helps her up.

“Thank you so much. So much. What’s, what’s your name?”

“Maven.”

“Thanks, Maven.” She holds the side of the pickup bed.

“Yours?”

“Candy Bear.”

“Candy Bear. Okay. Listen, I ain’t judging or nothing. Not the kind for it. I just run into someone as beat to hell as you and I got to say something. Whatever you’re doing, do something else. Even if you ain’t got no one, which I’m guessing is true, maybe, maybe not, there’s people you can find. Even if nobody understands. That’s part of things. Nobody understands anybody, that’s the big problem of everything. None of us understand each other no matter how hard we try. I just stopped expecting folks to understand me. I been a lot happier since then.”

“Thanks Maven, I got this. Got this.”

“Bullshit.” He takes a wheezing breath. “I wish you luck, but you ain’t got it. It’s got you, all wrapped up in its finger. I hope you live a good long life. Get old like me,

you start getting a good case of the who gives a fucks, in the good way. Things get to be all right even if the world and everything in it's going to shit."

"Thanks, Maven. Thanks. I'm gonna go over there to the casino now. You have a good time with your brother." Candy rubs the border collie's head and walks away, the dog whining. She looks back and Maven waves at her before he gets back in the truck. Then he leans out the window.

"Ah, hell, get back in. You can come out with me to my brother's place. I can get you down to Winnemucca tonight if you want. We can have lunch and drop off this calf. His girl is magic with these little shits."

Candy Bear limps back up to the truck and puts her hand on the side of the bed. "I don't know, Maven. Maven. You got got your family to be with and that calf, and I, I think I best, best be shoving on down. I'll hit up a ride from the casino and get down to Winnemucca at least."

Maven looks at her, then looks at the ground. "We all need friends, girl. Don't pass it over when it's there."

"Thanks, Maven. I got this. You have a good time with your brother, your brother. And his girl." She moves to take off the down vest.

"No, you keep that, okay. You take care now. Take this too." He gets out and reaches into the bed of the truck and grabs the blanket and hands it to her.

Candy Bear turns and heads across the street to the small casino and cafe. A cold wind blows dust and garbage around her feet and she wraps the blanket around her hips to keep the wind from blowing on her bare skin.

Chapter 22:

Harley

She was covered in tubes and wires. They'd taken her into the hospital in Pocatello. Some poor old retiree found her out in the desert in the river bed while he was rock hounding or taking pictures of wildflowers or some shit. She was just barely breathing when he found her, and he was afraid to pick her up. He started crying and I knew before I'd seen her that whatever had been done to my sister was the worst thing this little old man with almost no hair left on his head had ever seen. Tears worked down his old leather skin and I knew I didn't want to see her but had to.

The doctor lead us into the I.C.U. and down the hallway of life support to her room. Her face was wrapped in bandages and her eyes were swollen shut.

"They broke most the bones in her face," the doctor said. Mom's legs went out from under her and dad caught her and helped her to a chair. "I'm sorry, I didn't mean." The doctor was young and didn't know how to talk. "I'm sorry, I, I, she'll be okay but it's bad. If you want to just, if you, if you want to just sit there with, we can talk about it later."

"No, son, tell me. What did they do to our little girl?" My dad said.

"They, sir, they, they broke her jaw and both cheek bones. She has a crack in her skull. To the best I can tell they, they, they stomped her head into a rock. She's lucky to be alive."

"Why would someone do this?" Dad asked the floor, maybe the doctor.

The doctor cleared his throat. "I don't know sir, the police are looking into it. She uh, she, there was sexual contact. I don't think it was forced, except maybe the anal contact. But, uh, there was a foreign object used."

"Oh, dear god."

"I, I, I'm sorry, I didn't..."

"Doc, you can shut the fuck up now," I said. Mom and dad looked at me and the doctor stammered. I swallowed. "I mean, it's okay. You. We got it."

The doctor nodded and walked out and Hank walked me to the waiting room, carrying a tray with two sandwiches on it for us. He flipped through a magazine and set it down, sipped his coffee. We munched on our sandwiches, both not really caring about food but somehow knowing we needed it, or at least knowing it was something we could do with ourselves.

"You know," he said, then went quiet, like he decided not to say anything.

"Yeah, I know."

He looked at me. "There's been something going on with her a long time and I just ignored it. She ain't herself, and I been ignoring it like it was just her growing up or something. But there's been something really wrong about it the whole time. Hard to put words to though."

"I know it."

Hank sat the magazine down.

"You seen her slipping off into something, I know that."

“Yeah.” My face was hot, thinking I could have done something, told them what I knew.

“Mom and dad, not sure they had a clue. Dad for sure didn’t. He’s blinded himself to a lot of things over the years, things he don’t want to see, he just keeps from seeing them. Mom sees things, just don’t say nothing. I don’t know which is worse.”

I swallowed. “Hank.”

“Yeah bud, what?”

“I know what she’s been up to.”

“You what?”

“She told me, awhile back.” I took my hat off in my hands and it fell to the floor from my grip.

“Bud, it ain’t your fault. No matter what it is.”

“Not how it feels, Hank. I may as well a crushed her head on that rock.”

Hank put his hand on my shoulder and I pulled away. I saw that cut right into him. His eyes glistened. He got up and filled his coffee cup again, just trying to find something to do.

Chapter 23:***Hank***

Hank's boots scuff the ground as he rights himself under the weight. His breath deepens against the strain, and he shifts his father so his body lays across both shoulders rather than just the one. The moon illuminates the two track, exposed earth to rock and dust with stunted brush jutting up in the center. Shadows shift across his vision, some from his movement, some leaving hints from the unseen. He remembers when they got Candy home from the hospital, when they let her down into her bed, eyes shining up so distant from the bandages, and him and his father went out to the living room. Harley slammed the front door leaving and it was just the two of them.

“Well, buddy,” Henry said.

“Dad, I don't know. I just don't know.”

“Me neither. But if we can get through this we can get through anything. Takes awhile but I think things work themselves out if you don't give up. It might not make any sense or be anything we want at all. But I guess if we just get what we want we wouldn't want that either.”

“Is this at all what you want?”

“Hell no, but how else are we supposed to survive? Got to tell ourselves something. This has got to lead to something, or somewhere.”

Chapter 24:***Candy Bear***

Beyond the fence and the barrier of tumbleweeds, tangled into a mass across the wires, beyond the mass the highway.

While I healed up, I watched the highway every day. Each lonesome car appeared as a dot out in the desert, maybe only a glint of light cutting through the heat waves from a windshield, then it would slowly develop shape and change from a spot of formless haze to color, and the color would take shape, until finally there was a machine coming in its full form, with its human cargo on the way to whatever they were carried toward. A flash of their faces snapped by: farmers I knew around town, old friends from grade school in Mackay, families on their way to church, backpackers on their way to peak Mt. Borah*.

My hand wrapped around the barbed wire warmed by the sun as a truck burst by, a cigarette dangling from the driver's mouth, the smoke curling through his mustache. The truck's breeze whispered faintly against my skin, and was soon gone, the memory fading as quickly as all the others, one by one, gone, gone, gone beyond. It had been three weeks since Earl put me in the hospital. I must have looked like a ghost standing there by the highway, jaw wired shut and bandaging around my head, my arm in a sling. I spent

* Tallest peak in Idaho; elevation 12,668 ft (3,861 m), prominence 5,982 ft (1,823 m)

every afternoon I was strong enough to walk at the fence. Part of me reached out and hopped inside of each car that blew by, followed them away to where they traveled, to anywhere things could be better somehow. Harley wouldn't speak to me, even though he was the one most in charge of taking care of me. He resented me for it, that he had to take time from work to do it when he'd gotten to where he could barely stand to be with me. But, he made the least amount and someone had to stay. He made sure I had what I needed, but I could see in his movements that I was dead to him, and maybe he was too.

What I wanted was home but that was long gone. I wanted to talk to those circles of stone far up in the high field. Maybe I could make my own stone circles here, arrange the lava rocks. I knew what they were saying so maybe I could make the words their words, bring them back together but no, it was gone, I'd lost it, I couldn't make it like they were cause they weren't the same, weren't made by the same makers, that ancient power from hands and flesh long lost to memory. I wasn't keeping my old thing going if I did that, wasn't keeping their messages and bringing them out in new creations. Co-create hands back to forever unite earth and sky into machine, bring the steel from the earth strip mother rape the sands*. I salvaged scraps of iron spread across all over, all the old artifacts left in the succession of human waste, because I'd seen the tailings, the chewing of the earth that came from the mines that used to eat away at the mountains before they were stopped. If I could let the old wires come in line, bring all in check, they would shake the earth, all of it moving toward touching the first touching, origins touching between then and now and forever the hum and shake of it all. Steel and leaves

* See Figure 15.

Figure 15: Strip mining: Removal of surface structure (overburden)

Gains access access mineral source below.

In the case of gold mining, yields of .75 grams of gold per ton of earth moved is considered economically viable.

Impacts: Leaching of chemicals into groundwater, gases released into air, spills of transport vehicles. Extensive landscape fragmentation. Effects long lasting. Black lung disease, irradiation, paranoia, social fragmentation.

Rehabilitation: Lands dissected by open pit strip mining are rehabilitated, often turned into cultivated pasture land or wetlands that remain toxic. Large scale landscape transformation is typical of the process.

weren't the same but eventually one becomes the other, leaves break down into earth and the right heat happens and they all transform to metal, iron breaks to sand, dissolved to earth sucked up into tree vein to leaf and a dew drop contains a crystal of iron.*

The stone circles guided me to thresholds where insect and wire, wing, leaf, and steel became each other because the whole process was always happening, each and every second a new creation developed. I just tapped the hum and set at the right speed.

* See Figure 16.

Figure 16: Structural transformations of iron oxide molecules

select functions of ferric oxide:

extraction, pigmentation, corrosion, transformation, sharpening of tools, jewelers polish

final thrust of a star before supernova; decay of nickel-56 to iron-56

I could amplify it but could never get it under control. That's why dad couldn't have me doing it. That's why we really had to go away. We lost the ranch for all the reasons dad tried to hide from me, but it was more than that really, there was more involved, there was more that even he didn't know. It was dangerous to have me out there. If they took it all away from me and put me in town where I could be all broken open in front of humanity then I wouldn't be a threat any more. I would just be another human and I'd be where they could always see me no matter what. No matter where I went near their roads and wires the more they could watch me and eat me up. The more I was around the concrete and asphalt and steel, the more I needed to be around them, the more their draw pulled me. Out away, I made it without the wires like we all should. We can get all we need without being tied into their wires, be our own power. It's all around us in everything and in each other. The more they wire us in the more we look away from each

other, tied in elsewhere, tied away toward their unseen locus points, an irresistible draw to what lies far away unseen, that's the trick. We can't see what's right in us and we can't see where the wires go but with the right images, waving flags and the buzz of voices we're drawn just as moths.

The road was blank and I could feel nothing coming from beyond either horizon, so I let go of the barbed wire and shuffled myself toward the house. The outside door was open with the screen door closed. A box fan was on just inside, blowing air out. Another set in the living room window blowing current in to keep the air in the house, if not cool, at least moving. At least that was the idea, but right then the air blowing through the screen felt no different from the air outside but for its force of movement. I opened the screen and edged inside past the fan, then shuffled across the living room to the kitchen. Harley had left me a protein shake fixed on the counter. It had started to crust over so I stirred it up. I so quickly had gotten sick of shakes, all I could really have with my jaw wired shut, but I sipped on it anyway. It was just him and me in the house, everyone else was at work. The house seemed a kind of still that betrays a more than ordinary absence of movement, like it had been good and quiet for some time before I'd come in. I called Harley's name down the hall to no answer and shuffled down to our room to see if he was napping. He wasn't. I shuffled back and noticed the closed bathroom door but heard no sound.

"Harley?" I knocked. No answer. I opened the door and the sunlight coming in the open window trailed in, leaving streaks in the air, shadows from the window frame leaving their mark on the floor. Birdsong chattered from the tangle of elms outside and the leaves fluttered in the breeze. The bathtub was full of water stained red and Harley's

skin just broke the surface with its paleness. His hair touched the surface like the grasses that stroke the surface of a pond from below. His chin was tucked and only his hands and knees broke the surface. On the edge of the tub his hunting knife lay where he had set it right after. I took it up in my hand and sat on the toilet. I looked at the sticky blood on the blade, blood that had just begun to set, and I placed the knife on the sink. I hummed the song that must have been his last sound, the sound he made as his heart counted down its last emptying beats toward the end. I hummed him back into life inside me.

PART 3

Sometimes I open up my blood to find that blood is all I've got.

Graham Foust

Chapter 1:***Candy Bear***

It's been so long since any sense of gentleness has entered her life, anything but the smallest hints; the thaw of spring, leaves moist against her skin. Even those have long ago lost their differentiation, all the world an abrasion against her. But gentleness is now knocking on her door again. From her emergence from the icy river, a new dawning, something reaching through to tell a different story.

Grasses a tangle in willows,

spirals of gold

light appearance of a songbird; no disturbance of its seat

upon a red branch

shortly after pause and chirp gone gone gone beyond

Candy Bear wakes near the bank of the Humboldt river in Winnemucca, Nevada, embedded in a tangle of dry grass spiraling around the base of the willows, bright red limbs reaching toward the sky. She is cocooned in the warmth trapped by her layers, Maven's blanket, and the interweave of grass she is enwrapped in. She crawls out and stretches in the sun, then shimmies down the embankment to the where the river curves, a

rubble embankment holding the channel in place, the ground saturated from the water passing over at flood stage into the slough beyond.

Cirrus clouds trace patterns dissolving to other shapes as quickly as they appear, disappearing over the crest of hills above town on their way to interminable lines of high peaks beyond and out of sight. Candy Bear knows the sweep of the valley and revisits the twisted spaces it has left in her mind, climbs up the bank on the other side of the slough, grabbing hold of a concrete slab embedded into the bank to hold the channel solid from the current's slow wearing shift across the valley. Flags of plant fiber chewed by flood waters back in spring and turned to paper on the catch of limbs wave in the faint breeze. She walks along a chain link fence topped with barb wire, around a set of storage units, until she comes to the road and crosses the bridge into downtown. Graffiti scrawls cover the bridge in grey and blue, intermingled in straying cursive:

Papa durrrr snoop whack

She follows the street into town, Maven's Mexican blanket fluttering in the breeze, wrapped tight around her waste. She walks the main drag to pick which casino to hang in before she heads for the truck stops to find her ride out of town, passes signs; Liberal Slots, Prime Rib Sandwich \$5.99, State of the Art Machines! She picks the door that says \$3 ham and egg breakfast! Diners glance awkwardly as she limps to her seat, and the waitress holds the menu from her as if to refuse before sitting it on the table and saying "coffee, honey?" and pouring it into the freshly sterilized cup, still warm from the dish pit.

She eats her breakfast, feeling the shaky heat of faces trying not to stare, but the vibration of their eyes tingles the back of her neck. The tile on the counter is cool and her coffee cup squeaks as she lifts it away to her still swollen lips. Her hand is weak and the surface of the coffee shakes its reflection in circles interrupted by waves breaking the opposite direction. She adds salt and hot sauce as she eats; runny eggs mashed up and coating hash browns, swallowed quickly so she can go to the slot machines that call her into the casino and its smoke with their bells and song.

She finishes and pays at the counter and enters the rows of slots. A man with grey hair poking from the cracked adjustment band of his ball cap feeds quarters, each push of the button taking more away. His once shiny bowling jacket is frayed and dull green. He smokes and sips whiskey. He sighs. Candy Bear thinks he might be desperate as she and sits at the machine next to him, a nickel slot at the end of a line of quarter slots. She feeds it and hits the button.

“How you, doing, honey?” she says.

“What?” he says, his voice rough from smoke and whiskey.

“Oh, nothing, nothing there to get fussed, fussed about,” she says.

“What the fuck do you want? I’m busy,” he says.

“I don’t know, don’t know, nothing, oh hey, oh.” The bells jingle. “I won a bit. What do you make of that luck, eh? Eh?”

“Ah, fuck you.” He sips his drink, hits the button again.

“That’s no way to treat a stranger.”

“The hell. I’m busy.”

“That I can see, but, how about a break?”

“No.” He hits the button.

“You sure? You sure? You look like you could relax.”

“I’m relaxed enough.”

“Listen, honey.”

“Nobody honeys me but my mother.”

“A blow, blow job’s only ten and it’ll only take five minutes and make your life a whole, whole lot better for a good hour, so why don’t we go for a walk?” Candy rests her hand on his thigh and leans toward him.

“You smell like blood,” he says, eyes on the screen. “Leave me the fuck alone.”

“Alright, alright,” Candy Bear says and gets out of the seat and moves into the daylight that hurts a little less with a decent meal and time away. Footsteps land on the pavement behind her and she looks back. A woman stops in place and looks at her, holding her hand to her cheek. Candy Bear turns back and keeps walking between cars. She hears the footsteps again. She turns around and the woman stops again. Candy Bear turns toward her but doesn’t say anything. The woman is in all black except for a pink scarf that covers her head. They stand in silence for a long passing of seconds.

“What?” Candy Bear says.

“Nothing, honey. I just saw you in there. I heard.”

“So, so what? Do you want to save me?”

“Well, yeah, maybe.”

“I’m not, interested. I don’t, don’t need saving.”

“The hell.”

“Really thanks. I’m okay. I just have to keep moving on.” Candy Bear takes a step away and turns sideways to her.

“Where to?”

“South. South. Warmer there.”

“That’s it? That’s your life?”

“Who? Who do you think you are?” Candy looks around, finding the right direction to run.

“Bea.”

“Oh.” Her legs are too bruised to go beyond a trot, she releases the desire to flee the earth beneath her.

“I just want to help out some. I’m not a church goer if that’s what you’re worried about. I’m a nurse though. I might be able to help out with what’s going on with your face.”

“I’m fine. Really, thanks.” Candy Bear takes another step back.

“No, you’re not. Let’s go. Get in my car and lets go. You can leave in the morning if you think you have to. Stay as long as you like, honey. I’ve been where you are. I’m not a stranger like you think.” She steps closer and takes Candy Bear’s hand.

“Okay. Okay. I’ll go.” Candy Bear looks at her face. There is a soft scar just under her eye.

“What’s your name?”

“Candy. Candy Bear.”

“I went by Maggie May.”

Chapter 2:***Hank***

It could be an hour has passed. He has lost track of all time. He remembers carrying Candy back to the house after the first runaway attempt. She hadn't gone far. He found her in an old barn on the abandoned farmstead next to the trailer park. All she could do was repeat Harley's name over and over, and she could barely walk, spent from the quarter mile. One year later, after Vivian was diagnosed with cancer, Candy would be gone for good.

The sweat sticks his shirt to his skin. The weight seems heavier with each step. His boot catches the exposed root of sagebrush and he tumbles to the ground, belly first, and the body presses his face into the rocky soil. He moves under the weight enough to breathe and stays there under the cover of the blanket and the weight of his father. The pressure is somehow comforting. The weight is familiar. As is the falling.

Chapter 3:

Candy Bear

Bea guides Candy Bear to her car, an old white Ford Falcon, and they drive down the freeway south. Snow frosts the mountains to either side of the wide basin that seems to extend ahead without end.

“I work in Lovelock,” Bea says, “but I live up the road to Coal Canyon.”

“That’s just, just there before the prison, right?”

“Yeah. You been through here a few times I take it.”

“Got busted for hitch hiking in the prison zone once.”

They go on for about a half hour, passing scattered houses and remnant towns, a long reservoir catching the light of the sun, and turn off at the exit to Bea’s place. Cracked pavement and potholes bump under the car and the road bends its way through the canyon, grass sunburned to gold and brush on the canyon walls. They crest a hill and drop into a small hanging valley. Stunted juniper* trees dot the red earth hillsides. Bea pulls off onto a dirt road and drops toward an old pink single-wide trailer with a small weeping willow in the yard, nestled near a grove of junipers. As they approach, rose bushes and a garden come into view and an old mutt barks, standing in the middle of the grass, wagging its tail. Bea pulls the car around the back of the trailer and stops next to

* See Figure 17.

Figure 17: Juniper (Juniperus)

Select species: *Juniperus communis*, *Juniperus osteosperma*, *Juniperus phoenicea*,
Juniperus chinensis, *Juniperus angosturana*.

General: Coniferous plant, varies from low, ground hugging shrub to erect tall trees.

Leaves: scale like to needle like,

Fruits: Berries of females fleshy, soft, blue frosted grey.

Branches: spiny to windblown smooth, tangled by growth and the influence of elements, bent to the weight of life bearing down. Slowly adapts to outside influence, roots deep, arms curve slowly with the wind, solidifying its shape to constancy.

an old Jeep pickup, in front of a large propane tank sitting alongside the wall.

Candy Bear sits still for a moment, watching Bea walk around the front of the car, her hips moving under her dress. Bea opens her door.

“That’s my truck. Use it on rougher roads, and once winter comes. Might be the last drive till spring in the Falcon. Part of why I ended up in to Winnemucca, made a circle up the back road to Battle Mountain. Come on in, hon.”

“Okay, okay.” Candy Bear rises out to her feet. The dog runs up to her and sits down in her path, looks up at her eagerly.

“He just wants a pat on the head and he’ll move on.”

Candy Bear pats the dog and he runs off into the trees. Bea leads her by the hand up back steps. Inside, the trailer smells of flowers. Dried blooms hang from the ceiling in the small back room.

“I dry my roses,.” Bea grips the head of a rose delicately, squeezes it softly with her fingers. “Sell the petals. More for fun than anything. A little extra cash but not much.”

Candy Bear looks at the roses. She moves her lips to talk but nothing comes.

“You want some tea?” Bea says.

“Okay.”

“I’ll get it started. Chamomile? Black? Something from the herb garden?”

“Whatever. Thanks. I mean, whatever, whatever you think is good.” Candy Bear folds her hands across her chest.

“Listen, you’re welcome to make yourself at home. Have a seat.” Bea gestures toward some tall chairs at the bar between where they stand and the kitchen. Candy Bear sits and watches Bea closely as she places a teapot on the burner and opens a cupboard filled with small glass jars. She spoons something green out into clay tea strainers and sits them atop cups and places the jar back amongst its neighbors. Candy Bear swallows hard as the cupboard door shuts.

“You okay?” Bea says.

“Yeah, fine, fine. Just remembering something.”

The water comes to a boil and Bea pours it over the strainers, the green leaves puffing in a billow from the rims. She covers each cup with a plate.

“Here, let’s let these steep awhile and check you out. Come on.” She leads Candy Bear down the hall and into the bathroom. “Have a seat here.” She points to a stool. Candy Bear sits down and Bea begins to peel the tape away.

“Ow ow ow!” Candy Bear winces. Tears come to her eyes and she bends forward. She tries to push Bea away but she grabs hold of her shoulders and pushes Candy Bear upright.

“We have to do this, honey.”

“It fuck, fucking, hurts!”

“I know.”

“The fuck, the fuck, the fuck, fuck you know.” She tries to pull her head back, pushes her arms to full length to keep Bea away.

“I know hurt.” Bea says.

“Just, just, just.”

“What, honey?”

“Please be careful.”

“I will.”

Candy Bear straightens up on the stool and closes her eyes as Bea comes toward her. She peels at the edge of the duct tape and skin comes with it. Without meaning to Candy Bear knocks Bea over and runs out the door. She knocks into the wall and runs out into the living room, everything a blur she’s lost in, a murky lake of night extending everywhere. Bea pushes her and they fall to the couch, Bea pressing her body into the cushion, speaking softly words that fail to take form on her ears. Their breath begins to move together, a pulse and wave warping and wefting into one ever moving fold. The edges and center of their bodies become one with the room, one collected verb of shake and quiver.

“Listen, my love, this will all be over then it will be the past. It won’t be real but for a little bit. Come on, we can get through to the other side of it.” Bea’s lips are against her ear, sweat beads on earlobe and lip intertwine, breath heat and moisture as a single mist. Candy Bear moans, her voice muffled by a throw pillow. “I’ll try something else to get the tape off honey. It won’t be like that.” She lifts away as Candy Bear’s muscles give with one long sharp gasp. Bea goes to the kitchen and runs hot water into a large pot. She goes to the bathroom and grabs a washrag, returns to Candy Bear, and rolls her to her back. Candy Bear’s eyes blink at her, at the low light. Bea rests the soaked hot rag on the

tape, the moist heat softening the adhesive to let go of the skin it has seemingly become one with, a grafting of melted together substance.

“Honey, I got stuff to put on this but we better go into town tomorrow and get you some antibiotics. Hopefully the doctor doesn’t have to cut any flesh out of you.”

Candy Bear closes her eyes as Bea slowly pulls the softened tape away from flesh turned red, purple, raw, releasing a putrid smell thick and sweet with its rotting. Bea leads her to the bathroom and strips her naked, the deep bruises stripes across her flesh, some of the tire chain marks deep enough to betray the likelihood of broken ribs. Tears float to the edges of Bea’s eyes. She turns the showerhead to a soft stream and guides the water over Candy Bear’s face, blood and puss faintly letting go from the slashes and running down her cheeks and neck. Layers of filth built up since before Candy can remember run down her body and darken the water as it transforms mud that circles the drain like a slow lazy river. The scent of her fills the bathroom as the steam opens into the air; cheap wine and malt liquor, blood, dust, sex, and an amalgam of plant life decayed upon her skin and hair.

Bea guides Candy from the shower and wraps her in a towel. Candy Bear rests herself on the toilet lid and lets Bea dab her face dry and squirt ointment across her pink swollen wounds. Gauze unwrapped. Soft hands upon flesh. Clean wounds have their chance at healing.

Chapter 4:***Hank***

Lichen presses moist against his face. Cool breath soaks with the taste of damp earth, mud taste with each inhalation, sweet and thick.

Many kinds of weight in a life. The weight when he found his brother and lifted him cold from the bathwater, and Candy muttering to herself on the toilet seat. That weight of loss settling onto a life and piling on turning life into that very loss in its fabric. A fog and weight of always reaching for a body to reach back that disappears.

His father's weight, the weight he's knows so long, presses him, and he feels back into its descent because he knows this is the last time he'll feel this weight and that when the loss of it sets in, the weightless reaching will add a new dissipation to his movement. He takes this heaviness now to make himself real.

Chapter 5:

Candy Bear and Bea

Bea changes Candy Bear's bandages every day. Any way Bea tries to convince her, she refuses see a doctor. Within minutes, Bea knows not to force anything more than the ten minutes a day changing the dressings. She pulls back the gauze and irrigates the wounds with warm sterile water, adds more antibiotic ointment, and gently layers the gauze across, inflammation retreating as skin becomes skin again. She steals some antibiotics from the clinic she works at in Lovelock, and Candy Bear faithfully takes them; the deal to keep Bea from physically dragging her out the door to take her in.

The feeling surprises Candy Bear at first, comes as the settling in of a clear apprehension of an unexpected reality before her, that she has found the deepest love she will ever know. She sees it in the way Bea lifts her forearm to move a lock of hair out of her face, something in the movement tells her, just like anything else in her life she has known instantly and without question, and also reveals to her its impermanence, just like everything in the past she's known to be joyful. As soon as the heartlift comes across her, so does the settling in that she cannot avert her eyes and expect anything to remain. It is a powerlessness always come across as an inkling, a powerlessness she is only now coming to understand, a powerlessness she might have the strength not to shudder away from. Her understanding of life as a hell realm remains as a subtle stain even in this moment of joy, the knowledge that in reaching beyond her own shell lies a seed of infinite suffering in the future. But she also sees the need to go beyond the pull back inward, rather than

revel in the cycle of obliteration that itself dismantles and erodes any chance of even finding the seed of joy living within the matrix of ever present suffering. Just as in the matrix of joy lay the seed of perpetual suffering, the suffering contains the seed of transcendence.

Candy sits on the couch and Bea places a cloth napkin on the coffee table. She looks at her with a half smile and walks away, raises her hand slowly to place a lock of hair behind her ear.

“Just take a look at it when you get a chance,” she says as she walks away.

“This for me?” Candy says.

“Yeah.”

“You made it?”

Bea nods and walks out the back door. Candy sets her coffee cup next to the napkin and brings it up between her hands. In the center is an aspen leaf in gold, bordered by sage leaves in a circle, flawless detail of leaf vein and gentle patterned edge on the white background. The two things that had most rooted her to the landscape of her home. A shiver crawls through her spine, a listening to understand what is carried in Bea’s secret knowing. She wonders if she muttered about these things in her dreams or simply fixated upon them unconsciously in her stories of home. Either way, Bea has managed to see right into what moves her in a way no one else has, without asking for guidance into that interior world. Nobody has seen her so closely since Harley when they were very young. She holds the napkin to her lips and lets the fabric move over her face and her other hand traces down her chest and her palm comes to rest on her belly. She settles into

the glow of joy and knowing of loss and death and decay and then walks to the back window and watches Bea move in the garden, where most of the leaves have withered to brown. Squash lay like fatted hogs in the sun, and Bea kneels to take one up, cuts it free and lays it in the path, moves on to another and does the same. Her harvest is conducted with a light, unaffected care, natural delicacy Candy Bear has so long been cut off from, a softness not even matched by her own mother, though with a heat moving beneath it, an animal heat that knows the touch of the other within the world, where hand and other connected with so much greater depth than mere points of contact, beyond barriers, intermingling, reaching into each other like vines driving root through soil.

Slowly, Candy Bear moves out into the cool air, the juniper trees let off their faint scent, sap coming to slow, and a deer's tail flits just up the hillside, amongst the light waving of branches. Bea moves slowly on hands and knees between each ripened fruit. Candy kneels down next to her and places her hand on her shoulder. Bea turns her head, eyes staring back into eyes. The lock of hair falls to her forehead again and now Candy Bear reaches to place it behind her ear. Bea's eyes tremble, tears at the edges, and Candy's gaze falls to the ground. For a brief moment, the shame of the undeserved and unearned comes across her. Bea places her hand on the side of Candy's head and slowly that sinking feeling moves on to haunt her another time, for the moment becoming a ghost sheltered in her unseen reaches.

Ribs open to breath,

arms entangle with arms,

branches and vines

hand glance cheek, soil fingers

streak upon jaw line.

They fall with each other to the ground,

the sun warming them as body upon body

softening frost hardened grass beneath them, bodies pressing the ground and tearing the vines with their movement. Bea unbuttons Candy's shirt and moves her hands soft across her skin, down her belly to her rising hips. With each breath they become a little more each other, though their separations ache more the further they reach through and melt their edges to non being. They remain, press through

remain press through

and somehow another side appears, and that

a question

Of past and present, the past an answer, the future a question, a darkness of unknowing, a slow unveiling of two bodies in the sunlight. Skin together a potentized entity anew, one of the soil and the sun, falling, falling, and free.

Chapter 6:
Candy and Bea

Her wounds transform from slash to scar, knitting together into raised white ridges upon long tanned skin, skin that over time has turned nearly to leather. Bea begins taking her to AA meetings and she quickly finds she is not the strangest case in the rooms. This is a comfort, though still fails to offer any sense of being normal. She moves from the guest room to Bea's and settles further into their new life together. Beneath the wallpaper Candy senses in the walls the kind of wood paneling she'd known in Arco years before, living in her shared room with Harley. The familiarity of that paneling breathes itself beneath the white paper, beneath the border of pastel red flowers along the top, and it takes time for the presence of memory within each moment to fade and the present to take its place in the stage of her mind, for her mind to connect to the room and the world around in present tense, not reaching back through a cloud of memories, memories that slowly settle from cloud to fragment, then fade further back until short glimpses of the world come unimpeded by the old shadows of her life. She is thankful anyway for the wallpaper. Any bit of concealment a buffer, if a only small one.

Through an AA friend of Bea's, Candy is given a job waiting tables at Trudy's diner in Lovelock. They put her on a slow night first for fear she will be unable to talk. Though it is slow, the group she deals with on this night are the regulars. Her vision blurs from nerves of dealing with people on these terms. She looks at them sitting at the

counter, waiting for their coffee, and freezes in place. She goes back into the kitchen and the bus boy goes out to give the regulars their coffee.

“It’s cool,” he says when he comes back into the kitchen. “It’s cool girl, I got your back tonight. No problem.”

“Thanks. Thanks, Jorge.” Candy sits on a bucket, bent over and hugging her knees.

“Any time. I know you’ve had some fucked up shit go down. Come on, let’s go on smoke break.”

“But I just started.”

“Come on, don’t even worry about it.”

Jorge leads her out the back door and rolls her a cigarette. “They’re a lot cheaper. I’m a fucking bus boy for Christ’s sake,” he says as he lights the cigarette and hands it to her, rolls another.

“I don’t smoke,” she says.

“Humor me.”

He sits on a milk crate and pushes one over to her. She sits down.

Moths flutter around the light bulb sticking out of the concrete above Jorge’s head.

“Thank you again. I don’t know why it’s hard.” She takes a drag and coughs a little.

“No worries, girl. So, I know you been into something, what was the deal.”

“I was a lot lizard.”

“Fuck. Holy shit. Damn.” He leans forward, his elbows on his knees. He takes a drag from his cigarette, blows smoke at the moths and they flutter. “I was a coke head. Drank a lot of fucking whiskey too. It’s safe here, you know. That’s why Bea hooked you up here. We’ve all been there. Those old timers know it too. You don’t have to impress no one.” He taps his fingers on the milk crate. “Fuck, some dude found me in an alley in Reno. I asked him for fifty cents for a forty. This place is kind of a shit hole, but I ain’t dead, and maybe I’ll figure something a little better out, maybe not. Either way, I’m breathing.”

“I’m right there with you. It’s just going to take a while to figure out how to do this normal thing. I’m used to sleeping in the bushes and asking for crank if I suck someone off.”

“I know, dude. I paid for pussy with a rock quite a few times before I hit bottom. You’ll get it. Hey, we’re talking now right. Shit, don’t even talk, just dump coffee in their cups. Those old fuckers will tip you just the same.” Jorge mashes out his cigarette on the ground and tosses the butt in the dumpster. “Let’s go in, I probably ought to clear a table or something. Ralph’s the one in the blue shirt. Just start off with giving him a refill. He’s the one that can’t let his cup get under half full.”

“OCD?”

“Dickhead.”

“Thanks, Jorge. Thanks for the pep talk.”

“Any time. I’ll probably have some fucking panic attack some time and you’ll help me out. Don’t worry about it. It’s Lovelock, Nevada, there ain’t much at stake to these guys. They’re all retired and waiting to die. Let them get a little butt hurt over their peach pie.”

She laughs and doubles over in pain. “Oh god, stop. I still have a busted rib.”

Jorge gets up and holds the door for her. “How’d you bust your ribs?”

“Tire chains, I guess.”

“Christ, I’m not going to ask for any extra information from now on. God.”

They walk up to the front and Jorge rolls out the bus bin as Candy grabs the coffee carafe and walks over to Ralph in the blue button up shirt. He is thin and wears a half smile that she knows is the up to no good kind. It reminds her of her grandfather when he was alive. Ralph’s eyes are hazed over from cataracts, and with their blue look like glass.

“I’m about an inch under half, honey? What are we gonna do about that?”

Candy looks at him and takes a breath and for a second all fear leaves her and she opens her mouth. “Are we talking about your boner, Ralph, or your coffee cup?”

Ralph sits up straight and the old man next to him slaps his shoulder and snickers. “Well, damn, Ralph. This girl might last through us. Trudy’s last little burn out, not so much.” He nods his chin up at her. “I have the same policy with my gas tank. Fill it up.”

“Shut up, Harvey,” Ralph says.

Candy pours till the coffee splashes over the edge. “Thought I’d top it off. At least this won’t light you on fire if I throw a match on you.”

The old men watch her as she puts the coffee away and grabs a rag to wipe up the spill.

Chapter 6:
Candy and Bea

Christmas eve. They throw a party, string lights from the trailer to the trees, white lights that glow in the desert as the sun goes down. Five fire pits burn in the yard and their ragtag collection of friends mill in and out of the house, hot cider in crock pots in the kitchen, homemade from the apple tree in the garden. Everyone brings a side to go with the goose that Ralph the regular shot in the Humboldt Sink* and gave Candy as “a gift for your first Christmas out of the goddamned alley.” AA buddies and friends from work trail in on the gravel road, and a breath of warmth surrounds everyone, a feeling of a shared history of unspeakable horrors, that the joy they feel is impermanent but in that all the more beautiful. The lights around the trailer create a halo around the space that seems to penetrate even into the dark surrounding. Candy’s words no longer catch in her throat, and the voices of others pour into her without the old cloud and veil, without swimming through webs to reach her. Bodies mill around the yard in the light, the swimming of friends through winter air, in and out of the house, their shadows dancing on the periphery. Through the swirling of activity Candy and Bea make short moments of contact, take a moment to sit next to each other while eating, a sideways glance in conversation with others, a moment of eye contact from across the yard, in which they share an in and out breath.

* See Figure 18.

Figure 18: Humboldt Sink

General: Seasonal dry lake bed, remnant of ice age Lake Lahontan.

Source and terminus: Fed by the Humboldt river. Downstream of agricultural and mining operations. No natural outlet, water seeping slow beneath the desert. Scar in the ground cut to link with other nearby lake bed to prevent flooding of interstate and Lovelock.

Mid way through the night Candy walks into the bathroom and grabs some toilet paper to blow her nose. The door comes shut behind her. Cigarette smell wafts toward her on the terminus of movement. She turns around and Vaughn, a friend of Jorge's who comes into the cafe sometimes, is standing there.

"Shh." He holds his finger to his lips.

"What? I'm not fucking whispering, Vaughn. What do you want?" She moves to open the door and push him out but he holds his hand up to her.

"Shh shh. Come on man. Come on. No one's gonna know if we shut up."

"What do you mean? I'm not fucking you. What the hell are you thinking?"

"No no no. Here, I figure you'd like some of this." He pulls out a quarter paper and starts to tap some onto the counter, reaches into the cup beneath the bathroom mirror

and grabs a nail file and cuts out four small lines. Candy looks at them and grips her hands. She bites her lip and her nose starts to tingle.

“Vaughn, get that the fuck out of here. You get the fuck out of here, now.”

“Come on, girl.”

“Don’t fucking call me girl. I will scream. Get the fuck out of here.”

“All right. Fine.” Vaughn leans forward to snort the lines.

“No. That shit is not going inside of anyone. Leave it. I’ll clean up.” She brushes the lines off the counter onto the floor.

“Bitch.” He grinds his teeth. “You fucking bitch.” He grips his hands into fists.

“Yeah? Get out.”

Candy follows him out of the room and into the living room. Jorge is sitting on the couch drinking coffee. “Jorge,” she says. “Get your friend home.”

“What the fuck did he do?”

“He can tell you.”

“Dude, what the fuck, Vaughn? You fucking up again? Bro, you need some rehab or some shit, come on.” Jorge guides him out the front door by the arm, and it slowly returns to normal, even if a small tremor of fear and understanding remains in the hearts of everyone in the room.

Slowly, after pot after pot of coffee, the night wears on to two, three in the morning, and car lights bounce away into the desert, a few bodies take their place on the

couch or floor until morning, but not because of any sense of inebriation, simply because of tiredness, or the desire to stay till morning, to hold onto that warm feeling that passes through them and brings with it a strange and unfamiliar sense of peace, not to be released and left behind too easily.

Candy and Bea settle into the slow change of night to early morning and take in the feeling of wholeness, something as new to Bea as it is to Candy.

“Candy, my life’s been back in shape for years now, but this is new. I never knew of a damn thing like this. I always thought that was a bullshit cliché.”

“I guess it’s not. I just thought everything was meant to crumble and become misery. I guess I was wrong too.”

“Cheers to being wrong.” Bea offers up her water glass and the edges strike gently. They lay down their heads and watch each other until their breath matches.

Chapter 7:
Candy and Bea

In the middle of January, Candy runs her hands across the sheets to find Bea's skin, a pocket of warmth under the blankets. She shakes from her mind the sound of motors starting and the angle of light beneath the water under a river's current. The air outside the blankets is biting cold.

“Fuck, it's freezing,” Bea says.

“Mmm.” Candy settles against her and falls back toward sleep.

“I'll go check the furnace. It shuts off sometimes. Need to get it fixed.” Bea yawns and slides out from under the covers delicately and presses them back down over Candy, her hands pressing through the fabric, the articulation of her fingers gently pressing her eyes shut. The door opens and closes.

Silence,

soft footfalls,

a gasp of air,

a dragging down the hall.

Creak of the boards upon the front step.

Motor start wheels crackle in the snow and grow distant.

The noises replay and stretch through Candy's head. A blow of cold air sucks beneath the door and she quickly pulls back the covers and throws on her robe and runs down the hallway to the open front door.

"Bea?" She says. "Bea!" The air is still, only the faint whisper of the snow on the breeze. Fog hugs close to the hills as she peers out into the frozen white. She looks down at footprints, droplets of blood in the snow next to her. "Bea!" She screams.

"What is it?" Bea says from the kitchen. Candy looks and Bea is making coffee in her pink robe. She looks back into the snow, the entire surface fresh, pristine powder, untouched by anything but the wind. Candy closes the door and sits on the barstool. She leans her elbows into the counter and cups her hands along the edge of her jaw.

"Bea, I don't know."

"What is it? God, you look like you just saw hell."

Bea tells her of her dream and images, what she heard and that she doesn't know what was dream and what she may have actually heard.

Bea stops scooping coffee into the filter and puts her hand on the counter. She rinses a cup. "Well, honey, the good news is what you heard wasn't real at all, or happening right then. I've been out here the whole time and haven't heard a thing. The weird news is, I've been having that same dream for years. I must have passed it to you in my sleep."

"I don't know what to make of it."

“Might be nothing but random dream stuff. I read once that in Chinese medicine they treat couples to harmonize their sleep. They treat the liver. Our livers are both shot, so, that ought to tell us something.”

“Swiss cheese.” Candy shivers, a tingling up the spine. “Joking aside. It shook me up.”

“I don’t blame you. Maybe it’s something out here. Sometimes that much space around a place can mess with you. They say it’s good to have views, it’s some kind of safety to hold onto psychologically, but I think it can drive up old paranoias just as well.” She pours water into the coffee maker and starts it going. A gust of wind rocks the trailer.

Candy looks out the window. “Yeah, like that. It reminds me of back home a bit. Mostly in the good way, but memory is always a mixture of things.”

“Dark and light in everything. Sometimes I get sick of it and just want a rest, want some pure white light for a while. Keep wishing.”

The pot steams puffs of air. The trickle begins, dark water in the bottom of the glass.

Chapter 8:*Hank*

After a time the body seems to press him less into the ground, and the downward force reflects back and presses him upright. Hank shoulders his father again. The sweat cools on his back and his steps move with the weight propelling him onward down the road rather than in descent into the earth. On he moves along the familiar curve that tells him where to enter the sage, the upper branches of the wind-stunted brush grabbing at his pant legs and the low hanging fringe of the blanket. He walks faster with the pull of his destination. The brush thickens then just as quickly thins. The ground is open with only a sparse covering of grass. How it always was. The stone circles form dark rings against the moonlight, their shadows make the rings seem wider than they are, widen their scope. Hank lowers Henry's body off his shoulders and looks across the flat. For a moment he sees the movement of a silhouette on the other side, skirting the edges of the brush as it continues away from the clearing. He squints his eyes and the silhouette disappears, sublimated into all the others.

Chapter 9:
Candy and Bea

Spring comes and the desert releases from frozen to green. Bea and Candy both have the day off from work and go to the reservoir for crappie fishing. Only late April and the sun is hot, the green fading slowly from the grass on the hillside, all wilting, and heat waves dance over the ridge uphill from the water. One boat trolls slowly across the middle of the lake, which still follows the path of the river before it was dammed, a snaking shoestring through the desert, white bluffs sloping down toward the water. Alkali white soil crumbles under sneaker soles as Bea and Candy sidestep down a gully from the bluff ridge down toward a cove. They settle their chairs into the dirt and put up a beach umbrella. At the high-water mark, a band of willows grow along the shore. Water laps at the bank softly and they crack sodas open and cast their lines. Bea fills their five gallon bucket with water from the lake as Candy pulls a crappie in, it's spiny dorsal fin fanning out as she pulls the hook from its lip and drops it into the bucket. They continue to cast and draw the lines through the water, pulling fish in periodically, and an old man sets up a chair a little bit down from them and casts out, slowly drawing his line back in, the float bobbing in the faint waves with each pass. Slowly, more fish fall in with the others, the movement inside getting less and less as the crappie puff against each other's bodies in the still water. The sun warms their legs and Candy feels contentment deepen through her, a softness in her breath and opening in her ribflesh far far unfamiliar.

“Bea,” she says.

“Yes?” Bea leans back into her lawn chair and turns her head to meet her gaze, a lock of her hair hanging loosely across her face.

“Thank you for all this, all this you’ve done.”

“It happened to me as much as anything.”

“I don’t know.”

“You happened upon me. I wasn’t saving you.”

Candy stays quiet and watches; the soft face looking back, the smile that curves softly over full lips, polka dot shirt and black shorts, legs crossed and the curve of knee, a soft scar on the right kneecap. Beyond, the old man casts his line, a shadow of movement. The bobber wobbles on the small wake of a boat.

“I don’t know how to hold onto this, Bea.”

“Don’t. You’ll kill it good and dead for sure that way, even if it goes on as some sort of half-life. We could all go any time, constantly trying to grasp it and hold on will just kill our chance of living it.”

“Just scares me. I pretty much lost everyone, even if it was my own doing.”

“What do you mean? You said they were all dead.”

“May as well be.”

“Candy.” Bea leans forward toward her.

“My dad and my brother Hank are still alive, I assume.”

“God, honey.” Bea looks out at the water. “Don’t you think you should get in touch?”

“Maybe. Not sure they’ll want me back how I run off. Saw Hank about a year ago at a gas station outside Pocatello. He didn’t recognize me.”

The old man takes up his stringer of fish and walks up the bank. He gives them a wave. Bea looks at Candy. She moves to speak and holds her teeth to her lower lip, takes a breath. “Candy, I’d barely recognize that person from what I’m looking at now.”

Candy’s eyes fall to the ground. “I am getting to be me again, whatever that is.”

“That’s to be revealed. Hell, I haven’t found out what I am. Honey, any parts of the past that won’t kill you, maybe you should see to them. Most my past would kill me if I got in touch with it though, so I got to stick to now. I don’t blame you for doing the same though, if it’s the right thing.”

“Like you say, it shall be revealed.”

The sun lowers in the sky and cuts through their shade. Beads of sweat spot their skin, and they pack up. The half full bucket of fish has fallen to stillness. One or two crappie flip their tails languishingly and Candy feels the water, tepid and slick to her pinched fingertips.

They get back to the old truck and put the lid on the bucket and tie it against the bed with bailer twine. They bounce along on the gravel road toward home. As they pull up the drive, the radiator spits steam from under the hood.

“Candy, you run the fish in to the sink will you? Get them in cold water. I’ll get on this.”

“I’ll come back out and help you.”

“Thanks.”

Candy walks in and dumps the bucket into the sink and the fish lay dead in the bottom. She lets water run slowly over their still bodies. She goes outside to help with the radiator, which is still steaming.

“We got to let it cool a bit before we do anything with it. I guess we can wait. Maybe shall we get a jump on cleaning the fish? Fry up a few filets while we’re at it?”

“Sounds good to me.” Candy places her hand on Bea’s shoulder, rubs her muscles tense to soft.

Two of the fish have come back to life, and splash water onto the floor. They swim above the others, who have not been dead long enough to float.

Chapter 10:***Hank***

The blanket is tangled from the slow shift and settle of travel upon shoulders. Hank unwraps his father to adjust the bundle, to make it right. He turns the body onto the grass and lays the blankets out flat. He rolls Henry back upon them and rolls the bundle back together. He pauses and unrolls him again to look at his face, eyes shut to the light, the strong skull beneath leather skin, the skull that gives the face the same cheekbones as himself, the same as his sister, that made the old man look fierce if not for the eyes, and made her beautiful in her ghostly way. He'd once seen a woman with those same features and wondered if it was her, a thin and damaged being outside the gas station, stringy hair and tattered leather pants, drinking malt liquor from a paper bag. He walked past and wondered if it was her, but saw none of the life of his sister in the eyes. He lays one hand on his father's chest, all air gone out of it now, all the life that once moved it. Footsteps fall behind him softly and he doesn't move. The shadow extends from his shoulder and conceals the face looking back up at him. He looks back at the fall and release of grass waving in the wind, the moonlight moving with the fluttering of seeds.

Chapter 11:
Candy and Bea

Summer. They wake sticky with sweat, the heat pressing them down.

“Good fucking lord,” Bea says. “Can’t a girl sleep in on a day off? A/C’s out, gotta be.”

“Uhh. Come back after you get it running.”

Bea walks naked from the sheets. The door opens and closes.

Silence,

soft footfalls,

a gasp of air,

a dragging down the hall.

Creak of boards upon the front step.

Motor start wheels crackle in gravel and grow distant.

Candy snaps up and runs out into the hall. She runs out the open front door and the dust is faintly settling upon the road. Whatever car has pulled away is out of sight around the hill. Candy runs to the tire tracks and sees the spots of blood on the ground. She follows the spots back to the front step, and before it in the dust is a pool of blood,

soaking the dust. She puts her hand to it and feels the warmth of her love sink away into the earth.

The whole body is never found, nor Bea's killer, only parts scattered in the desert in Autumn.

Chapter 12:***Hank***

He splits branches from the big sagebrush, taking no more than two or three limbs from each, the cool scent and soft animal fur of leaf becoming one with his clothes, one with his sweat, soaking its coolness into his pores. He brings them by the armload to lay next to his father, until there is a pile large enough to lay around his body and then lay in a criss-cross until the mound stands hip high. At the top he places a tripod of limbs with the leaves a fan at the top.

“Guess that ought to do it, dad. Like you can fuckin hear me. Guess you *could*. Anything’s possible I guess. Thanks for everything. You’re it. Have a good journey over to whatever it is. Maybe visit my dreams or something. Tell me what you see.” Hank digs his bootheel into the turf and looks at the sky. He thinks of the coyotes who will begin to dismantle his father soon after he leaves. He thanks them for their work, bringing his father back to the source, taking him on to whatever next manifestation he may be.

Chapter 13:*Candy*

She sees him standing just so, and knows it would be that easy. Walk from the gas station to the motel, or even just to his car. She knows this game, how to be discreet about it, and rely on the very fact that most people simply don't care enough to notice it happen. And he knows it too, she can tell in his movement, in the way he holds himself there, waiting to be asked, waiting for money, or a good reason to let it go free.

She will only have a little, one line, maybe two. Just for a taste of the feeling, the buzz and howl of heatlight within her breath. Every placement of heel toe heel toe on the earth a magnet awakening in the palms, openings in the bottom of the feet grasping further the pull across the parking lot, carrying her further and closer further and closer, the sidewalk in front of the convenience store nearer each step. She wouldn't even have to do it the old way. She has plenty of money in her pocket to buy a paper, or a teener if she wanted, maybe even get a eight ball and have a time of it. She could have a line in the bathroom, then wait till she has a couple days off and take the truck and go for a road trip, some much needed alone time, time away from work, away from being in the trailer without Bea in this life anymore, a chance to blow off some steam from it all, a month into mourning and it's time to cut loose from sorrow, enough already. It would all be fine, surely, just a little visit back to it, to know for sure, but without having to suck cock to do it. It would all be fine that way, at least it wouldn't be that far back into it. Nothing wrong if she just did it the once to get it out of her system. She could say she's going

home to take care of unfinished business, and get out of work for a while that way, say that she's going to see her dad and brother, to make amends for being absent while her mother withered away and died.

She remembers, about five years after she ran away, running into Steph at a truck stop in Twin Falls. Candy was standing by a soda machine and Steph was distracted by her child's cooing as she walked by, hand in hand with the girl, both of them in flower print dresses. They walked by and Candy called her name. Steph froze in place and the child looked up at her, over her shoulder at Candy, back up at her mother. Slowly, Steph turned around.

"Hi, Candy," she said. Her mouth held stiff.

"Hey, honey, honey. What did you, did you do, go, go Mormon on me?"

"Yeah, actually, Candy. This is our first. My husband's home with the baby.

"How old, old is she?" Candy pointed at the child, who ducked behind her mother's leg."

"Two."

"Two by, by twenty. That's something."

"Do you know about your mom?" Steph looked at her coldly. "You weren't there."

"What do you mean?"

"She died of cancer, Candy. She died and you weren't there."

Candy looked down at the ground, at the studs on her boots, their shine in the sunlight.

“Did you hear me? You weren’t there, Candy.”

“What’s, what’s your girl’s name?” Candy looked up at her friend who now hated her.

“Vivian.”

She stands before him now, heat on her shoulders. Beneath the faint twitch of the skin on his face, a skull. It could be her own. Her own skull reflected in his eyes, his movement her own, his skin hers. She thinks of how he might taste in her mouth, she thinks of him broken upon her. She reaches into her purse and lifts out the bills.

Chapter 14:

Candy and Vergil

A little over a year has passed since she touched the pool of blood disappearing into the dust, Candy living on in the trailer alone. Two lines off the bathroom sink at the gas station led to a one month bender, locked away in the desert before finally Jorge and a few buddies, who'd been dropping by to feed the dog and make sure the garden didn't dry up, knocked down the door to find her cutting the couch to pieces slowly with a pair of scissors.

They took her back at work, and now she sits at the counter of Trudy's, listening to the murmur and grumble of the regulars at the other end. The tinny smell of canned beef stew heating in a pot in the kitchen, the special, wafts to her. She spoons at her bowl, her shift meal, a hunk of beef cooked forever, then canned and cooked forever again. Candy thumbs at a magazine. The countertop is a dark blue Formica. Her fingertip just barely touches the edge of the water ring left by her glass after she took a drink and sat it on the other side of her bowl. Her fingerprint just stretches the membrane edge, not crossing, not breaking the surface. She feels the quiver and shake of the particles inside, remembers the silver box and her earthquake.

The seat next to her creaks. The shadow of a forearm crawls across the countertop to her hand.

“Vergil's the name, honey.”

Candy turns to an old man, stocky and with a short gray beard, a face dark tanned from the sun. She says nothing to him, shakes his offered hand.

“V-E-R, though, not V-I-R. Way back when the British got it wrong. Started spelling it V-I-R. They got it from some joke on Vergil that he was the virgin poet. Well, I ain’t no virgin. So, V-E-R, Vergil.” *

“What can I do for you, Vergil.” It falls out of her like habit. What can I do for you? She’d said it so many times at the truck stops.

“Ah, nothin doin. I just thought something about you, thought maybe ought to come over and sit here. Not so sure why. Sorry if I’m buggin you.”

“No. Just wondering what brought you over here, or here here anyway. Were you with the regulars?”

“What, those yahoos?” He turns in his stool and surveys them.

“Nah, I just walked in. Didn’t hear the bell?”

“Must have been lost somewhere.”

“We’re all lost everywhere. Hell, I’m lost here.”

“From around this place then?”

* Vergil’s English spelling possibly stemmed from a transcription error in the Middle Ages, a confusion from a pun on his name, pronounced similarly to *virgo*, referring to a maiden or young woman. The joke being that Vergil was the virginal poet. (note by Charles Gabel see Appendix A for full text.)

“Lived here a long time. Don’t know if I can say I’m from anywhere.”

“Go places?”

“Some places.”

“Have you felt this?” Candy grabs his hand and he lets her guide his finger to the water.

Holds him by bone and skin,

feels marrow and reaches through fingertips,

to touch his fingerprint to the water,

the edge of each ridge connecting the water’s surface,

creating curve, but no break.

His eyes are hers and she sees that he sees.

Within him is the turning,

the turning of blood cells in touch with the cells of the water,

speaking back into him.

“Yeah, I’ve felt it. Not *that* that, but I’ve felt it in other things. Good to feel it through another. Not too many let you know it.”

“None. My brother, for a time.”

“Too bad. I know’d a few. You ain’t the only one, probably the first thing you needed to know. Had you known it wasn’t only you, only about you, maybe them scars wouldn’t have happened.”

“Maybe so, but the scars were the teachers. They’re just scars, they never made it over. But it was a round about way of telling me I was nothing.”

“You weren’t nothing. Nothing’s nothing. Everything’s everything. You just ain’t the only everything.”

Candy stares at Vergil and brings her soda to her lips. She sets it back down on the water ring they’d been touching, sealed perfectly on the edges and suctioned to the countertop. Vergil’s boots scuff on the foot riser, his boot sole leather splitting away, the stitching slowly unraveling to make an opening, like lips that flap as he taps his toe to no rhythm to speak of but the moving of nerves.

“Anyway’s, how’s the stew?”

“It is what it is.” She pokes her spoon at the mixture.

“Oughtta try my venison stew some time. If’n you’ll join me, we can check some shit out, out on the playas over the hill from my house.”

“When?”

“Tomorrow work for you?”

Chapter 15:***Hank***

Hank walks back to the truck and looks at the wheel sunk down into the rut, nearly to the axle, and takes a shovel out of the back. He clears the mud away and breaks the edges of the ruts down around the tires, then scrapes the ground to free up the larger rocks and gravel, sifting them out of the soft sand and clay, and scatters them around where tread meets earth, giving a base for rubber to connect to ground. He tears sagebrush limbs and wedges them in with the rocks. Again his shirt is soaked through with sweat as he sits down behind the steering wheel and fires up the engine. He moves the truck back and forth into first and reverse until he catches good traction and backs until he finds a good spot to turn around. He speeds as quickly as possible as the dawn light pinkens the horizon, headed toward the highway before he is noticed. His aloneness sets in with the rhythm of the earth passing beneath him. The rocking of the truck teaching him its emptiness, the hollow ringing of air whistling by, singing to him the absence of human voices.

Chapter 16:***Candy and Vergil***

Candy drives out into the desert west of Lovelock, the truck winding around the hills on the slow curving paved road. On the seat next to her, the sheet of paper where Vergil scrawled his directions rustles gently in the breeze, a notebook holding it in place by the edge, its weight just keeping it from the loft of the window's breeze. She keeps the directions, though they are clear enough to remember:

Out on the road to seven troughs

Go past the first mine turn offs till the pavement gets rough

Turn off at my rock cairn, can't miss it

Out into the rough country, beyond the hills that hide the inside of the canyons and playas and ghost towns from those who speed through the basin on the freeway. She takes it slow past the turn offs to the mines, sees the long arm of a crane, the back tire of a front loader, the chewed up hillside exposing striations of the red and tan earth. The maintained road ends and the pavement cracks in heaves. Tall peaks jut up against the western horizon, rising up from a long playa. She turns off at a tall rock cairn with multi-colored glass bottles hanging from it on wires, and the truck crawls through the stunted brush until Vergil's home appears as from mist,

edges change shape with angle to the sun,

scrap piles come to view,

rises connect a central axis,

somewhere amongst them openings lead inside.

Candy follows the scrawl of the ruts around the junk pile. As she approaches them, she sees the sense to their shape. The first two are spiral pillars the ruts lead through. Interweaving pieces of rebar and hammered strips of aluminum sheeting interlink in skyward reach, between their tips tridents of coil shock springs from old dump trucks.

sun strikes filaments strung between

invisible arches imitate arachnid silk shot between points

a traveler long hidden passes the arch to greet a lost friend

The ruts continue into a central mass of junk heaps pressed into shapes, animal shapes hammered into the walls. Above a final arched gate, perched upon iron rods:

Leopard: Her spots shined rivets on black painted tin

Lion: The mane a mass of thin wires, its body molded iron

She wolf: A body of hammered iron, rusted, suckled by

miniatures of herself

Here the ruts end in a circle of sand and scattered chipped jasper. Candy shuts off the truck and opens the door, the stones crunching beneath her boots. She walks through the gates, each pillar spirals of rebar inlaid with small copper leaves that sparkle in the light. Beyond the gates the door emerges, a patchwork of pine planks pieced together both vertical and horizontal, of varied lengths, water aged but brought back to life by caring hands. She knocks and Vergil opens it quickly, startles her slightly.

“Saw you coming up the way. Tried to make it out to greet you at the gate. Was in the middle of something.”

“No need to be my greeter and my host, hon. What were you in the middle of?”

“Work.”

“Work?”

“All this don’t do itself.” He waves his hand back and forth, breathlessly. “It could have been anything. I forgot by the time I got to the door. Happens when I have a guest, since I don’t have no guests really.”

“Sorry to interrupt.”

“You were invited. Not really an interruption. I just lost track of time.”

“Awful at time. Seems so off to me, wrong, against the fabric of it all.”

“You tune in to time. Different kind a time. Me too. It all moves together in clouds and wind. Beats with the earth and all that shit. In the crawl of scorpions. That kind of time moves by pulse and fluctuation.”

“Those pulses though,” Candy says, “they aren’t like clocks ticking. At least what I’ve seen of it. They sure as hell aren’t like digital watches and satellites. I wonder if those fucking things are on the same time as the first clocks back in clock towers.”

Vergil waves her inside. “The beat’s not a tick but a throb. It moves and hums into place, it’s just a fluctuating hum. You know all this. I know’d you did at the cafe last night.”

“It’s good to hear someone say it.” She follows him inside, down a hallway of smoothed plaster over earth. Slabs of stone are pressed into the floor and into the lower parts of the walls, old bottles bring colored light in from the ceiling. “I’ve been looking for it all my life, but I forgot. I’ve been listening to the hum and buzz of things, trying to connect it to how we all can connect to it. Crickets in summer were always the best for it, showing the big throb of everything there with the single pulse.”

“Yep, yep. I’ve spent my time with the crickets all right. Lots to talk to out here even if folks see a bunch of nothingness.”

“There’s a whole lot of something in the places where most folks see nothingness, everything really. There can be everything there if you ain’t blind to it. That attitude killed my brother, or at least didn’t help, tore him down more and more. Not seeing anything living took him down.”

“Glad to have you here. Feel like I’ve finally found someone to see all this with. Been a long time.” He leads her into the living room, homemade wooden furniture, gangly juniper branches carved into shapes and hand-stitched fabric, patchwork and solid. “Have a seat.”

Candy sits down, her arms falling to rest on smooth wood of the couch arm, dark gloss juniper. “I don’t know all of it. Like I said, I stopped listening a long time ago. Lost touch with it. I don’t know that I lost it all the way or not. I’ve been trying to hear it again.”

“You just bludgeoned yourself out of hearing for a long while. It ain’t lost. There’s a trail back to it.” Vergil turns on the light, a lamp of salvaged metal, the shade pieces of glass wired together. “Your girl Bea got you to the edge, got you to the wood. She got you clear of all that tangled mess you got mired up in. Glad for it. There’s more. There’s more beyond what I know. I’m still trying to learn what I’ve been finding along the way.”

“Sometimes I’m scared to hear it again. The world just got to seem loud.”

“After awhile it gets quieter. Course, it’s all the louder around the amp up of humans. We get shit all fucked up and make a loud ass mess of everything. We just don’t know how to work with all that power around us the right way. Don’t know the means to speak with it.”

“For a time I worked with jars of sparks and insects. Hornets. I wanted to work with it to get it bigger, so I could do something with it, make something of it so folks could see. I figured out early on that people needed a reason to pay attention, couldn’t see something unless it gave them something they needed or wanted. I just ended up making an earthquake and that was it.”

“You were onto something. I’ve figured out a few things out here, some tricks. But that’s all they are. You can do all the magic, and even useful things you want and it

still ain't the main point. It's good to know but ain't everything. There's something a whole lot bigger to talk to and it'll carry you through any bullshit you find. You won't care so much when they don't listen, and you won't care so much when you fail. And we all fail. It's part of being people. We're all in this suffering hell around us. But that's right where all the good stuff is too. Right in all that's the gate through to heaven. The opposing pole of suffering is healing. In pain is truth. In hell is grace. The flames turned down become the glow of heat that makes us hum and pulse. They ain't true opposites. Get in touch with the truth of it and everything becomes a companion to you.”*

“I need what companions I can get. Bea's about the only one who got me, but didn't get it all. Couldn't expect that of her, but still. It's good to find someone who knows.”

Vergil leans back and puts his feet up on the long dark coffee table. “I been waiting for you. You I think. Hasn't been anyone else anyway for a long while.” He looks at her for a long while, and they sit in that silence. “Come on into the kitchen for that stew and we can talk about it some more if you want.”

* See Figure 19 and 20 on William Blake's *The Marriage of Heaven and Hell*, and a comment on the four noble truths of Buddhism, respectively.

Figure 19: William Blake's *The Marriage of Heaven and Hell*.

Long poem investigating interrelations of good and evil as polar opposites necessary for existence, and leading to ultimate transcendence when fully explored and understood.

From Plate 3:

Without Contraries is no progression. Attraction and Repulsion, Reason and Energy, Love and Hate, are necessary to Human existence.

From these contraries spring what the religious call Good & Evil. Good is the passive that obeys Reason. Evil is the active springing from Energy.

Figure 20: Four Noble Truths

The First Noble Truth: The truth of suffering. Life is pervaded by suffering, which feeds upon itself and perpetuates itself.

The Second Noble Truth: The Cause of suffering: Craving, attachment, in particular attachment to the opposite of suffering, attachment to permanence and happiness.

The Third Noble Truth: The cessation of suffering: There is a way out, or a way of getting good with it.

The Fourth Noble Truth: The path: Understand suffering. Understand that living shape looking back at you in the mirror.

Chapter 17:***Hank***

Hank shuts the gate and tosses the padlock out into the ditch by the highway to rust. He hops in the truck and takes off back toward home, downhill and past the outlet of the creek and the turnoff to the old ranch. To the west the reservoir comes to view. He stops for breakfast in Mackay, biscuits and gravy, coffee and orange juice. He reads the classifieds, a Palomino for sale green broke. Reminds him of Hobbes, and finding the horse standing over Candy years ago on those same flats, the girl laying in the middle of the central circle, cold to the touch but still breathing. The sun is bright when he steps out of the cafe and drives to the trailer just on the outside of Mackay, where he and his father moved after Candy ran away and Vivian died. They'd lived there for years, so Henry could be close to the old place, and at least see the mountains. Hank walks in the front door and grabs a beer from the fridge, feels the floor flex under his weight, then goes and sits in his easy chair. He takes a piece of blue tissue paper and feeds it into a big old glass pickle jar on the coffee table, and closes the lid quickly. He stares at the wasps as they emerge and descend into the nest, a spiraling rainbow of color, so large, but at once so light. A cloud.

Chapter 18:

Candy and Vergil

The next morning, they sit at a table with a long granite slab as a top and legs of tangled mountain mahogany*. Candy is well rested from a coma-like hibernation on Vergil's couch after a talk that took them on tangents long into the night. Coffee steams from tin cups, the air bitten with its smell.

“So what is the point, Vergil?” Candy says.

“Couldn't tell you. You know that.”

“How would I? I thought you were supposed to know it. Why else am I here?”

“To prove to yourself that humans are a perpetual disappointment.”

They sit in silence. A shift of the skylight pattern moves over them from a disturbance of sunlight unknown to them. A cloud perhaps. A flock of birds moving just above. A whisper of duck wings as they move to the flooded out playa over the hills. Vergil breathes in and closes his eyes.

“Keys turn and you find out. But nobody can tell you what something is. Not a damn human on this earth, anything. I can't tell you what a fucking cheeseburger tastes like. Not enough to give you its cheeseburgerness. Did you rely on people when you were a kid?”

* See Figure 21.

Figure 21: Mountain Mahogany

Example Species: *Cercocarpus ledifolius*, *Cercocarpus breviflorus*, *Cercocarpus intricatus*.

General: Several species of deciduous shrub, found in semi desert or chapparal habitats. Populations vary from isolated individuals to tight groves and thickets spread on mountainsides, a canopy growing above, obscuring sky. A young boy leads his horse through in search for a rogue bull, he can feel its movement in the darkness, his horse spooks and crowds him, presses against his back. Scent of elk musk and the clatter of hooves. Obscured movement he feels shaking his chest as tears saturate eyelashes.

Leaves: Varies by species, from broad alder leaf varieties with thick, leathery skin to small leaves covered with animal fur.

Flowerheads: Varies from species *intricatus*, where small cups that catch the dew, a reservoir of potentized leaf mist, the air distilling itself upon any surface it can cling, to *ledifolius*, the oldest known flowering plant, reaching ages of thirteen hundred years and older, plumed, curled flowers covered with soft animal hair, reaching for the air around, grasping for touch.

Distribution: Western United States and Mexico

Used medicinally by the Paiute and Western Shoshone of Idaho, Utah, and Nevada.

“Thought I could.”

“You can’t. Not for things that ain’t their job.”

“That I learned.”

“You ready to let that go? Nobody can do life for you. We run into each other as people to relate to I think, not as some me guiding you kind of thing. Besides, a guide will always have to leave at some point, fall away and you find it’s all just you and a huge expanse of everything. The alone that ain’t alone. The alone that’s the whole goddamn thing.”

“I never been alone. When I tried to avoid it all, look away, it all just haunted me. Hounded me like some kind of hell around me.”

Vergil sips from his cup, stares into the steam and blackness looking back at him. “Hell becomes your person if you don’t look at the hell that’s your life. It’s all our lives, part of it, the other side of it always there. It’s all circular and keeps spinning if you don’t stop it. Light and dark over and over but all sides of the thing lit up get illuminated if you don’t stop it from moving. When you stop moving, one side of you’s frozen dark. That causes the break. Only we can do it. We keep trying to push away the darkness and it just gets frozen in a hidden place and then we’re tied to that spot, and it makes its way over us

until we're all of us a hell being. Bone through bone. All the flesh frozen and immovable. Stove up in body and mind. Whole fucking thing. Bea warmed you out of your freezing, but what are you going to do with your movement? You know what I mean?"

For a moment she wants to knife Vergil, to kill him right there for her disappointment and take his place, make it real if that's what he wants. She wants to kill him and put him on as a mask. Dance with his flesh as her own, take him over and go the next round dancing in him as a human flesh covered apparition, the bones of desert creatures collected as a necklace as she moves. But in its settling the rage is turned and clouded into something else, a droning push into raising her hands from her lap onto the table and pushing her upright. She takes his cup and places her palm over his hand, takes in the contours of his bones, the skin the same warmth as her own, their color the same faint red, the grooves and curves of finger the same tangle of weathered tree turned to flesh. She takes their cups and sets them in the sink, leaves him there at the table and walks out the back door, into the grove behind the house, the path leading through. Vergil's grove is not of aspen or juniper. Not even of the silver sage growing all about the hills. Rising from the earth is a tangle of twisted steel turned into trees. Lengths of wire interconnect between the thin limbs, copper leaves hanging, strings of tinsel shine in the faint light. The canopy darkens the sky and a curved path leads through the grove, leads her in a spiral toward its center, black and red stones from the desert laid into the earth in a circle. A small bush of copper and tin, silverwork inlaid upon its branches, reaches up from the center. Candy stands above the circle, chipped jasper scattered around the ground, concentric circles of obsidian moving out as ripples upon a pond. The throb and pulse reaches into her, touching into the center of her bones.

The circle breathes her in,

its spinning and its song,

a return home.

Chapter 19:

Candy and Harley

The sun beat down, lighting the hills and sage brush, and Harley slit the deer open from anus to ribs, blood trailing out to the earth. Harley had taken me along to teach me how to track and I'd led him to the buck, where it stood beneath the limbs of a pine. I placed my hand on the buck's side and felt his pulse slowly fade as Harley wiped his knife down the thigh of his pants, darkening the denim with blood. The air changed as the last breath went out and I saw the grass wave in a faint breeze, a faint shaking of the golden strands. Harley reached into the cavity and pulled organs out, throwing the guts out in the grass for the vultures, placing the heart and liver in a plastic bag.

"Take this," he said, and handed me the bag. It was heavy with the organs of blood, warm against my thigh through the plastic. Harley drug the deer behind him by the antlers, blood wetting the dust behind him, soaking in, earth and blood one. He drug it toward the road, then got down and lifted it onto his shoulders and into the truck. Blood stained the back of his shirt and pant leg where it had run down. Harley shut the tailgate and wiped his hands across his thighs, then went to the pickup cab and got some rags out from behind the seat.

"Forgot these were here," he said. "God damn, Candy, I'm beat. Sure as hell glad I got that buck, fork horns are good eating, fat little fucker too. Probably one of mom's tomato seed bucks been eating up the garden, bet he'll be good, had a good heart on him. Bet mom will roast that up tomorrow, maybe have some liver and onions tonight."

“Ew,” I said.

“Shit, girl, this won’t be just any liver. Deer liver might change your mind.”

“That’s gross.”

“Whatever you say. I’m eating hell out of it. Just potatoes for you then.”

“Fine.”

“Well fine then.”

“Yeah, fine then.” I kicked dust at Harley’s boots and he grabbed hold of me and started tickling. “Cut it out, Harley,” I said.

“Ah shit, fine then.”

“Well, fine.”

“Hop in, let’s get this little son of a bitch into Milford’s and get him cut, we can drop the heart and liver off at the house on the way.” Harley mussed up my hair and hopped into the truck. Harley’d been driving since he was ten, my age, and he was showing me how to drive hay truck just like Hank had showed him. Nobody even paid him any mind if he drove off the ranch and into town, since he was almost old enough for his permit and never drove wild or anything. He put on a Clint Black tape and tapped his fingers on the wheel as he drove. We bumped along the road that wound down out of the high field toward our place. He patted his hand on his knife, in its scabbard. “Hey, Candy. When I die, I want you to have this.”

“What do you mean, Harley?”

“Oh, nothing, really. It’s just something I want. You know, we all die some time. There’s only a few things I like enough to care what happens. So when that happens...”

“We’ll be old, Harley, right?”

“Some say so, sure, that’s the usual deal.”

“I want to be old.”

“You’ll be old and crazy.”

“You’ll be old and stupid.”

“You’re probably right. Probably right.”

Harley got quiet so we just rode down the road bouncing along the potholes. We got to the house and Harley ran the bag with the heart and liver inside. Dad came out of the shop and looked in the bed of the truck. He put his arm on the frame of the rolled down driver’s side window and leaned in.

“Your brother got a good fat one, didn’t he?”

“Yeah,” I said. I didn’t look at him.

“Honey, I’m sorry I had to take the box apart. I got it done just now. You did good on it, and I’m proud of you, but whatever it is just ain’t right.”

“Fuck you, daddy.”

His throat caught and he got red, but he didn’t say anything. He didn’t say anything at all. Then tears came to his eyes and I felt bad.

“Daddy, I’m.”

“I know you’re sorry, hell, I’m sorry. I’m sorry kid but you just got to learn whatever that is, I don’t know what to tell you. You’re welcome to do some small stuff with all the guts. I’m glad to see you tinkering.”

“I’m done, daddy.”

“Come on, baby girl.”

“No.”

“Candy.”

“It’s bullshit.”

He just shook his head and looked up and waved at Harley coming out of the side door. “Good buck, buddy.”

“Thanks, dad.”

“Going in with him now?”

“Yeah, he’s not a big one or anything.”

“Don’t need no trophy. That’s not what counts. Good one.”

“Thanks, dad.” Harley hopped into the truck. “We’ll be back in a little.”

“Have fun.”

We pulled away and I looked back at dad. He watched the truck pull away and walked back toward the shop, his head bent forward more than I’d ever seen before. We got onto the highway and Harley turned the music down.

“Listen, Candy, I know you’re mad at dad about stuff. I don’t blame you, but I don’t blame him either. Don’t be hard on him, all right?”

“I’ll be hard if I want to, Harley. You don’t get it.”

“Maybe not one of us gets it. That doesn’t matter.”

“It does too matter, Harley.”

“That’s not what I mean. What I mean is we may not get it and dad might not get it but you need to be soft on him right now.”

“Why for, huh?”

“Listen damn it. Just be nice.” He pounded the steering wheel and I flinched.

“He ain’t being nice to me!” I pushed his shoulder.

“Honey, god. Okay, fine. Just you think what you want and be fine with it. You just don’t know everything’s all. You’ll see some time.”

He got quiet again and we rode silent toward town. The fields all rolled by, the hay cut but the new growth coming in, the pastures wet and green. We went into town and got to Milford’s. Harley backed the truck up to the loading door and Jimmy Milford, who was fourteen, came out and helped him get the buck inside. Harley stayed inside and Jimmy came out. He tapped on my window. I didn’t roll it down and just looked at him. He winked and stuck his tongue out at me between his fingers in a V. I flipped him off and folded my arms across my chest.

Harley came back out and we drove home. As we pulled off the county road to our place, he finally talked. “You know we’re losing all this right, honey?”

“Yeah, yeah. I know.”

End

APPENDIX A

of Eclogue I

of Eclogue I

Virgil – no – *Vergil*
[corrective]

Vergil's English spelling possibly stemmed from a transcription error in the Middle Ages, a confusion from a pun on his name, pronounced similarly to *virgo*, referring to a maiden or young woman. The joke being that Vergil was the virginal poet.

crass version – built dirty pun [of] identity

here: [text] verged to virginity

Meliboëus:

*Tityre, tu recubans sub tegmine fagi
silvestrem tenui Musam meditaris avena*

[Tityre] tu recubans sub [of the beach tree] [branches]
[you meditate] [Sylvan] Musam – *direct object* [slight]
[shepherd's pipe]

ablative of means:

avēna ae, f

oats, V.: steriles avenae, wild oats, V.: si avenam videris, i. e. weeds.—An oatstraw, straw (in a shepherd's pipe): structis cantat avenis, O.—Hence, an oaten pipe, pastoral pipe: tenui Musam meditaris avenā, V.

*nos patriae fines et dulcia linquimus arva
nos patriam fugimus*

[our] patriae [borders] et [sweet drink] [we left] arva
nos patriam [we fled]

[when my father died and left me nothing]

*[this is how I speak]
~Myung Mi Kim*

exile :: pastoral coughing in the exile breathing in

Whereas Theocritus had kept pastoral and court poems rigidly distinct, contemporary politics and pastoral are strikingly blended in the first *Eclogue*, which describes ... the effects upon the Italian countryside of the triumviral dispossessions of the late 40s BC ... In consequence of this, the pastoral world may be said to exist no longer in a hermetic space, but to suffer encroachments from without, which have the effect of disrupting the shepherds' traditional **otium** ('ease, tranquil existence').

*slopping, verged from homeland Arcadia to here,
a breath*

*border of Vergil – finite stranger in the Arcadian
past(ure)*

*tu Tityre lentus in umbra
formosam resonare doces Amaryllida silvas*

[you] Tityre [slow] in [shade]
[beautiful] [to echo] [teach] *beautiful* Amaryllida [forests]

*tu Tityre slow in umbra teach the forests to echo formosam
Amaryllida*

*you, Tityrus, slow in the shade, teach the forests to echo beautiful
Amaryllis*

*I echo the forests back I echo Amaryllis I echo the name means
'shining one'*

*O Meliboeus deus nobis haec **otia** fecit
deus nobis [this] [calm] [creates]*

our deus this calm fecit

Vergil – create this calm

[Vergil]: Behold, I,
sickly myself, urge onward the choruses

[the forest echoes *Amaryllis*]

[I echo]

de caelo tactas memini praedicere quercus
[by] [sky] [touched] [I remembered {perfect}] [to predict] [oaks]
[I remembered] *sky-touched oaks*

*I remembered sky-touched – a note to lightning – what
weather!*

touched by the sky [memini] the oaks foretold – I remembered

I remember in perfect tense

once, in the past, a border finis, as the homelands

*mirabar quid maesta deos Amarylli vocares
 quoi pendere sua patereris in arbore poma*

[I use to wonder – imperfect] [why] [sad] [gods – dir. obj.] *sad Amarylli* [you use to call]
 [for whom – dat. ind. obj.] [to hang] *sua* [you left] in arbore [fruits]

imperfect: indefinite in the past, more than once

wonder imperfectly I wander to pull this

fruit down what gods

some way to echo:

I use to wonder why you, sad Amaryllis, use to call to gods
 for whom you use to leave the fruits to hang in the tree

imperfect: lingered crack of wonder

I wander back to the shade with a shepherd's pipe

Vergil leaves an apple here and I echo, a verge of light

to catch a shadow

*ipsae te Tityre pinus
ipsi te fontes ipsa haec arbusta vocabant*

[itself] [to you] Tityre [pines]
ipsi te [springs] ipsa haec [vineyards] [they called out]

*hic tamen hanc mecum poteras requiescere noctem
fronde super viridi sunt nobis mitia poma
castaneae molles et pressi copia lactis*

[I echo]: but here this night with me you were able to rest
above verdant leaves the fruit is ripe for us
the chestnuts are soft and I pressed the store of milk

*et iam summa procul villarum culmina fumant
maioresque cadunt altis de montibus umbrae*

villages and now the smoke rises from the roofs of the
and great shadows fall from the high mountains

The smoke rising from
the houses indicates a
country-side at peace, a
wish perhaps in light
the turmoil in Rome
during the first century
BC.

*here we echo in the leaves and rise as smoke to verge the sky
and touch back*

*here I sing the forest and watch it bend as if to Orpheus as if
the earth were still the poet's to touch*

APPENDIX B

Missing Figure and Errata

Figure 1B: American Aspen (*Populus tremuloides*)

General: Colony growing tree in the Aspen family. Characterized by white bark often scarred black, messages scrawled in the skin, growing in small to large clusters of interconnected beings.

Leaves: Nearly round in adults, with small rounded teeth, soft to the touch, layered upon the forest floor a skin upon the ground. Leaves together speak their song like the lyre, a soft whisper of applause in the forest.

Flowers: long catkins, producing seeds that rarely sprout, reproduction reliant upon self-proliferating root system.

Distribution: Western and northern North America

Note: Root system interlinking, one example found in Utah considered oldest living organism, reproducing large colonies tied together in the unseen world beneath the earth's crust. Survival dependent upon overall colony health. The collective produces and supports the one. If the root system fails, all will perish.

Errata/Apologies

Throughout this work, real places have been altered or details forgotten, or in some cases misapprehended; currents flow faster, slower, or in the wrong direction, or some areas don't have electricity when they should, or the other way around. Also, apologies to the people of Arco, Idaho. You may have a lovely town to live in, but I grew up in a small town, on the wrong end, or at least a very awkward end of the social hierarchy, and may have some misplaced venom that I've enacted upon your place of residence. In my times spent in town, I've had a pleasant time, but know from experience what can lurk beneath a pleasant day.